

Implementing a Parenting Ministry

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Typically, a lay person in the church is the first one exposed to Growing Kids God's Way or other Growing Families International curricula. This section contains recommended steps to help the lay person, under the direction of his church leadership, to start a parenting ministry utilizing Growing Families International curricula. It also serves as a guide to existing parenting ministries that want to incorporate GFI curricula into their ongoing ministry to families. The following information is designed to help your church:

- 1) Put in place a structure that will facilitate a long-lasting ministry to families, and
- 2) Develop and adopt standards that your church will use in holding its classes.

This information is certainly not the only way to facilitate a parenting ministry, but it does contain many recommendations that have proven to be extremely effective over a number of years in spreading the message of biblical parenting. Our prayer is that God will give you the discernment and wisdom needed to incorporate this information as you implement your parenting ministry.

FOUNDATION OF A SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY

Growing Families International is dedicated to the practical instruction of biblical principles in parenting. We believe that the family, within the context of the local church, is the God-ordained forum for this type of ministry, and as a result all of the curricula we offer are designed for use by the local church.

The starting point for the establishment of any effective ministry is its leadership. Choosing an appropriate leader(s) and obtaining the support of church leadership is critical. We encourage the selection of leader(s) that are examples of faithfulness to Christ, to their family, and to their church and its leadership.

We believe that parenting is a kingdom issue and is worth fighting for. Pastors, church leaders, and lay people have joined to lead the fight when it comes to restoring biblical principles in the church and community. Because our adversary hates strong families, which are the building blocks of the local church, there will be great opposition to an effective parenting ministry. A unified commitment by your church family, especially church leadership, will be the underlying key to successful integration of Growing Kids God's Way into your overall church program. Our prayer is that God will come and exalt His Kingdom in and through the parenting ministry at your church!

STEP ONE

BEFORE APPROACHING YOUR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

1. **Pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit.**
Is this the right timing for this ministry at your church? Is this ministry right for your church family? What does God want to do with this curriculum in your church family?
2. **Become familiar with the material.**
Be ready to answer questions from church leadership on the content and class format of the Growing Kids God's Way curriculum. Read the Leader's Guide thoroughly. You can obtain a GKGW Introduction set by calling (800) 396-4434 (it includes: GKGW workbook, leaders guide & intro-video, and a GFI curriculum video).
3. **Pray for a submissive and humble spirit as you prepare to approach church leadership for approval.** (Your suggestions will be helpful, but the church leadership has to make the final decision.)

STEP TWO

APPROACHING YOUR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- 1. Explain Your Vision and Plan.**
Ask your church leaders if your vision and plan is compatible with the philosophy of ministry of your church.
- 2. Allow Them Time to Review Course Materials.**
Provide a workbook, a leader's guide, and the introductory video (at a minimum) for them to review. If possible, also provide them with the name of another pastor who already has the ministry at his church and the names and numbers of the GFI representatives in your area: Community Representatives, Area Coordinators, State Representatives, and Regional Administrators.
- 3. Request Their Involvement.**
Humbly seek their wisdom and guidance. If your church leadership is not in support of the ministry or will not give their blessing to start a class, then it is not God's timing for your church or for you to lead a class without being subject to their authority! We challenge you to pray and wait on God to bring His blessing through those above you. Prayer and a submissive spirit open doors for His power to be released. It is easier (but certainly not wiser, nor more effective) to force the program in your own strength than to pray and wait on God's timing.

STEP THREE

BEGINNING A PILOT GROUP

A pilot group is a hand-selected group of couples (by you and your church leadership), which will form your church's initial leadership team for this ministry. (Characteristics of potential leaders are discussed later in this section.) This core group of couples will go through a complete 19-week Growing Kids God's Way class, following the recommended guidelines. Keep this group small (5-8 couples), and give them the benefit of an informational meeting (see pp. 24 – 27) to help them prayerfully decide whether or not they will participate. Try to include key church leaders, elders, deacons, and pastors if possible. However, the most important criteria for the couples who participate is a genuine desire to be better parents by going through the class. Additionally, the pilot class is the training ground for the development of additional leaders who will be needed to offer future classes to a broader spectrum of parents in the church. After completing the pilot class, the number of Growing Kids God's Way classes you will be able to offer to the church as a whole will be determined by how many of the couples in this group believe God is directing them to lead classes.

HOW TO BEGIN A PILOT GROUP

To begin this core group, choose the option below that best fits your church's vision and circumstances. Remember to keep this group small (5-8 couples), and try to include key church leaders, elders, deacons, and pastors when possible.

- 1. Option One.**
Send out a lead couple to take the Growing Kids God's Way class under experienced leaders (preferably leaders who have led multiple classes and participated in the GFI Leader Certification Program). Once they have completed the course, they will return to lead a pilot class of potential leaders from your church.

Experience has taught that this is the best scenario because:

- a) Passion and transformation are caught by lead couple.
- b) They will gain wisdom and example from seasoned leaders.
- c) They can focus on application in their family without worries of leading.
- d) Anticipation grows for beginning the ministry in your church.

- e) Compared to the other three options, it allows more time to formulate a plan to integrate the ministry into your church's vision.
- f) Hesitant church leadership can see the spiritual fruit.

2. Option Two

You may borrow a trained leader couple from another church to lead your first pilot group. (We will see more of this as the ministry matures across the country. Churches with available trained leaders will allow them to assist other churches in beginning their ministries.) This option is also highly recommended when available.

3. Option Three

If there are no available classes in your area, you may begin the ministry by forming a pilot group within your own church, headed by a mature couple with a proven ability to disciple others. This couple should take the lead by pre-reading the leader's guide and workbook before the class starts. It is recommended that they preview all of the videos before leading each class in order to help keep discussions focused on the current lesson.

4. Option Four

If there are no classes offered locally and no mature couples with discipling experience available, you can form your pilot group of potential leader couples with an iron-sharpening-iron mindset (Proverbs 27:17). One couple should take the lead by pre-reading the leader's guide and workbook before the class starts and then hold the class accountable for homework and attendance.

HOW TO SELECT POTENTIAL LEADERS FOR PILOT GROUP

Potential leader couples will ideally have the following characteristics:

1. **Active members of the church body.**
2. **Strong husband/wife relationship** (1 Timothy 3:4-5). The couple is important here; we highly discourage a married person from leading a class without his spouse, or a single person from leading a class solo (a single person may want to co-lead with a couple). We also feel strongly that the husband must take the more active role in leading the class. This is for the benefit of the men in the class. Without the respect of the men, their participation will be minimal; without their participation, there will be no transformation in that family. The wife's role in the discussions is important to bring out practical application and maintain a relationship focus.
3. **Spiritually mature with evidence of consistent growth.** There is no substitute for an intimate relationship with Christ in the leaders you select. Hearing Christ's voice and following Him (John 10) is key to addressing all the challenges that will come to the Growing Kids God's Way Leader.
4. **Their children are characterized by obedience and self-control.** (If there is no willing couple who exhibits this characteristic, you may want to temporarily waive this requirement and see how God will deal with this family through the experience of taking their first Growing Kids God's Way class. The transformation in these families can be a tremendous witness and an inspiration to others in your church.)
5. **Respected among men and women in the church.** Respect allows discipling and mentoring. Leading the class is a team effort and both husband and wife should be active in discipling the class members. While we recommend that the husband take the more active role in leading the class and discipling the men, this should not prohibit the wife from sharing her practical wisdom and discipling the women.
6. **Humble desire to help other parents.** They must have a servant's heart.

7. **Ability to communicate effectively.** (Not necessarily eloquent, but able to express themselves and their excitement about the principles taught.)
8. **Should be willing to take advantage of GFI leadership training.** We strongly encourage all leaders to participate in the optional GFI Leadership Certification Program.

DETERMINE CLASS STRUCTURE AND STANDARDS FOR PILOT GROUP.

Please refer to Step Four and adopt the guidelines applicable for this group.

HOLD AN INFORMATIONAL MEETING FOR YOUR PILOT GROUP.

1. **Invite potential leader couples, Pastors, Elders, Deacons, and church leaders** who will need to be supportive of this ministry. We realize that many church leaders will not have the time to commit to this pilot group, but we have found that their participation in this one introduction meeting will help them be fully supportive of the program.
2. **Adapt the guidelines under Step Four for this Introduction meeting.**

STEP FOUR

INTRODUCING GKGW TO THE WHOLE CHURCH

Most churches get so excited about the potential of this curriculum that they fail to establish an effective program. In an effort to get the message out quickly, they try to put as many couples into the first class as possible. Well-meaning church leadership may not recognize the importance of establishing a small group, discipleship format for their parenting classes.

The most effective classes will be those conducted in a small group, discipleship setting. Typically, the dynamics of a small group provide the opportunity for enhanced discussion and relationship building. Furthermore, this setting enables you as a leader couple to invest yourselves into the lives of your class members through your example, time, commitment, accountability, and love. Lifelong relationships are often developed in this “iron-sharpening-iron” environment.

DETERMINE CLASS FORMAT

We recommend that you and your church leadership adopt the following guidelines. These have been developed after many years of prayerful consideration and experience teaching this material. They are built on a foundation of relational discipleship principles that the Lord will use to produce transformation in the families involved in your classes. (Requirements for class members are detailed on pages 25 – 27.)

1. **We recommend a class time of two-and-a-half hours.** Less time restricts class participation during discussions as well as the time for building deep relationships through fellowship. A suggested class format follows (see leader’s guide “Helps for the first Night of Class” for more specific format recommendations):
 - 1) **30 min.** - Group Discussion of Homework & Questions
 - 2) **60 min.** - Video or Lecture (avg. time)
 - 3) **30 min.** - Refreshments, Fellowship
 - 4) **30 min.** - Final Q&A and prayer (avg. time)

(Note: many classes move the refreshments to the end of class to gain more time for questions, discussion, and prayer.)

2. **Evening classes are the norm.** Advantages and disadvantages of classes held in the home vs. classes at church are detailed on pages 23 – 24. The night and time of your class will depend upon your church community and leader availability. Monday or Tuesday nights have proven to be the best nights—Sunday nights also work well for many churches.

3. **A small-group format where accountability is encouraged works best.** Class size should be from 5 to 8 couples. This material does not work well in a Sunday School class, and we highly discourage its use in this format! Why? Sunday School class attendance is often sporadic, as is the commitment to homework. Most Sunday School classes only have one hour or less, and many of the GKGW videos are close to an hour in length, leaving no time for discussion, homework questions, and relationship building. In our experience, churches that utilize GKGW in a Sunday School class setting are generally disappointed with the outcome. They often realize belatedly that, while they may have given their parents information, they did not provide the relational environment necessary to see the information appropriated into their lives. The principle that God works through relationships in the Body is essential to success with this curricula.
4. **Each student should have his or her own workbook.** In addition to the workbook, single parents should be provided with The Single Parent Supplement and blended families should be provided with The Blended Family Supplement. (Blended families are families who have unique relationships due to divorce and re-marriage.) The class leader should have the appropriate supplement to review to make sure homework is completed.
5. **Plan on a time of fellowship and refreshments for each class.** We highly recommend refreshments for every class! This time facilitates one-on-one encouragement. Reserving a time for refreshments and fellowship helps to deepen relationships within the class and allows for more openness and sharing during the discussion time.

Experience has taught us that when classes follow the relational guidelines above, class members will enjoy strong accountability and lasting friendships. As a result the Holy Spirit will be at work to empower each family to apply this information. Please consider your class format prayerfully, and remember that many people will take GKGW only one time—please give them the best chance at appropriating this material and developing relationships that the Lord will use to make eternal changes in their families.

DETERMINE CLASS FEES

1. **Each church may set its own class fees based upon its expenses.** For GKGW you will figure at least a \$40.00-\$50.00 per couple (\$20.00-\$30.00 per single parent) to cover the cost of workbooks. If childcare is provided at the church, this may be figured into the cost. The church can put any extra money generated from class fees toward the purchase of the videos, audio tapes, or other expenses.
2. **Full scholarships are not recommended, even for the extremely needy.** Reason? In our society, paying for something gives it value. If there is no cost involved, then no value is attributed, and thus attendance and participation will likely be sporadic. You will do a family more good to allow them the dignity of paying for at least part of their class fee, even though it may seem hard on them. The only time a full scholarship might be considered is for a full-time missionary family, and then it is recommended that the scholarship be in the form of a gift from one person or family, and not from the church. That way there is some accountability due to the gift of the friend. Partial scholarships may be handled the same way.

DETERMINE CLASS LOCATION(S)

Our experience is that classes held in the home form deeper relationships than those held at the church. The home could be that of the leader couple or could be a separate “host couple’s” home. Many churches use a combination of some classes in homes and others at church to accommodate their church family.

1. Meeting in Homes

Advantages to Meeting in Homes (children at their own homes with sitters):

- a) Class relationships build deeper and faster (especially to host couple).
- b) Children go to bed on time and Mom and Dad do not have to rush home after class to get the kids in bed.
- c) It can become a date-night for Mom and Dad (dinner out before class).
- d) Host couple can exercise the gift of hospitality to a greater degree.

- e) There is a greater freedom to remain after class and ask questions, without having to rush to pick children up from the nursery.
- f) If a leader couple's children are at home and playing quietly in other rooms, this can be a great witness and encouragement to the couples in the class.
- g) Holding classes in a home may be less "threatening" to the un-churched than classes held at the church and may be an evangelistic aid.

Disadvantages to Meeting in Homes:

- a) The cost of babysitters for 19 weeks could deter some couples from taking the class.
- b) If the leader couple's children are not yet brought under control, meeting in the leader couple's home could cause distractions.
- c) If their home is the host home, there is more of a burden on the leader couple to prepare their home for guests each week. (Some see this as an advantage however—at least their home gets thoroughly cleaned once a week!)

2. Meeting at the Church

Advantages to Meeting at the Church:

- a) Childcare can be provided.
- b) Possibility of family meals at the church before class.
- c) Class times can coincide with children's activities (i.e., Awana).
- d) Children can be taught the same principles mom and dad are learning in class.

Please check with GFI for future information on a Babysitting Guide that accompanies GKGW.

Disadvantages to Meeting at the Church:

- a) More impersonal atmosphere is less conducive to relationship building.
- b) If childcare is provided at the church, there may be less opportunity for fellowship after class, as couples will be pressured to pick their children up on time from the nursery. To offset this problem, we suggest that childcare extends 30 minutes past the end of each class. This works well if snacks are at the end of class.
- c) If child care is provided at the church, this brings its own set of problems. Incorporate as much structure and organized activities as possible. Be aware that there may be conflicts if you have very young and much older children in the nursery together. Problems may also occur because of how different families have trained their children or not trained their children.

PLAN YOUR INFORMATIONAL MEETING

1. **Determine how many classes you can accommodate** based upon how many couples are ready to lead from your pilot group.
2. **Plan an informational meeting(s).** You may want to hold more than one informational meeting if you plan on holding multiple classes. This will allow more husbands and wives to attend together and make a joint commitment.
3. **Announce your informational meeting(s).** (Pulpit, bulletin, newsletter, flyer, and word of mouth.) The amount of communication is usually limited by the number of leaders you have ready to lead classes.

HOLD YOUR INFORMATIONAL MEETING(S).

Schedule the informational meeting(s) far enough in advance of the first regular class so that you will have time to order the correct number of workbooks and supplements (single parent and blended family). Usually this will be at least two weeks before the date of your first class, but it may be as much as one month (or more) before the first class. Remember that no workbooks are handed out at the informational meeting; this is not done until the first week of class or Session One.

1. **Open the Meeting with Prayer.**

2. **Welcome Everyone and Introduce Leader Couples.**
3. **Have One or More Leader Couples Share Growing Kids God's Way Testimony.**
4. **Give a Brief Introduction and History of the Ezzos and GFI.**
5. **Give the Opening Explanation: (Put this in your own words—share your heart/burden.)**
 - a) Not just another program, nor a quick fix, but a **Philosophy of Life which requires effort.**
 - b) Not just another class, but a **Discipleship Relationship.**
 - c) Not just another 19-week bible study, but a **Generation to Generation Lifestyle.**
 - d) Share how this fits with your church's vision.
 - e) The importance of "heart training."
6. **Show Introductory Video (37 Minutes).**
7. **Explain the Commitment:** (We highly recommend that churches using GKGW adopt these standards.)
 - a) **For GKGW, you must commit to 18 weeks.** (Alternatively, some churches ask for a 6 to 9 week commitment at which point each couple will decide whether to continue or not. Most couples choose to finish but those who do not are given the rest of their workbooks and encouraged to re-enroll at a later time).
 - b) **This must be a husband/wife commitment** (if currently married). Single parents and blended families are welcome.
 - c) **Faithful attendance is required:** It is highly suggested that you allow no more than two unexcused absences and three absences total. All missed lessons must be made up before the next class session. Lending the videos is discouraged. It is recommended that you purchase a set of audiotapes to lend out. **(Exceptions for multiple absences are allowed when context is appropriate,** i.e., an airline pilot who knows that he will have to miss multiple classes agrees to be accountable to the leaders in staying current each week with audiotapes and homework done. This will only work if he is really committed to the class.)
 - d) **The Husband and wife must each do their own homework** and will be held accountable for applying what they have learned. We highly recommend one workbook per person as the requirement—not one per couple. This guideline is designed to encourage both the husband and wife to do their readings and homework. Single parents should be given The Single Parent Supplement and blended families should be given The Blended Family Supplement in addition to the regular workbook.
 - e) **Workbook chapters are handed out weekly.** To avoid the temptation to read future chapters, students will be given only the current week's lesson and homework. If a class member misses a class session, it is his/her responsibility to pick up the lesson from the leaders and complete it by the next class session.
 - f) Childcare arrangements are the responsibility of each couple, unless the church has agreed to provide childcare for the class.
 - g) **If married, both husband and wife are to view the introductory video** and agree to the class format and standards set by your church before being allowed to take the class. The viewing of this video and agreeing to your class standards are critical to a couple's willingness to

be taught. We highly recommend that every effort be made to get couples to the introductory meeting.

8. **Explain Course Guidelines:** (We suggest your church adopt these guidelines.)
 - a) **Respect for others is the rule during class discussions.**
 - b) **Debates or arguing should not be allowed during class** in order to protect the limited amount of class time. (Disagreements with the material should be brought to class leaders after the class.)
 - c) **Confidentiality is expected when appropriate.**
 - d) **Couples should be continually encouraged to use discretion in sharing parenting principles they are learning with those who are not in the class.** Be careful not to become the parent police. Allow your and your children's example to draw inquiries. The transformation of your children will speak much louder than words. Generally a person will be ready to hear when they initiate and ask!
9. **Announce Class Times and Locations.** If you are offering classes in both a home and at church, review the advantages and disadvantages discussed previously (pages 23 – 24).
10. **Announce Cost for Class.** Notify if partial scholarships are available (p. 23). Explain that the leaders are not getting paid and the fees go to the church to purchase materials needed.
11. **Explain Class Format: Class length, Prayer, Discussion of Homework, Video, Refreshments, Wrap-up, Questions, and Prayer (refer to pages 30 – 31).**
12. **Give People an Acceptable Way to Bow Out of Taking the Class.** You want only the committed and teachable parents, not those who might take the class because of peer pressure or class popularity. Do not talk people into taking the class.

Ask, *“Is this God’s timing for you to take this class?”* (Pause.) In a gentle manner explain that *“it may not be if one of the following is true:”*

- a) ...one spouse is reluctant or **“dragging their feet.”**
- b) ...one spouse is too busy to **commit to weekly homework.**
- c) ...your **schedule is too busy** and you know that you will have to **miss multiple classes.**
- d) ...**childcare is a problem** and cannot be resolved satisfactorily.
- e) ...you’re not really ready for others to **instruct you in the area of parenting.**

And add (if it’s true), *“We will be offering this course again in the future.”*

13. **Ask for Questions.**
14. **Pass Out Registration Forms** to be completed and turned in with the class fee now or later by mail. If class space is limited, explain that a “first-come-first-served” policy will be in effect. Registrations and class fees received after classes are full will be put on a waiting list for the next round of classes. Many churches include a list of the standards that their classes will follow as part of the registration process. See the leader’s guide for samples.

ORGANIZE FIRST ROUND OF CLASSES BASED UPON THOSE WHO SIGNED UP

1. **Provide each leader couple with their class roster and a Leader’s Guide.**

2. **Have the leaders contact each class member** to inform them of their acceptance and to make sure they are agreeable to the class structure and standards set by your church leadership.

STEP FIVE

EXPANDING THE MINISTRY WITHIN YOUR CHURCH

1. **Look for potential leader couples** in each class. The class leader should prayerfully approach them (if they do not initiate contact) and ask them to think about leading classes in the future. Some of these couples may need to “co-lead/assist” a class with experienced leaders before leading one solo.
2. **As God provides leader couples, introduce more GFI classes**, such as Preparation for Parenting, Preparation for the Toddler Years, Preparation for Adolescence, Reaching the Heart of Your Teen, and Reflections of Moral Innocence.
3. **Develop a schedule of upcoming classes** and times they will be offered so that you can inform prospective parents and coordinate available leadership. Many of the larger ministries will hold a leadership planning/prayer meeting in mid-summer to plan the next year’s calendar of classes.
4. **Keep church leadership informed as you proceed with classes.** If the church leadership is not personally involved with the classes, have class leaders give them periodic written (short) updates on how their classes and the ministry are progressing. Encourage several class members to send them a written testimony of what the Lord has done in their family.
6. **Build a ministry that is deep** (relational focus) **and not just wide** (program focus). Do not try to grow the ministry too fast. Wait on the Lord’s timing at each step. Do not hold large classes just because there is a demand. Keep your classes at 5-8 couples. Utilize waiting lists when needed. They help build anticipation and increase teachability! Encourage long-term discipling of couples. Encourage-age couples to repeat Growing Kids God’s Way and to take the other GFI classes.
7. **Build a community of like-minded parents.** Encourage social activities (pot-lucks, picnics, etc.) to promote fellowship among Growing Kids God’s Way alumni. Many of these will be family events to allow your children the opportunity to interact with other like-minded families.
8. **Plan for your children’s ability to parent and their children’s ability to parent.** Lay the foundation of a ministry of discipleship that will affect generations. Plan for this ministry to be a part of your church’s foundation, that your children may someday take classes there!

STEP SIX

EXPANDING THE MINISTRY TO YOUR COMMUNITY

1. **Train leaders for other churches.** Invite couples from other churches to join your classes. You may want to give priority to potential leader couples who plan to start classes at their church.
2. **Send trained leader couples out to other churches to start classes.** There is a constant demand for trained leaders who are willing to help another church with their first class. Please contact your local or regional GFI representatives. They will be excited to help you expand your outreach.
3. **Reach those who do not attend church.** Growing Kids God’s Way classes are an excellent outreach to the community. We caution you in keeping a healthy balance between church and un-churched couples. Too many un-churched couples in one class can overwhelm your leader couple and greatly reduce the effectiveness of their class.

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