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How to increase the small group connection at your church

by Steve Gladen

For many churches, your primary ministry field is within a few miles of your church. Now that digital cable television has arrived, you have a unique opportunity to promote your ministries, and amazingly, it can I have a lot of pastors come up to me and ask how connected the people in their church should be. If they have connected 10, 25, or 50 percent of their church members in small groups or Sunday schools, they wonder if that's good.

*“We just keep raising the bar and expecting God to do even more through”
our small groups.*

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There's no right answer to that question. The truth is, your congregation will only be as connected as you have been hoping for, praying for, and believing God for. If you've connected 10 percent of your church, dream of a day when you'll connect 25 percent. If you've connected 25 percent, dream of a day when you'll connect 50 percent. You should never be satisfied with how many people are connected within your church.

When I came on board at Saddleback 10 years ago, we had a dream. We wanted to have as many people in our small groups as we did in weekend worship. We wanted to connect 100 percent of our church members.

Now, for the last two to three years, we've actually had more people in small groups than in our weekend worship services. We had a high goal from the beginning – and now we've exceeded it! We just keep raising the bar and expecting God to do even more through our small groups at Saddleback.

Connecting your congregation like that starts with understanding your church members. Specifically, you need to understand the barriers that keep people from getting connected in small groups.

Childcare solutions

- Have each family get its own babysitter.
- Hire a babysitter at a house near where the group meets (childcare at one home while the small group meets at the other).
- Dedicate a room in the

You'll need to do your own informal research at your church, but some of the most common barriers that we've heard include:

- **Childcare issues:** People don't know what to do with their children while they are in a small group. This is by far the top excuse I hear when I'm trying to connect folks.
- **Fear of intimacy:** Opening up and being vulnerable in a small group is another common barrier, particularly in today's world which doesn't tend to put a premium on developing real community. Because of that, many in our churches have a fear of intimacy.
- **Lack of time:** You'll hear this one all the time as you start trying to move people into small groups. "I just don't have the time." We all have 168 hours in a week. The question is, how are we spending our time?
- **Lack of biblical literacy:** Many people are under the mistaken notion that they'll feel out of place in a small group if they don't have a good grasp on the Bible already.

each family contributing money for childcare costs).

- Rotate one member out of the small group each time to provide childcare.
- Have a family small group so the kids can be part of it.
- Ask high school students to provide childcare as part of their "ministry project."
- Trade childcare responsibilities with another group.

But, in the end, these are simply excuses. If you were going to hand someone two tickets to a World Series game, they'd figure out how to find childcare and they'd make the time to go to the game. While it's helpful to know what the barriers are to connecting your congregation, the most valuable way to overcome the barriers is through emphasizing the value of small groups. Let your congregation know that small groups are where they will find support and accountability. Let them know just how God will use those relationships to change their lives.

You do that and they'll find someone to watch their kids, they'll make a place in their schedule, and they'll take a risk and push past their fears of intimacy and lack of biblical knowledge.

And they'll get connected.



Steve Gladen has been on staff at [Saddleback Church](#) since 1998 and currently oversees 2,500 adult small groups at Saddleback. He has co-written several books including: [250 Big Ideas for Small Groups](#), [Building Healthy Small Groups in Your Church](#), and [Don't Lead Alone](#). ©Copyright 2002. Used by permission. All rights reserved.