



Chapter Ten :

Getting Into the Home

GETTING ONTO THEIR TURF

Many children's workers attempt to learn about children and create relationships from within the walls of the church only. This is like studying volcanoes from your bedroom or space merely from earth. You can collect some facts and even gain some insights, but if you really want to learn about something, really seek to know and understand it, then you need to GO TO WHERE IT IS. The good news is: getting onto a kid's turf is safer than studying a volcano or outer space!

The bottom line: If you want to understand children, you've got to get into their homes. It is amazing what you can learn about the interests and influencers of children from their bedrooms! A kid's room is like a diorama of their heart. So

you've got to get into the homes of children you minister to! Now, before you go out and buy some dark clothes, a ski mask, and night-vision binoculars, let me suggest some better ways to get into the homes of kids, some things to do and look for while you are there, and how to use what you learn in your ministry! The payoff in the effectiveness of your ministry will be well worth the time and effort involved. Plus, you'll have a lot of fun too!

worth repeating!

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WAYS TO GET INTO THE HOME

Visitation Plan a systematic schedule to get into the homes of the children in your class or ministry. Start with the kids that you work closest with. Then identify the ones that you could use a little “inside scoop” on for better ministry. (Quiet kids, disruptive kids, angry kids, etc.) Be careful not to neglect the “good” kids too! Sometimes the ones that give us no problems can go unnoticed. What a shame if their reward for good behavior is being overlooked!

Birthdays If you are one who does clowning, puppets, magic tricks, or something else creative (even just offering to lead the birthday games!), then offer to do birthday parties for the children in your class or ministry! What a great way to not only get into the home, but to meet a bunch of their friends while you are at it! It will make it easier for them to invite their friends to church, as it is an invitation to see YOU again. Plus, the parents already met you when they picked their kids up from the party. Birthday parties are a VERY important social event for children, right up there with Christmas! Dropping by with a card or small gift on a birthday will surprise and delight the child. If you aren't invited in, don't worry about it. They'll be glad you dropped by. Your being there speaks volumes of your love and interest in them. After all, the most valuable thing you can give to children is TIME!

Visit when they are sick or injured Taking pizza over to a boy with a broken leg or balloons to a little girl who is sick will mean so much! Bring a video of Kid's Church that they missed or Sunday School papers. Having kids at church make a Get Well card gives you a reason to visit to deliver it. Giving them a lift in a time when they are down, will give your ministry to them a boost too!

Video Taping Bedrooms A fun way to get into the home, and create some anticipation with the kids, is to do some things that involve video taping their rooms! You can do a “Name This Messy Room” on Sunday where you show a video of a room you visited that week and the kids try to guess whose room it is! I do a unit on being ready for the return of Christ by announcing that I will make surprise visits to bedrooms with my video camera for a set number of weeks. When I come, it will be too late to clean. I will just video tape the room as it is and show the tape on Sunday. (NOTE: If you like your job, don't surprise the mom by showing up with a video camera. Only surprise the kids.) This is a great lesson on being ready for the unexpected return of Jesus and how it will be too late to clean up our lives! Plus, this is a FUN way to get into their homes and learn about the kids in your ministry by seeing what they have in their rooms and seeing their family situation first-hand. (Complete details for this teaching activity is available on Kidology.org.)

Make the most of unexpected opportunities. Whenever you find yourself at a child's home, make the most of the opportunity! Even if you are giving a ride home, ask the child to ask his/her parent if you can come in for a minute.



Making the request come from the child puts the parent at ease. If you ask directly, they may feel they have to say okay, even if they'd rather not. If the child asks, they will have no problem saying no, and you can politely back the parent up by saying, "Hey, that's okay, another time!" By having the child ask, you honor the parent and win, whether you get into the home or not.

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESS

Have parents' knowledge and permission. As stated above, you need to respect the role of the parents. It is, after all, their home. Avoid "SURPRISE" visits. If you are in the neighborhood and considering a visit, stop and call first.

(If you have a cell phone, even better. But don't call from the driveway!) Let them know you are in the neighborhood and ask if it is a good time to stop by to visit the child. Assure them that it's okay if it isn't a good time.

worth repeating!

Guidelines for Success:

Have parents' knowledge and permission.
Keep doors open.
Don't be nosy.
Don't overstay your welcome.

Keep doors open. For obvious reasons, when visiting with kids in bedrooms, leave the door to the room open. Even during counseling visits I leave the door open. Also, let the parent know they are welcome to join you any time they want. They may fear interrupting, but I don't want them to feel they have to stay away.

Don't be nosy. Parents may have let you into their home, but that doesn't mean they have given you security clearance to go exploring every room. If kids invite you to go to the basement, parents' room, or other place that the parent has not already expressed approval for, ask the parent, or say, "I don't think your Mom wants me going into her room." The parent can then offer permission or remain silent showing they agree and appreciate your consideration. Keep in mind you are a guest. Make sure they will want you back and will be more at ease around you as a result of the visit, not less!

Don't overstay your welcome! My Youth Pastor used to say at the end of events, "Thank you all for coming... thank you most of all for leaving." It was his humorous hint that it was time to go home. Be sure you don't stay too long. Keep in mind they will probably never ask you to leave, so it is up to you to know when you've stayed long enough to show you care, but short enough that they'll still want you back! As a general rule, leave while they still want you. Then they will be eager for you to come over again!



WHAT TO DO WHILE THERE

Ask to see their room. Children's rooms are a reflection of their hearts and minds. It's their "turf." Most kids put a lot of thought and energy into making their room their place. They are often proud of their room. They will be excited to show it to you! If they aren't, shame about their bedroom can hint at a low self esteem – so build up the room, and you'll build up the kid too!

Look carefully at their things. Compliment their stuff, the arrangement, artwork, etc. Don't just "scan" the room. Go shelf to shelf, and sit at their desk. Ask if you can pick stuff up and look at it. Try to gain insight into the child through the things in his/her room.

Ask questions. Ask WHY they have certain things. Ask about athletes, actors, singers, and what they like about them. Ask where they got something. Many objects contain hidden stories of experiences, travels, or people who have impacted their lives.

Talk about what they have. Transition from complimenting things, to complimenting them based upon what you learn from their things. For example, "Have you read all these books? You must be a good reader!" or "Wow! Looks like God has given you some great athletic abilities!" Or "You put this together? (a puzzle, etc.) Wow, God has given you a great mind. You can use that for Him." Don't offer them a sermon, just make instructional, encouraging comments. Those carry more weight anyway! If there are things in the room that concern you, don't judge them – this is not the time. You can address those things generally when you are teaching the group (they will know what they have and that you have seen it), and you can challenge them as you get to know them better. Your purpose is learning at this time. It is better to leave that poster on the wall and build the relationship, than to say, "You shouldn't have that," and put a wedge in your relationship. Besides, if parents are allowing it, the problem is bigger than just the child.

Play with them! Most importantly, spend some time with them doing the things they enjoy. Play building toys, dolls, video games or whatever it is. If they have a musical instrument, ask to hear them play it! If you can do something better, be humble, and don't show them up – you are an adult after all, and they are just a kid. Laugh with them, and have some fun! Then notice the difference in them on Sunday!

THE RESULTS If you get into the homes of the kids you minister to, then you are truly engaging in effective relational ministry. It will give you greater insight into the interests and needs of kids, and endear them to you so that they are more eager and ready to receive instruction from you. Ever had a really good friend who had never been to your house? Didn't think so. If you want to be their friend, you've got to get over to their house.



KIDOLOGY LAB ASSIGNMENT

Transferring Knowledge from Head to Heart

Date Completed: ____ / ____ / _____

List the last names of homes in your church that you have been in:

Visiting homes can be very nerve-racking if you've never done it before. But you'll find in doing it, that it's all in your head – it's easy and fun once you get over the initial hesitation to do so. What helps is to create a visitation kit, such as a tool box or tackle box filled with the things you might need:

kid's Bible

gospel tracts

yo-yo

magic trick

small gifts

candy

a game to play

balloons

a book to read to the child

coloring book and crayons

church brochure

Consider creating your own visitation box and circle the items above that you'd like to include, and write any additional items you need to collect here:

Set a goal for how many homes you'd like to visit in the next year, perhaps every child in your class if you have a small class, or at least one family a month for a year. You will be amazed the difference it will make!

Additional notes:

a note from Karl

A room tells you a lot about a child – it is like a museum in his/her honor. Carefully look at everything in the room, especially things that are displayed, and ask lots of questions.

Do not judge the things you see, just use the opportunity to learn what they enjoy. Remember, you are a guest. So be polite and say thank you for sharing!