

Ideas About Reaching Next Gen (13-30 years old)

1. Influencers

Over the years, I worked with MS, HS, College and young adults. I noticed that a lot of the growth we experienced was influenced by a handful of students in our groups. 1 out of a group of 10, or 2-4 from a group of 20 were Influencers. They were social and friendly. They were intentional about inviting friends. I suggest that you find out who these leaders are in your church – either students, single adults or young married couples - and mentor them and see how they can be involved in your leadership team for the contemporary worship service and/or your ministry to Next Gen.

2. Community is very important

People build friendships by spending time together and interacting with one another. Community is not built by just being in the same room. As a church leader, I made sure we had a fellowship they could invite friends to every month. But when our group was healthy, the individuals in our group would plan their own activities almost every week. They were friends and they wanted to hang out together when they had free time.

- Bible study small groups with lots of discussion meeting every week
- Fun activities: bowling, swimming, putt putt, hiking, basketball, volleyball, eating.
- Retreats and camps where there is extended time together
- Mission trips and mission service projects serving others

3. Leaders and Mentors

Married couples who are fun-loving, active and encouraging are great to lead small groups and Sunday School classes and go on trips as chaperones. They could be in their 20s, 30s or older as long as they enjoy being around students.

Two of the churches in Macon have a Wednesday night large group with students that only lasts 15-20 minutes and then they break up into small discussion groups led by college students and young married couples.

4. How people learn

People learn by observing, reading, thinking, discussing and doing. Try to avoid too much lecture-oriented teaching to reach Next Gen.

5. Growth by slightly harder challenges

Learning new things and accountability is a good tool to help people grow spiritually.

At school they have – homework, tests, lots of practicing, reading and answering questions in class. Coaches ask team members to do challenging things to get better in a culture of teamwork.

What could we do to ask students and young adults to try new things to increase their learning?

Example: At one church, the congregation says a memory verse together every Sunday for a month.

6. Help Next Gen learn leadership

As some of your students mature, try to use them (occasionally, not all the time) as leaders for the younger ones coming along behind them. High schoolers might help with middle school, college might help with high school, young couples might help with young single adults. (Example: VBS, a camp, a mission trip)

7. Learning to explain the gospel

By the time people reach high school and college age, they are absolutely ready to be able to memorize 20 scripture verses related to the gospel. They can be taught to share the gospel and ask someone if they would like to trust in Christ for their salvation. One church in Macon uses their 50 small groups to let people practice explaining the gospel to someone else.

8. Transition years are pretty important

Feeling that you belong is incredibly important. If a teenager doesn't feel accepted by the peer group at church, it isn't a stretch to understand that they may not feel loved and accepted by God either. It's the same with adults also.

6th Grade --- Elementary moving up to middle school – scary!

9th Grade --- Middle school moving up to high school – challenging!

High school moving up to college age – stressful!

Being accepted means a lot at these ages. What can you do to be intentional about creating a culture of positive acceptance of new people by the rest of the group their age.

Illus: I remember when I was in my first year of high school. A senior girl in the Band with me invited me to a small party at her house on a Saturday afternoon. I was shocked and I looked up to that senior from then on as a leader I admired because she was friendly to a new “nobody.”

Illus: My wife's 8th grade girls SS class made cards and cookies and took them to the new 6th grade girls who were promoted into Middle School in the Fall and feeling a little scared and shy.

9. The D-Life model

I think the D-Life strategy for small groups is fantastic because everyone in the group takes turns leading the small group for a few minutes every week. Everyone in the small group reads one or more chapters of the Bible at home during the week and is ready to share some things they learned when they meet with their small group. I highly recommend this strategy and the Mid-State Baptist Association can provide training for one or more leaders at your church anytime you are ready.

10. Reaching boys and men

I don't know about girls, but guys do a lot of bonding through sports, activities and games. What kind of social activities can you offer the Next Gen people you are trying to reach? Spending time together helps produce friendships which helps with discipleship.

- A walking or running group or an exercise class (**see *F3Nation on the internet***)
- Softball, volleyball, ultimate frisbee, or basketball teams (with a devotional)
- A tennis, pickleball or golf league (with a devotional)
- A camping, hiking, fishing, or hunting group (with a devotional)

11. Partner with other churches

There are many churches that only have a few students attending. The Mid-State Association encourages churches to partner with other churches to do some of their student activities each year – a retreat, a camp, a mission trip, a DNOW weekend, a service project. When churches partner by planning and doing things together, the Association would like to help financially with some of these activities. Call the Association and we want to be involved in planning with you.

Example: If five churches came together to do a DNOW weekend with 35 students, the Association might be able to cover the cost of \$500 for the food purchased.

12. Partnerships

Repeat of number 11, except partner with other churches to do an event for young single adults or young married couples like a retreat or a conference. The Association would like to help with planning and promoting in any way we can.

Example: Five churches plan a retreat for 10 young couples.

13. Age Strategy

Some churches have an age strategy for what they want people to learn or experience and when.

- Middle school – help with local service projects
- High school – go on a mission trip in the US
- College – go on a mission trip to Puerto Rico, Jamaica or Honduras.
- Young Adults – lead a small group, teach a DNOW group, teach Sunday School, etc.

14. Tell your story

If your goal was for every Next Gen person to tell their salvation story to someone at least five times a year, how would you go about making those opportunities a reality?

Example: Pair up on a Wednesday night, tell your story in your small group, at our DNOW weekend, at camp, and on our mission trip. For mature people – perhaps share in a worship service.

15. Goals

Make a list of the skills, habits and character qualities you want to help people develop. How will you create a culture and pathway that helps this happen? Examples of goals might be:

- Read the Bible at home during the week
- Be able to share a few important things that stand out to them in a Bible passage
- Be in a weekly small group with friends
- Memorize 10 important scripture verses
- Be comfortable telling their personal story of faith
- Be able to explain the gospel and quote a few verses by memory
- Be generous and willing to help support their church with time and finances
- Have a servant heart
- Develop leadership abilities by taking small steps

16. A key person

When you survey people who have been Christians for a while and ask them, “What helped you the most to grow spiritually?” - the most common answer is “a person.” It usually wasn’t a service, a church, a pastor, or a class. It was usually a person who gave both **High Expectations and High Support** in the context of a friendly relationship.

High expectation: “Let’s see if you can learn to run a mile without stopping.”

High Support: “I will meet you three times a week and do it with you.”

17. Take baby steps and celebrate

Change doesn’t happen overnight. Quality comes first, which usually results in more people. What baby step would help our worship service get better? What small change would help our small group be better? Show appreciation and celebrate.

18. Why first, then how

Help people understand the “Why” of the small changes you are trying to make. Don’t just tell them, it should be part of your discussion, prayers and Bible study together.

19. Ongoing evaluation

Every week, every month, do some reflection by yourself and with your team. How could we do that better or differently next time? Change is painful, but it is worth it.