



TOP TEN TRENDS IN

- Rise of the Children's Pastor
- Focus on Family Ministry
- Technology in Ministry
- Relational Ministry
- Training Kids to Serve
- 'Tween' Ministry Growth
- Kids Evangelizing Kids
- Priority of Children's Ministry
- Special Needs Ministry
- Child Security Procedures

Are You a Senior Pastor?

These are the two books that are having the most significant impact on shaping the Children's Ministries of the future:

• **Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions**
by George Barna

• **Rock Solid Kids**
by Larry Fowler

Every Senior Pastor should read these books!

Both are available in the Kidology.org online store.

Discuss This Report Online

This Report was first published on Kidology.org in December 2006. Interact with other children's ministry workers around the country in discussing these trends in our online discussion forums.

Simply go to Kidology.org, click on NETWORK, and search for "CM TRENDS."

Trends in Children's Ministry

Children's Ministry is always changing. Not only are the needs of the children and their families always changing, but so are the available tools to minister to them, and the strategies that churches employ to be effective in their efforts to reach and teach children for Jesus. Here are the **TOP TEN POSITIVE TRENDS** that Kidology has identified that will impact your ministry in the years ahead. God is alive and well and moving in the area of Children's Ministry!

TREND #1: The Rise of the Children's Pastor

Twenty years ago only large churches would have a children's pastor, and only after every other pastoral position had been filled. The needs of children once were lumped under a Christian Education Director who oversaw all ages, and therefore primarily focused only on the education of children, or they were added to the Youth Pastor's plate to be "overseen" while he focused on his primary focus, the youth. Many of today's children's pastors are former CE Directors and Youth Pastors who discovered that the children in their church were a group that needed more than just education – they needed to be shepherded, and that they were a much more strategic group in long term results for the overall church.

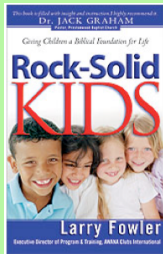
One of these new children's pastors, Tim Balogh, formerly an Awana Teen Ministry Missionary and a Youth Pastor in several churches became a children's pastor and explained it this way, "Youth Ministry often felt like a last ditch effort to get kids to own their faith whereas a transition to Children's Ministry provided me opportunities to help families develop stronger spiritual foundations that can last a lot longer than anything the youth pastor can do without that foundation." The issue is not that youth ministers aren't doing a great job – we CHEER those men and women on – but for too long the strategy to save youth was to wait until they were youth to give them focused attention, and often by then the efforts seem sometimes too little too late. Churches are discovering that a strong Children's Ministry only makes the Youth Ministry stronger.

Churches across America are desperately looking for teaching / shepherding children's pastors and there simply aren't enough to go around. There is a huge need for young people to be trained for a career in children's ministry. As a result, more and more Christian colleges and universities are developing children's ministry degrees and making young people aware that they can choose Children's Ministry as a career option. Because the available "pool" of available children's pastors is extremely small, more churches are hiring the children's pastor from within the church. This trend is very effective since the new leader already knows the culture of the church and can more quickly begin to lead once equipped with the time and resources to focus on the needs of the children.

MUST READ BOOKS

Rock Solid Kids

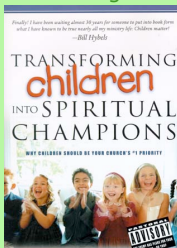
By Larry Fowler,
Executive Vice President,
Awana Clubs International



Rock-Solid Kids will help parents, teachers and children's ministry leaders build a strong ministry - in the home and church - modeled on scriptural teaching. This examination of the biblical basis for children's ministry includes eight core chapters. Each chapter is based on one or more Scripture passages and covers topics such as the importance, responsibility, content and golden opportunity of children's ministry.

Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions

By George Barna
Founder of the Barna Group
www.barna.org



Based on original research among children, parents and churches, George Barna reveals his discoveries about the significance of ministry to children - and what is required to help them become transformed for Christ both within the church and in Christian homes.

TREND #2 Growing Focus on Family Ministry

Many churches in past decades have made the mistake of thinking the church, or more specifically, the children's pastor (director, coordinator, etc.) could raise kids to know and love God. It simply can't be done. All a children's ministry leader can do is facilitate ministry to better equip families to minister to their kids. As children's pastor Dave Truitt in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania points out, "for years, families have come to church and then went their separate ways as soon as they arrived at church. Then they met at the mini-van when it was all over." For years the unspoken mantra of the church has been, "bring your kids to us and we will return them as good Christian boys and girls." It has taken too long for the church to wake up and see that not only was this strategy failing, but it was unbiblical.

Larry Fowler, Vice President of Awana Clubs International and author of the book *Rock Solid Kids* and *Rock Solid Children's Ministry* has been championing the message that the previous strategy of ministry directly and primarily to children has not only been ineffective, but has violated the biblical mandate to equip parents to reach and teach their own children. Awana is one of the global ministries leading the charge to give ministry to children back to parents while at the same time coming alongside parents to help them where they need it. Multiple studies have confirmed that while peers, teachers and others may have some influence on our children's faith and values system, parents have, by far, the most impact - positively or negatively. In his recent book, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, George Barna writes, "I have been discouraged to discover that most American adults - including most parents - see the spiritual development of children as a value-added proposition rather than the single, most important aspect of a child's development."

As the church is waking up to the critical role of parents they in turn are opening parents' eyes to the need to be more engaged in the spiritual development of their children. We underestimate the power of parents when we think we can do a better job. "A dad stumbling through a prayer is much more effective than an eloquent prayer from the kid's pastor," writes Dave Truitt. There is a movement across the country for children's ministry leaders to recognize that they can no longer ignore the daunting task of involving and engaging parents in the process. It is difficult to be family-focused because, as children's pastor Andrew VanDerLinden notes, "divorced and single parent homes are rampant in today's society and it is the children that are suffering the most. It is hard to be effective in ministry with children that are only able to attend your service once or twice a month because they are with their other parent the other weekends."

Though the obstacles many, the churches that are most effective are finding ways to creatively challenge and engage parents in the children's ministry. The key is to be less program focused, and more focused on relationships. When asked what advice he would give to new children's pastors, Spencer Click, a children's pastor in La Mesa, California answered, "spend as much time as you can nurturing your relationships with parents. Have specific events to help them get to know you - provide them with more information than they need. Do everything you can to get them to "buy" into your ministry." George Barna concludes that with the previous strategy of parent-void ministry, "we have virtually lost a generation - we cannot afford to lose another." In response to that, Larry Fowler warns in *Rock Solid Kids*, "It is not possible to do enough in children's ministry to change the trend. If we are not successful in engaging the home, we will lose another."

TREND #3 Media-Driven Ministry

As in all areas of our culture – the use of technology in ministry is on a growth surge. Marc Romero, the children's pastor at Manassas Assembly of God in Bristow, Virginia notes, "numerous churches that previously thought video projectors were toys are now investing large amounts of money on getting sharp images on the screens." Todd McKeever, a children's pastor in Fairfax, Virginia points out that when reaching out to kids, "our use of technology dates our relevance and can attract or disinterest the children we are seeking to reach." Aside from using PowerPoint-driven lessons, wireless mics on puppeteers, and DVDs with on-screen lyrics and backgrounds for worship, the most noticeable trend is DVD based curriculum. Whereas video clips were once used as teaching elements, there are now several video-based curriculums where the majority of the time children spend a majority of their time looking at a screen and being taught by a pastor they most likely will never meet. Marc Romero aptly notes that "kids have learned their ABCs with Big Bird, manners with Mr. Rogers, and humor from SpongeBob. There is a HUGE potential to use media as a resource for teaching Truth in the church." He quickly adds, however, that "media can be a great addition to the successful things you are already doing, but as with any medium used in a children's service, media should be viewed as a tool and not a solution."

DVD curriculum was born in part out of the rapid growth of ministries such as Saddleback Community Church and the need to ensure that the same message was being taught with uniform quality throughout the many classrooms. Saddleback's children's pastor Craig Jutila's DVD-based curriculum (empoweringkids.net) uses media for the teaching segment and several other components, but still provides materials for relational ministry to take place in small group discussions with men and women who know the children personally.

Another highly popular DVD curriculum that promotes itself as the "reinvention of Sunday School" is Kidmo, which is almost entirely video-driven and needs only an Emcee up front as a guide. (Kidmo.com) While there is a place for DVD curriculum especially for small churches or ministries struggling with adequate volunteers, there is a danger in this trend. Larry Shallenberger, Pastor of Children and Student Ministries, at Grace Church, Erie PA, cautions that "many of these curriculums are imbalanced and there is a concern that students become passive learners." Marc Romero admits "DVD curriculum makes me a little nervous, especially when churches are deciding to purchase a DVD to teach kids instead of investing in a Children's Pastor who will shepherd them. Will a DVD curriculum truly prepare kids to be a lifetime Christian?" There is certainly a need to help equip volunteers and a desire to make their job as easy as possible, but Children's Pastor Spencer Click isn't so sure it is a good thing as he laments that there has been "too strong a move towards overly 'Teacher Friendly' or 'Plug and Play' curriculums. Too many children's pastors are seeking a curriculum that can be done with almost no prep work. Do we really want a curriculum that is a microwave meal?" Technology is a reality we can't ignore and should harness to be as effective as possible, but at the same time, we need to keep in mind that Jesus was pretty effective with nothing that plugged into an outlet. Ministry will always be about relationships. Interestingly, many small churches that can't afford much in technology still are growing and reaching kids. Perhaps they have more time for relationships with less gadgets to plug in? As Karl Bastian likes to say, "A video can't love a child." Relationships will always be best.

Media Resources...

Here are a few samples of the kids of media tools available in the Kidology.org Online Store.



Hero Headquarters is a Kids Church curriculum that comes with voice-activated on screen games that respond to the children yelling to compete!



PowerPoint Slide Backgrounds you can adapt for your own needs.



A Look Inside...

**YOU MUST BE RELATIONAL,
NOT JUST INFORMATIONAL**

Relationship comes first. If you like someone you will learn from them. Whether you realize it or not! That is why "bad company corrupts good character." (I Cor. 15:33) Be a kid's friend before you are his teacher! This will transform your relationships with children, your classroom, your approach to discipline, and your overall ministry effectiveness with kids! A teacher who understands children and their world, and who is a genuine friend of the kids you minister to, you will influence more children than you can even imagine!

From the **KIDODOLOGY HANDBOOK** available at Kidology.org

TREND #4 Growing Emphasis on Relational Ministry

"Relationship connection is the currency of kids. You can buy the right to their attention, buy the right to be heard, and buy the right to get a response from them." So states Jamie Doyle, the Children's Pastor at Radiant Life in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a church that has grown nearly 50% this past year. Technology and programs will never replace the power of relationships. Growing children's ministries are making sure that in the midst of all the programming, there is room for relationships with kids. Children's Pastor Spencer Click adds, "this has become especially important with the older kids. (5th & 6th Graders). They have been entertained to death; they have been patronized with puppets longer than anyone cares to admit." They need to know that somebody with a name and a face knows them and cares about them. If no one on earth really cares, how can they ever believe that God does?

There is an old saying that goes "they don't care how much you know until they know how much you care". Scott Phillips, the Children's Church Director at Tabernacle Church in Laurel, Maryland reminds us that "this truth is essential in children ministry. The things our children are facing today are not the same things children faced thirty years ago. We must be aware of the challenges they are facing in life in order to be able to steer them to make the right choices." It is conversation, not videos or games, that draw out the inner struggles and needs of children. It is only through relationships that people are genuinely impacted and then changed. In children's ministry, we too often get caught up in trying to impress kids (or their parents) with the ministry feats we can pull off, but in the end, it is only relationships that matter.

When asked what was one of the ministry highlights of his year, Pastor Todd McKeever wrote about an experience with a little seven-year-old girl who was dying. As people were visiting her someone asked her to talk about some of her greatest memories. Her response was, "I miss and enjoy the most when Pastor Todd laughs in kids church." She didn't mention the giant inflatables or games or any of the programs at Jubilee Christian Center, instead, she fondly remembered the laugh of her children's pastor. A hearty laugh will out-minister a video projector any day of the week.

TREND #5 Kids Being Trained to Serve

The age of children as mere spectators is over. The result of having kids sit and 'watch' church has resulted in a generation of youth and even adults who expect to come to church to 'get' instead of 'give.' It is of little wonder that so many adults are oblivious to the need to serve – we raised them to be spectators once they enter the building. Fortunately, that is changing. "One of the positive trends in the current generation in children's ministries is the desire to be very 'hands-on.' Children want to feel involved and a part of what is going on; they desire physical participation not just visual stimulus," writes Children's Pastor Spencer Click. Not only is ministry more effective when kids are serving, they are learning as well. Children's Pastor Dave Truitt writes, "kids of today are more interested in doing than learning – but by doing, they are learning. Training kids to serve helps them take their eyes off of themselves and onto others." The best way to reverse the trend of losing children in the teenage years is to engage them before those turbulent years come. George Barna adds extra urgency to the need to train children when he states that "social scientists have known for years that the moral foundations of children are generally determined by the time the individual reaches age nine... Anyone who wishes to have a significant influence on a person's moral and spiritual foundations had better exert that influence while the person is still open-minded and impressionable - in other words, while the person is young." For children who find serving at church natural, it will become a life long habit. When we engage kids, Spencer Click points out they "are transformed from 'sitters' in to 'doers.'" Paul Bradford, a CE Director in Coudersport Pennsylvania notes that plugging in kids now helps keep them stay engaged in the church later because "some kids leave church as a teenager because they feel if they left no one would even notice." Training kids to serve transforms 'making disciples' from mere words to action.



TREND #6 Increased Attention to “Tween” Ministry

George Barna’s research (available at barna.org) concludes that “more often than not, what a person decides about truth, sin, forgiveness and eternal consequences during their pre-teen years is the same perspective they carry with them to their grave - and beyond, where ever that may take them.” Pastor Marc Romero commented on this when he wrote, “twens are a growing force in our economy and culture. Churches are starting to realize that this new group requires specialized focus. Twens are the Junior Highers of the 80’s and 90’s.”

According to a UNC Chapel Hill study by Southern Baptist Convention, “after high school seniors, twens are the second largest group of people to leave the church and never come back.” Even secular sources are expressing concern over how fast our children are growing up. A recent AP article noted that children as young as fifth and sixth graders are developing teen attitudes, including disrespect of parents/authority as well as interest in dating and consumerism. Joni Lum, a children’s ministry leader in Irvine, California commented that “The chasm between our younger and older elementary children seems to be widening and thus we need to continually pray and look for ways to engage and stimulate our twens to help them live out their Christian faith.”

Ministries with names such as ‘Club 56’ are cropping up all over the nation. While the focus on Tween ministry is a healthy trend, it is not as simple as treating preteen ministry as a mini or early youth ministry. Too often churches are jumping to combine middle school ages that developmentally are not best mixed. The trend with public middle schools to include preteens with junior highers is often more space / capacity motivated rather than developmental or educational strategy. Before a church moves too quickly to combine preteen and junior high it is advised to inquire what the middle schools in their area are doing within the buildings. Most often it will be discovered that the preteens and junior highers are completely separated. There is another danger with tween ministry when a church provides all the “youth ministry ideas and strategies” to preteens. The kids will certainly have a lot of fun, but the gap from 5th grade to 12th is extremely wide and too often youth ministries struggle with little left to offer their older teens if preteen and junior high ministry have stolen the thunder. But with these cautions, the trend to target twens and seek to effectively engage and minister to them is positive and critical.

TREND #7 Kids Evangelizing Kids

Another healthy trend is the increased focus, and with it, improved resources to equip children to share their faith with their friends. Kids reaching kids will always be one of the most effective strategies for reaching kids for Christ. Joni Lum points out that including kids in outreach helps to “reinforce Jesus’ teaching that children are important, their gifts are real, and they can be an integral part of fulfilling the great commission now, not ten years from now.” Who has the most access to children in neighborhoods and public schools? Other kids who already know God. Spencer Click notes that “this is the most vital way to either grow your church or the kingdom of God as a whole. Feedback from other children’s pastors has confirmed a universal truth, the most effective way to get new kids to church is through a friend.” (For helpful resources see these sites: evangecube.org or cefonline.com) Growing children’s ministries are growing in part because they are training their kids to reach their friends.

Preteen Ministry Report



A common question from both secular and religious educators is “what do we do with today’s preteens?” As seen by the covers on this page, of both Children’s Ministry Magazine and a secular news magazine, Newsweek, the world is waking up to the needs of this age group. Called ‘inbetweeners’, ‘tweeners’, ‘preteens’, ‘preadolescents’ among other names, it appears no one is quite sure just where to ‘peg’ these kids.

In a phone conversation with Gordon West, (author with his wife Becki of the book *Dynamic Preteen Ministry: The Essential Guide to Build a No-Miss Ministry With Kids*) Gordon described this age as being involved in a ministry game of ‘hot potato.’ Too grown up for the children’s ministry, they are tossed to the youth ministry. Then, when not ready for the issues and activities of youth, they get tossed back to the children’s ministry. Gordon, himself a ‘tweener’ by the previous definition (someone born between 1960 and 1965, between the Boomers and Busters) noted that ‘tweeners’ tends to be a term assigned to any group people aren’t sure what to do with, or where to place. Or in his words, a ‘tweener’ is someone we don’t understand.”

READ THE ENTIRE ARTICLE ON KIDOLOGY.org

SEARCH FOR “Preteen Ministry” in the Article Zone.



Four Ways to View Kids:

According to Larry Fowler, in *Rock Solid Kids*, there are four primary ways that churches view children.

ATTITUDE #1

Children are a **BOTHER**.

When this attitude is present kids are best out of sight. Real ministry takes place with the kids out of the way.

ATTITUDE #2

Children are a **TOOL**.

This church will invest in kids, but parents are the target that really matters. Children are just the bait.

ATTITUDE #3

Children are our **FUTURE**.

This attitude looks good on the surface, because kids are loved, but ignores the real needs of kids and the children's ministry.

ATTITUDE #4

Children are **PEOPLE**.

This is the attitude of Jesus. Kids may bring parents, and they may live into the future, but they need Jesus TODAY.

The question is not "are kids important in my church" but rather, "are they prioritized?"

TREND #8 Prioritization of Children's Ministry

Children's Pastor Jamie Doyle rejoices that "George Barna's Book, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, is taking hold of senior pastors in America. It's making them think about securing the future of the church." No longer is children's ministry's purpose seen as occupying the children while real ministry takes place elsewhere. Churches are catching the vision that if you want to grow, the most effective means is through reaching families through their children. As Larry Shallenberger notes, "children's ministry had been viewed as essential to capturing boomers in the '80's and '90's. However, the next step is beginning to occur: Children's Ministry is being valued as a way to advance the mission of the church." The most obvious way this trend is seen, after the hiring of a children's pastor, is that the children's ministry area of the church is often transformed. Andrew VanDerLinden points out that "Before you can touch the heart and lives of children you must capture their eyes and ears. Each time you improve your facility to make it more kid friendly you become more effective in reaching young families and children.

We live in a day that parents will attend a church that they don't particularly enjoy or like, if the needs of their children are being met." While we can wring our hands over the commercialism that has families 'church shopping' the reality is if we want to draw kids and their families, we need kid-friendly environments. Marc Romero says it this way, "No longer satisfied with drab walls and dull carpets churches are remodeling their children's environments to be fun and inviting. Children's ministries are doing everything from repainting walls to installing slides and arcades.

Churches are waking up to the fact that what a child experiences in their first ten minutes of walking into their building will give the parents their first impression about how a church views the importance of kids." But as with all positive trends, there is a warning. Environment may draw families and help engage kids initially, but it is still truth communicated through loving relationships that transforms hearts. A church that can't remodel their children's ministry can still be more effective than a church that looks like an area in Disneyland if relational ministry is not taking place within the programming. Whether it results in multi-million dollar remodeling, or simple murals, or better budgeting, or hiring staff to focus on children, a priority on children's ministry throughout the church can only help build the Kingdom of God through reaching and teaching kids.

TREND #9 Ministry to Children with Special Needs

One encouraging trend is that many churches are moving away from cookie cutter approaches to ministering to children, and that includes acknowledging that many kids come with special needs that need individual focused attention. In the past, children who struggled to succeed in the regular classes or programs either stopped coming, were considered as discipline problems, or were gathered into a special classroom so as not to disturb the other children. Healthy churches today are not ignoring the growing reality of children with special needs and are creatively seeking ways to minister to the whole family. Most often churches develop a "Friends" or "Buddies" ministry where children with special needs can have a dedicated volunteer to assist them through the regular programming. Churches are helping families take better responsibility for their child's unique needs and providing helpful resources and attention so that they can help their child get the most out of their church experience.

What are Special Needs?

A child with Special Needs:

- 1) has significant impairments in one or more of the following areas: health, cognition, communication, sensory motor, social / emotional / behavioural or self help (adaptive), and
- 2) requires specialized supports to enhance or improve their health, development, or participation in daily activities at home, in school and in their communities.

Source: Ministry of Children and Family Development (BC)



TREND #10 Increased Attention to Child Security

When people think of a children's pastor, often the image that comes to mind is that of a teacher with a puppet on one hand, an object lesson in the other, and a guitar strapped to their back. What most people don't realize is that today's children's pastor is often a family counselor, a savvy administrator, a staff manager, a book keeper, a pharmacist (educated in the behavior drugs kids are taking), as well as a lawyer and safety monitor. It is no longer just the mega-churches that have to focus on volunteer screening and child security issues. As other secular programs are clamping down on child safety issues, unfortunately the church has become one of the last places a predator can turn to get fast easy access to children! Jamie Doyle notes that in the years ahead "Churches will need to – and be forced to – implement security plans to make the church a safe environment for the entire family. They need to consider secure check-in systems, separate children's ministry wings in buildings that have monitored entrances and exits." Some churches are now using hall monitors, security guards or even uniformed police on site. Once considered an extreme measure, background checks are an assumption in most churches today. (Recommended resource for background checks: churchvolunteercentral.com)

With Kids in Mind... Pastor Karl's Commentary

Many who read this report I hope will be challenged to give some new or renewed focus to some of the areas covered. However, I would like to conclude this report by encouraging you *not* to try to address all of these at once. These trends are presented for prayerful reflection, not as a checklist for your ministry. Beware of the difference between trends and fads. As Dick Gruber once wrote, "A trend can serve to guide your children's ministry, or it can drive it into the ground." Each of these trends, if reflected in your ministry, can have a positive influence on your mission to reach and teach children (and their families) for Jesus. But in the end, we sometimes need to be reminded that it is not the 'stuff' of ministry that changes the lives of kids. It is not our programs, props, puppets or projectors that get into the hearts of children – it is only an encounter with the Love of God for each and every one of them. I love the story of a young boy over a century ago who was walking through the snowy cold streets of Chicago on his way to Mr. Moody's Sunday School. Another Sunday School teacher stopped him and invited him to attend his Sunday School which was much closer, but the boy responded that he'd rather go to Mr. Moody's Sunday School. When asked why he would travel so far across the city to go to another church when the one being offered was much closer, the boy replied, "because at Mr. Moody's Sunday School, they really know how to love a kid." Trends come and go, but God's love is here to stay. **Make sure loving kids is the #1 Trend in your children's ministry!**

WHY KIDOLOGY.org?

Multiple thousands of children's workers come to Kidology.org every single day from around the world. *Why?*

When asked what resources in children's ministry they use the most these two children's pastors answered Kidology.org

Here are their reasons:

I have found Kidology.org to be essential in my ministry because it has proven to be a valuable source for ideas, resources, contacts, and information from others in children's ministry. I am able to learn about other ministries and the situations they go through. I am able to learn how others run things and then I am able to learn from their experiences.

- Scott Phillips, Children Church Director, Tabernacle Church, Laurel, Maryland

Through Kidology.org I am able get a feel for the pulse of children's ministry across the nation. In just a few moments I can find out what other children's ministries are doing from all corners of the country. I can benchmark my ministry with the ministries of some of the top churches and children's pastors in the world.

Through Kidology I am mentored and my ministry developed by children's pastors and leaders from all walks of life and from different denominations.

- Andrew VanDerLinden, Children's Pastor, Aurora First Assembly, Aurora, Colorado



Kidology is a non-profit organization dedicated to equipping and encouraging those who minister to children. Through our website, conferences, and resources we are here to serve you. Join our online community and find the help and encourage you need!