

Parent Handbook



2022-2023

To the Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of:

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The teenage years can be great. They can also be a time where you, as a parent, gain some grey hair. This handbook explains the culture we are trying to create here at Acton Baptist for our youth ministry. There are 4 values we will live by and some expectations for everyone involved.

No one is asking for your teenager to be perfect. No one is expecting a booklet to change everything overnight. But through this handbook, we hope you're able to see the heart of everything we want to accomplish in our ministry and have some explanations as to why we will or won't do certain things in the years your child is here. If you have any questions about anything in this handbook, feel free to drop me an email at jcomer@actonbaptist.org.



The 4 Values of Acton Baptist Youth Ministry

Values are kind of a funny thing. We operate on the values instilled in us as kids, we act on the values we choose, and we perform with the values expected of us. But what happens when the values that we expect aren't necessarily the values we want to put forward? One of the most important things we can do is define who we are by the values we choose to pursue. Our values are the lens in which we do everything in our ministry.

If something doesn't fit with our values, we simply don't do it. If we aren't doing something that would fit into our value structure, we will work it in. Ultimately, it is our value system that will guide our ministry. But what are those values?



LOVE EACH OTHER

Every Student Knows They Are Loved

Love Each Other. It sounds simple enough, but in practice, it's so difficult to get right. We want our youth ministry to be one that sees every student and loves every student the way God does. There's this awesome video of Indiana football online where their number one value was L.E.O. (Love Each Other). In the video, the coach says this about love.

“Love has nothing to do with you. When you choose to love somebody, you choose to accept all that goes with it. All the stuff that nobody wants to deal with, all the hard things. That’s why it is so powerful of a word. Because it’s unconditional, when it’s pure and it’s right.”

What kind of a ministry could we have if every student knew they were loved unconditionally? That our love dealt with their hard stuff? That we are willing to put the work in simply because love doesn't have to do with us? Our love points others to Christ.

Jesus said that the world would know that we are His disciples by our love for one

another (John 13:35). Here's the great thing, Paul helps us understand what love is in 1 Corinthians 13...

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

So, as easy as this may sound, we will strive for every action, every meeting, every conversation to be through the value of love for one another. Will we be perfect? No. Will we be better tomorrow at loving every one than we are today? Yes. And it's that YES that is our goal.

EVERY PERSON MATTERS *Shallow is Fast, Personal Takes Time*

In the book "It's Personal", Reggie Joiner and company say this. "Shallow is fast, personal takes time. Shallow is easy, personal is complicated. Shallow is safe, personal is risky. Shallow is certain, personal is unresolved. Shallow is dismissive, personal is interested. Shallow is familiar, personal is unpredictable. Shallow costs money, personal costs me." It's one thing to say we love everyone, it's another to show it.

We want our ministry to be a place where EVERY student is seen, EVERY student is valued, EVERY student knows they matter. Not only to the adults in the room, but to every student. Knowing that you matter is monumental. Knowing you matter to people who aren't like you, who don't have the same friends as you, but see you for you, can be a life-changing invitation to find out why.

Why do we want to press on our students that every person matters? Because every person matters to Jesus.

Jesus never got so busy trying to save everyone that He didn't stop to help someone. Romans 5:8 reminds us that God's love for us brought an action along with it...

But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The proof is always in the action.

FINDING JESUS

For Christ and In Christ

You may be saying to yourself, “my kid already found Jesus.” To that I say Amen. It's a little more intensive than the moment of salvation though.

Our goal is to guide students into a lifestyle of continually finding Jesus in the every day, in the passage they've heard a million times, in the conversations they have with their parents.

This value is two-fold. Yes, we want to see students won *for* Christ, but we also want to see students grow *in* Christ. Finding Jesus is more than a one-time occurrence, it's a lifestyle, it's a calling. Matthew 11:28-30 says it like this...

*Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

What would it look like to have an entire generation resting in Christ, finding Christ daily, taking his yoke on them. That's what we mean when we say we are finding Jesus.

LIVING TRUTH

Focus on Christ

In our world today, you hear that truth is relative. But, just because opinions exist, it doesn't mean truth stops being truth. If we are living truth, lifting the Word of God above all else, we focus on the living truth of Christ.

If you haven't noticed by now, these values hinge on each other. If I love every one, I'm

going to see people the way God sees them. If I see people the way God sees them, I'm going to find Jesus in every situation of not only their life, but mine. If I am finding Jesus, I'm going to know that living Truth.

Just like Finding Jesus, this value is two-fold. Yes, we point to Jesus, but we also have an Ephesians 4 mindset. Paul tells us to “walk worthy of the calling you have received.” Not only do we know the living truth, but we live truth.

When it comes down to it, every one of these values is a key to an authentic relationship with Christ. I can't say I know Christ if I don't love like him. I can't say I know Christ if I don't see people the way he does. I can't say I know Christ if I'm not growing in my relationship with him. I can't say I know Christ if I'm not living for him.

These values are the microscope of our why. They are the reason we do what we do. They are the beacon to our community. And they are the grading system we are putting ourselves up against.

Love Every One

Every Student Knows They Are Loved

Every Person Matters

Shallow is Fast, Personal Takes Time

Finding Jesus

For Christ and In Christ

Living Truth

Focus on Christ

The 3 Imperatives of Acton Baptist Youth Ministry

Imperative is a fun word. The dictionary has a noun form and an adjective form. The noun says that an imperative is "an essential or urgent thing." The adjective form is defined as "giving an authoritative command." So, may I just say, we are using the term as both. How we see our values lived out is how our ministry will thrive and make a difference. We can talk all day long about loving each other, about how every person matters, about how we are constantly finding Jesus, about how we need to be living truth...but if it is not IMPERATIVE to me, if it isn't essential, if it doesn't have a sense of authority over me, then I can ignore them and do what I've always done. We should do everything in our power to not allow our values to be lip service. So, what are the imperatives of ABYM?



THE INDIVIDUAL *Humility*

So when it comes to our vision, it's important that it is ingrained in every student that walks through that door. We live in a society where the individual matters above all else. A society that is so opposite of the gospel message. We read in Acts 2 where the early church sold their property, not because the market was booming, but because brothers and sisters had a need that they could meet.

When it comes to the individual in our group, we need to have the understanding that our focus can't be on me. If we are to be followers of Christ, we should model our lives after his. And if there is one great example of selflessness, it's Jesus. So, as the individual, how do I strive to love each other? We humble ourselves.

Paul writes in Philippians 2...

If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.

Our love for others is removed from ourselves and it is Christ focused. If we want say that every person matters, we have no further than to look at a verse we all memorized as kids...

For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

If we want to find Jesus in the everyday, we need to take the last words of Jesus on earth to heart...

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

If I as an individual want to focus on living truth, we have to look no further than the VBS verse this summer...

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time, for us to do.

It's all about connecting each student to the purpose God has for them.

THE GROUP *Accountability*

It's easy to understand the individual imperative of our values, but what does that mean for the group as a whole? The Bible tells us so much about community and emphasizes what our lives should look like when we live them out together. There isn't a single individual who is going to instantly be perfect at our four values, and that's what is so important about having a youth group mentality.

The group holds each other accountable, the group lifts each other up in our shortcomings, the group bears with one another in love and makes every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. This side of heaven, we will not be perfect, but we will strive to build each other up the way Christ has commanded us to.

I think sometimes believers, and I'm putting myself into this group as well, have this idea that it's our job just to prepare to live outside the walls of the church. We come to church to get recharged for our mission field each week. At the beginning of my ministry career, I had this idea that the church was for the saved, we were here to be trained up and sent out. But then I remembered that sin was messy. We are here not just for training, but to bandage wounds from the world around us. We are here to do the work of the ministry together, and sometimes that ministry includes calling out and serving each other.

So, yes, the group matters just as much as each individual. In fact, it's where our strength is found. That's why the writer of Ecclesiastes say...

Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their effort. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up.

THE CHURCH

Lifting Up

And that brings us to the church as a whole. To accomplish this shift in the youth ministry and to fuel this restart, the church has to be involved. Your teenager needs you. Our ministry needs you. If we are to be the people God has called us to be, there can be no one on the sidelines. The imperative to the church is a call to lift up these students, help them see where they have put blinders up in truth and in love.

I've said it before and I'll say it again, I want this youth group to be the best place for our students, I want it to be the place where no one feels alone, I want it to be the place where students are upset when they have to miss any time we meet. But I can't form this culture alone. I need buy-in from everyone involved.

The early church knew what it looked like to lift each other up. In the book of Acts, we

see what separated the church from the culture around them...

Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. they ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Now, there's more to the church than simply lifting up students. It's also a student's responsibility to be a part of the overall ministry and family of the church. Like I said earlier, no one is on the sidelines. The imperative to the church is not just a call to those outside the youth, but also within.

So I invite you to help me grow the culture of ministry at Acton for our teens. Together, we can show what a community of people who love each other, who see that every person matters, who are striving to find Jesus in the everyday, who are living truth out looks like in Granbury and beyond.

The Individual

Humility

The Group

Accountability

The Church

Lifting Up

The 2 Goals of Acton Baptist Youth Ministry

If you are a member here at Acton Baptist, you've heard the statement "Encounter and Engage." I've got good news for you, you won't have to memorize a new one for us.



Leading students to have an encounter with the REAL Jesus is so important, and it leads them straight into engaging with others to share the REAL Jesus.

ENCOUNTERING THE REAL JESUS

What do I mean by an encounter with the REAL Jesus? We have a hard time realizing sometimes that the Jesus we have in our head is one that always agrees with us. The Jesus we know could be made up of the stories we like and ignore the ones we don't. The Jesus we know could be one who is here to make my life easier. The Jesus we know could be one that doesn't ask anything of me.

The REAL Jesus though, is the one that I am called to follow, dying to myself every day. The REAL Jesus is seen through the entirety of Scripture, not just the parts I like. The REAL Jesus calls us to die. The REAL Jesus asks for your life. The REAL Jesus is alive and is constantly speaking to those who are listening.

An encounter with Jesus is life-changing. Take the story of Zacchaeus in the book of Luke...

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house." So he quickly came down and welcomed him joyfully.

It's that encounter that is our goal for each student. Imagine with me, an entire culture that is chasing after Jesus, listening for his guidance, ready to go at a moment's notice.

Now imagine if that cultural shift started with your student. It's something worth grabbing on to and it's our goal here at ABYM and at Acton Baptist as a whole.

ENGAGING OTHERS

Let's pick up where we left off with Zacchaeus...

...Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much."

When we encounter Jesus, we can do nothing else but engage others. What happened every time Jesus healed someone? What happened any time a life-change happened in Scripture? What should happen every time Jesus does something amazing in our life? We see people telling others about what Jesus had done. It's our goal for ABYM that as our students encounter Jesus that they engage the world around them.

How amazing would it be for our students to simply not be able to go a day without being excited to share Jesus with someone? Here's the craziest part of this whole equation, when students engage others, they tend to encounter Christ, which drives them to engage others, which drives them to encountering Christ...you get the picture.

The Christian life is one of continually encountering and engaging. It's what Jesus did, it's what he commanded us to do, and it's our desire for each of our students to turn into their lifestyle.

Encounter Jesus
Engage Others

The 1 Purpose of Acton Baptist Youth Ministry

I could go into a big, long statement here, but Jesus summed this one up pretty well, and since I'm not Jesus, I'll be silent.

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age...Matthew 28:18-20

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth...Acts 1:8

Go...be witnesses of Jesus Christ

Expectations of Students

I want to start this section by saying there is no such thing as a perfect teenager. Let me say that one more time, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A PERFECT TEENAGER. However, when there are a room full of teenagers, it is probably smart for us to lay down some expectations.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce to you the P's of ABYM (sooner or later, all the letters may get confusing, sorry about that).

Prepared

What do I mean by prepared? Are we assigning homework? What we are meaning is, are you prepared mentally, emotionally, spiritually, to love every one, to say every person matters, to find Jesus, to live truth? When we come in with the baggage of the day and have a hard time shaking it, it's very difficult for us to be ready to hear from God. If you've had a day filled with people questioning you, or if you had a rough practice, how charitable are you going to be with others who haven't experienced your day, but may push a button unknowingly.

Ecclesiastes 5 reminds us just how important our attitudes matter when it comes to being in the presence of God...

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Better to approach in obedience than to offer the sacrifice as fools do, for they ignorantly do wrong.

That's why we have created a **preparation room**. It's a room that is designed especially to let go of the day and be able to focus on what God wants to say to you. We'll have an adult or 2 ready to pray with you, help you release yourself from the day and focus on the purpose for being here with ABYM.

Parents, you can encourage your students every week to prepare their hearts for worship and fellowship. You can set the tone for their experience before they even arrive.

Productive

What does a productive time with ABYM look like? It's a time that is focused on encountering Christ and engaging others. Anything that hinders that throws productivity out the window. Not only for us, but for others, too. It goes into the imperatives. We all need to work toward the same goal to be able to grow collectively. Are you allowing others to speak into your life? Are you lovingly speaking into others lives?

Productivity isn't about an assembly line mentality, but a willingness to let God do what He wants to do through us and to us. The prophet Ezekiel, as God was speaking about restoring His people, gives us a glimpse of the kind of work God does in a person's heart... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

When we choose not to be productive, we are choosing to take lordship over ourselves instead of handing it over to God. This is also something that can have devastating effects on others, too.

Parents, help your student to be ready, to be productive. Help them to remember to be in God's Word daily, pray with them before they come, and help them retell what God did during their time with the group.

Patient

Hey middle schooler, do you ever feel like that high school student has talked long enough and now it's your turn? Hey high schooler, do you ever feel like that middle schooler doesn't know what real problems look like? There's this amazing thing called patience that we all need help with from time to time. Remembering to put others first is where patience comes in.

Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:1-3...

Therefore I...urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Patience isn't an easy concept. It's one that takes practice, and it's one that takes us going through times of being impatient to learn. When we put others first, we remember that patience relies fully on me.

Parents, help your student by steering conversations to remember to have patience with others, with leaders, and with fellow students.

Polite

Patience may be a virtue, but everyone can be polite. There's this passage in Romans 12 that says...

If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

High schooler, remember when you were a middle schooler. Was there that one person who always treated you like you mattered? They were always kind, always there to come alongside you and make you a part of what was going on. If you've ever been in my office, my computer screen is a constant reminder. It says "Be the person you wish had been there for you in middle school." Middle schooler, how can you begin to step in that role? It's a call for politeness.

That's the call for polite attitudes. It's a call to treat people with the respect they deserve just for being a person God created. Everyone deserves that respect. Everyone deserves to be treated like they matter. Everyone deserves dignity, and that dignity is found in the way everyone treats them.

Parents, this starts with you! You are the example for them at home. Speak highly of your church and of others! Solve problems in a biblical manner.

Prepared
Productive
Patient
Polite

Expectations of Parents

None of this holds water unless it's backed up at home. If I'm lucky, I am able to see your students for 3 hours a week (Sundays and Wednesdays). The rest of the time during the week is divided between school and home. I need partners in ministry and I want you to know that I am fully on your side as a parent. I also need you on my side when it comes to the ministry environment we have created. The entire point of this book is to help us solidify a direction, and if things go off course, to help us get back on track.

When it comes to ABYM's expectations of parents, it's pretty simple.

- Understand our values, imperatives, goals, and purpose and assist us in keeping your student on track.
- In documented cases where the student is refusing direct correction from a ministry leader (a leader is considered as anyone deemed to represent the ministry for any given service or function by the youth pastor), parents will help to alleviate the situation with parental correction and guidance.
- In documented cases that are seen as a pattern, parents will meet with the youth pastor to discuss and implement corrective measures together.
- In cases of a guest to our ministry, parents will extend grace and mercy, as fitting with any situation. Serious incidents of physical/mental abuse will be dealt with by the youth pastor immediately.

- In cases of illegal activity, ABYM will contact the proper authorities and take necessary action to 1). protect our students, and 2). protect the integrity of the ministry. All parents will be notified of illegal activity if any has been confirmed during any ministry event.

Expectations of ABYM

Know that if I'm asking you to acknowledge your role as parents, I will be sharing what you can expect from our ministry. ABYM will be a place where your students are safe, raised up, and taught God's Word. As far as it has to do with ABYM, we want you to expect this from us at all times.

- All ministry will be under the direction of the youth pastor. No leader acts outside of the realm assigned to them by the youth pastor.
- All ministry will fall under the guidelines of our values, imperatives, goals, and purpose.
- Any incidents will be fully documented and will be fully reviewable by those involved, along with any parents of those involved.
- ABYM will be open to any parent who would like to join us (eg. Sunday school, Wednesday night programming, youth group outings, camps, etc).
- ABYM falls under the leadership of Acton Baptist Church and any serious issues will be taken to senior leadership.

I think everyone understands that the teenage years are not easy. Students will make mistakes, they will have bad days, and they are ultimately trying to figure out who they are in this world. We live in a lost and dying world, and sometimes that world enters our ministry context. Please be in constant prayer for our students, our leaders, and our ministry staff as we guide our students to love each other, to see that every person matters, to find Jesus in their everyday life, and to live truth out. I will be in prayer for you as we partner together in the discipleship of your student.

