

## JACK'S CORNER

**QUESTION:** My teenager does not like the youth group at our church and refuses to go. Should I force him, or let him skip?

**ANSWER: You may not like this answer.** Most of us adults attend the church of OUR choice. We have looked around, prayed, and chosen the place where we are nurtured, hopefully challenged, and believe we have something to give. That place may NOT be the place where our children experience those same things. Just as all adults don't like all churches, all teenagers won't like every youth group. Often, parents expect their children to "make it work" at a church their kids have not chosen. Few adults "make it work" at a church they don't like. Instead, most adult simply leave and go church shopping.

It is critical that teenagers find a church youth group where they can **connect, serve, and grow**. I believe your job is to help him find such a place, even if it is not at your present church. I assume you are spiritually mature enough to grow, serve and make new friends at any Bible-based Christian church. Your son may not have the spiritual maturity to adjust to your church. Some points to ponder:

1. **Talk openly and unthreateningly about why he doesn't like his youth group.** Often, it is because he has failed to connect with the kids there. Ask him to call a friend whom he has made a connection with and attend a couple events together. Make a commitment with him to try three events with a friend.
2. **Don't just sit back and let him not attend.** Worship service is not enough for a teenager to have the kind of spiritual growth he needs. Have some heart-to-heart talks about helping him find a youth group where he can connect, serve and grow (not just have fun). Insist that he find a place that he will attend. When he finds such a place, support him in his choice (assuming the place is biblically Christian).
3. **Try getting involved with the program.** Maybe it could use your help. Be part of the solution. Discuss this with your son. He might have some reservations about your involvement.
4. **Encourage him to try involvement in another aspect of the church.** (i.e. choir, helping with Sunday School, Nursery, etc.) These are good opportunities to serve and grow, but not for making the spiritual connections with peers that a teenager needs.
5. **Be willing to change churches for the sake of the spiritual life of your teenager.** This can be heart breaking. Parents have to evaluate their teenager's spiritual life and the possibilities for growth as they weigh this decision.
6. **There is no guarantee he will like the youth group just because YOU have chosen to attend a particular church.** Youth groups are all a little different. There are probably teens in your church who positively love

their youth group, just like there are probably adults who have left your church because they didn't like it.

Making the decision to change churches should not come without deep and fervent prayers, hours of heartfelt conversations with your teenager, and a solid commitment to find the right church for him. The best parenting means you will consider your son's spiritual growth as paramount.

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