

A Brief Worksheet on Family Systems Thinking As It Relates to Working with Youth

There are 2 key points we will interact with:

1. To think about "systems" and how we interact with them.
2. To begin to observe systems in our own lives as well as youth ministry /small group dynamics that we are presently involved with in our ministry.

Intro - Think briefly about the history of families who have lived their "lives" out for us in the "reality" of TV and list them here.

The Cosby Show	The Jefferson's	Everybody Loves Raymond	Modern Family

Systems thinking is descriptive of teenagers not necessarily prescriptive (we attempt to "fix them")

- It helps us with the messy stuff of life.
- We are working to get past the "they are just messed up" or "that is just they way they are" or dropping the d-bomb of dysfunctional.
- Health not equilibrium is our goal. You may bump the system or tick someone off in the process of identifying the elephant in the room. This is not permission to be a jerk in Jesus' name.
- We observe systems by beginning to identify some helpful factors.
- Remember when you disturb the balance, first order and second order change will interact with each other.

Here are some questions to spark your thinking. These questions do not make an exhaustive list but they are a good start:

- How is the teenager's relationship with their parents? Do they fight a lot? Are they close, distant or not involved?
- Who takes the lead regarding spiritual matters at home?
- Is there respect and support for you as a shepherd/spiritual leader or the church? Does the teen come to church because they are forced to come, or is the teen more on their own?
- Is there a favorite child status? Are they living in the shadow of an older sibling? Is there open rebellion where all attention/ resources have been poured into another sibling?

- Are there skeletons/ shadows/ family secrets or past hurts that aren't talked about?
- Do they come from a conservative theological background or a church split or no biblical background?
- What is the family make-up? Is it a single parent, blended home, or a biological parent home?
- What is the schooling situation? Do they attend public, private, Christian, Homeschool, charter school?

Conclusion - with wisdom and God's guidance, we now enter into teenagers' "family systems" with patience and understanding as we show the love of Jesus. Remember, kids don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.