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# Thriving in the First Five Years of Church

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## The Role of the Pastor

The senior pastor is often the most influential person in shaping the role and attitude of the church toward children. The importance of nurturing faith in young children must be conveyed and modeled by the pastor. New, expensive programs aren't necessary; recognizing and promoting children is the key.

For example, the senior pastor can promote a family-oriented philosophy by including a story time, puppet skit, an object lesson, or a short reading during the adult service. Adults also enjoy these vignettes, and the illustrations can help them build Christian attitudes and principles.

## The Role of the Church

The role of the Church should begin before a child is conceived. Young married couples need guidance in and exposure to effective parenting methods. This will help them understand the importance of establishing a family unit built on godly principles.

Include child development topics in the young marrieds classes.

Encourage young couples to become involved with children's programs—especially at the birth to age five levels. Pastors, prospective parents, and children's workers will benefit from



elective Sunday School classes and seminars that teach the importance of becoming involved with their children's spiritual experiences—especially during the first five years of life.

Pastors can encourage parents to model godly principles before their children. The parents in your congregation need to be encouraged to become involved in ministry through family proj-

ects, such as volunteering in a soup kitchen, participating in church clean-up days, providing food for a family, and visiting the elderly or shut-ins. These family activities make lasting impressions on children. Fun family outings are also essential for children to develop and build relationships.

## Promote Play

Other ways the church can ensure children will thrive in their formative years are through education and curriculum, attending to the physical environment of children, and promoting play. Play is important in the life of every child. When play is used as a strategy for providing learning experiences, children can learn organizational skills, develop language skills, and learn to communicate with others.

## Select Appropriate Curriculum

Children are not passive receivers of knowledge; they are active participants in their learning. It is important that curriculum presents God's principles in ways that keep children motivated and eager to learn. A child must be actively involved in learning. When children are primarily expected to sit and listen,

