



## **What happens when a student is grounded from youth group?**

Maybe you've gotten that late afternoon text message before, just a few hours before your midweek program is ready to get started:

*Can't come to youth group the next two weeks.  
Got in trouble at school and now I'm grounded.*

On the surface, this just *seems* wrong. It *seems* like bad parenting. Your kid makes bad choices and the punishment is to keep them away from the positive Biblical teachings of church?

After all, it's our job to help students make better choices and lead better lives. How can keeping students away from an environment like that possible help the situation?

And if I'm honest, the first time I got that message I was a numbers-centric youth minister with a small youth group and a spontaneously grounded kid might torpedo my attendance by as much as 15% for the next two weeks.

Then I became a parent and after that I became a parent to a teenager, and I started to understand things a little differently.

Today I've got a more nuanced view on those grounded students than I did ten years ago.

## Why would you ground your kid from church?

Unfortunately, it's not usually that simple. I remember being a teenager.

My social life was my entire life and my entire social circle was my youth group.

We met three times a week, and although I loved Jesus, my primary motivation for going was simply to be with my friends.

When you're grounded, that extra time with friends is usually the first thing to go, and for a parent it's an impossible situation - you can't effectively ground your kid and still let them hang out with their friends 2-3 times a week, even if it's at church.

It's a hollow and ineffective punishment if it doesn't sting.

Beyond that, there's the truth that parents often don't understand or experience the true value of your youth ministry.

Our emails and flyers and websites extol how fun the Nerf Wars are going to be, but don't emphasize the spiritual meat.

You already know that teenagers aren't the best at having meaningful conversations with their parents about "what we talked about at youth tonight."

Add that up, and a parent's view of your ministry might be that it's a lot of fun with a lot of friends. Stated that way, it's exactly the kind of thing you'd want to ground your teenager from.

Before getting too negative about parents, really consider their point of view.

Have they been shown the spiritual and moral value of your program?

Are the co-conspirators *also* a part of the youth group?

If mom sends him to youth group, does he then hang out more with the people he got in trouble with?

Is it possible that this is a one-week thing because the student needs to spend tonight working on an extra-credit assignment to make up for an abysmal grade?

Once you've taken a few minutes to be empathetic to the plight of a parent, it's time to start thinking about the student.

Even if you ultimately disagree with the parent, the truth is, it's their kid and you don't control how they parent.

What you can do is control how you minister to the student anyway.

A student isn't beyond your ministerial arm just because they're not at youth group, and the truth is that a student who's in some trouble provides a ripe opportunity for you to invest in their lives.

### **Send over an SMS-ready devotional.**

It's not difficult.

Figure out the Scripture part of what they'll be missing at youth group, and send a simple text that says:

*Bummer.*

*We're in Matthew chapter 8 tonight.*

*Since you've got extra time now, read over that a few times tonight and text me back to let me know what stands out to you.*

Later on, ask how you can pray for them.

### **Never speak poorly about a parent.**

Even if every part of you is inconsolably convinced that this is bad parenting, never let a whiff of that get to the student.

There is nothing good that can come from that, so don't do it.

**Instead, offer to help a tired parent out.**

You think kids take it hard when they get grounded?

Their parents might be taking it even harder.

Send a message to mom or dad and let them know that you're available.

You'd be shocked how many parents will take you up on it.

Word of advice here, if you meet with a student who's gotten into trouble, you'll want to be pretty businesslike.

Meeting them for donuts or disc golf probably feels like a reward, and that's kind of the wrong incentive.

But meeting just to talk, pray, and counsel?

That's cool, and it's an opportunity you will not want to miss.