

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Developing Children's Ministry



SESSION 10
Relational Leadership

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Relational Leadership

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Foundations of Relational Leadership

Communication and Organization in Leadership

Conflict

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- have a basic understanding of appropriate interactions with different staff members, especially the senior pastor.
- have a basic understanding of how to deal with conflict resolution.
- understand how to recruit and equip others for ministry, as well as fire those who are not fulfilling their obligations.

INTRODUCTION

All leadership relationships are important, beginning with our relationship with the senior pastor. A number of different factors influence the way relational leadership develops, including basic commitments to trust, respect, and appreciate the efforts of other leaders and workers. As with any relationship, being a part of leadership includes a complex process of communication and organization to develop a healthy team. Conflict may be inevitable, however leaders can identify the many ways conflict occurs, people respond, and responses surface to negotiate the conflict at hand.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP



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Mutual Trust

Every relationship relies on a foundation of mutual trust. In many churches, children's ministry incorporates the largest number of volunteer leaders and workers in ministry. Trust remains the life's blood of a team dedicated to working with children and families. Often, the senior pastor and other staff ministers (where available) model this trust in their relationship with each other and among volunteer leaders and workers. When pastors can trust children's leaders, they feel free to concentrate on their own role without worrying over having the appropriate support needed to insure a vital and vibrant ministry. When a pastor and leadership team work in the midst of ongoing strife, the pastor may find it difficult to encourage the congregation to support children's ministry. Pastors need to feel confident that leaders represent the ministry well, both to children and parents. Similarly leadership must be able to trust pastoral leadership to freely develop innovative ministry that is also consistent with the vision of the church. When trust fails, leaders find themselves isolated, unable to recruit the needed help to sustain a ministry, and unwilling to make the needed changes that keep ministry fresh and vibrant.

"Trust is earned, not given." This statement reveals a key principle: trust occurs through a consistent pattern of relating to people and achieving set goals of ministry. Leaders know that their actions often establish the baseline for trust. When leaders conduct themselves consistently, set standards for themselves equal to what they expect of others, and follow through on tasks, people trust them. Consistency may not always mean success; leaders will fail at times both with team goals and personal tasks. However, team members will forgive these moments if leaders remain open, honest, and consistent in their behavior and demeanor during these moments. Trusting members will see short-term failures as opportunities to learn from their efforts and improve their ministries. A trusting ministry emerges when leaders are willing to take risks, take responsibility, and work against adversity and toward success.

Mutual Respect

Mutual respect grows out of mutual trust. One of the challenges of children's ministry occurs when leaders feel disrespected. In some settings, people perceive children's ministry as a sub-ministry to other pastoral roles and congregational emphases. Some adults indulge these misconceptions concerning the gifts, skills,

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and knowledge necessary for children's leadership. In western contexts, many people see the ministry as a form of "glorified daycare," with leaders serving primarily as activities directors. Many nationally known pastors and theorists, including George Barna and Bill Hybels, admit their difficulty in accepting the importance of children's ministry early in their careers.

Respect includes a clear understanding of each one's role in the ministry. Respect occurs when volunteer leaders and workers know their assignments in ministry and their authority within those assignments, and possess the means to implement both. However, respect is earned as children's leaders serve as advocates as well as volunteers in children's ministry. When children, under the direction of leadership, serve local congregations, members often respond with admiration and respect. Leaders within the ministry must model this respect for each other and others in the ministry and for the role children might play. Respect includes an appreciation for the time, talent, and resources many workers provide.

Mutual Appreciation

Leaders often learn that mutual appreciation occurs out of the natural overflow of mutual trust and mutual respect. Volunteers and caring families know the joyful experience when a pastor or key leader shows appreciation for their ministry both privately and publicly. Appreciation flows out of the congregation both for the care of children as well as the ministry of children to the rest of the church. Leaders need to verbally acknowledge the people who make children's ministry possible through their skillful and dedicated work for the kingdom. Leadership entails the dual ministry of acknowledgment and encouragement, acknowledging the small efforts people give to the ministry, while also encouraging them to continue.

Appreciation flows not only from leaders to workers but also to other leaders. Pastors need the same level of appreciation. Unfortunately, most leaders approach pastors out of a sense of need or to accomplish a specific task. Appreciation needs to be expressed for those working for the sake of the church at large as well as those within children's ministry.

COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATION IN LEADERSHIP



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One way to insure trust, respect, and appreciation occurs through clear communication and organization. Communication is crucial for leadership teams to avoid redundant work, incomplete projects, and misinterpreting roles and responsibilities. Leaders need to communicate through at multiple levels, incorporating both verbal and written forms. However, the heart of communication in a relational leadership model must include the ability to communicate one-on-one and in small-group settings with leaders and workers. Many principles concerning interpersonal communication can be extended to print media once leaders grasp the concepts. Sound communication principles include the following.

First, practice the art of listening: Many assume that being a good listener is a natural skill. For instance, there are speech classes, but not listening classes. The fallacy of this thinking is obvious when we realize the difficult training professional counselors go through just to listen to other peoples' problems. When one is a good listener, people are apt to talk to him or her. When people truly listen, they communicate that they care enough to get it right. Leaders who repeat back what they have heard alert speakers that they are really heard, and allow opportunities to clarify misunderstandings.

Second, maintain a sense of sensitivity: Leaders must take the time to become aware of the person to whom they are speaking. In other words, be sensitive to their needs during the conversation. Do they need a joke? Do they need an acknowledgement of painful understanding? Is it best to probe for more information or simply listen? Sensitivity requires paying attention to indirect, often non-verbal, cues as well as spoken words: tone of voice, facial expressions, the unspoken words in their eyes. Cultural sensitivity must play into the situation, particularly in global settings. Different cultures express different levels of eye contact, physical proximity, phraseology, and body gestures and postures. Leaders must ask for clarifications in cultural contexts, in order to respond sensitively. When we take the time to "hear" all of the levels of communication, we meet people where they are. Sensitivity also includes a sense of timing and timeliness in conversations. Leaders seek appropriate times for any conversation, working hard to find those critical moments and use them.

Third, remember clarity is king: Leaders must work at being clear in what they say and hear. Misunderstanding can drain a team's energy, waste valuable time, and cause real hurt. Leaders should repeat key ideas and proactively seek feedback to insure clarity. Even writing ideas or statements so they can read helps ensure accuracy of communication.


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Finally, express complete honesty: Leaders must live above reproach and not avoid issues. People should not have to guess if you are giving the complete story. Be honest in every circumstance.

Organizing Team Ministry

As noted previously, children's ministry often involves more adults than other ministries. How we recruit and organize ministry teams may be as important as communication. There are five qualities present in healthy children's ministry teams:

- Christlikeness
- Competence
- Character
- Child-focus
- Symmetry

The Bible is quite clear about the responsibility involved in teaching and ministering to the youngest believers: "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

When we create a team to minister to children, we must first think about the kind of persons who can be trusted with kids. Children are vulnerable. Scripture tells us we are also endangering the spiritual welfare of the adults we select if they are not ready for the responsibility of working with children. The recruiting of volunteers is not a job to be taken lightly! We are doing more than "filling holes" in our programs. We are placing people into positions in which they will spiritually form others and be formed themselves as they serve. Every team member is precious and truly valuable.

The first requirement for service is showing *Christlikeness*. All Christians are on the journey toward this goal. None of us have arrived. Those we recruit to serve children must be good models of Christ and His love. We cannot afford to assume that because a person associates with the church, Christlikeness is a priority. The volunteer's relationship with Christ should be vibrant and growing. Our volunteers should be able to express their Christian commitment in age-appropriate ways.

Second, volunteers should show evidence of *competence*. They should possess or be willing to acquire the basic skills and gifts to perform their tasks well. A competent teacher is teachable. Skills don't have to be fully formed, but teachers


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should be open to learning how to teach better. Caregivers should be open to learning how to care better. Craft assistants should be open to learning new crafts. Whatever the job, the volunteer must have basic skills and a commitment to improving them for the sake of their ministry in the name of Christ.

Third, we need people with strong character. Good traits are loyalty, perseverance, kindness, and self-control. These traits are important models for children and team members who will commit to the goals of the ministry. Character counts.

Fourth, the ability to be *child-focused* is essential. We need people who love kids and are willing to sacrifice their personal interests for the children. Volunteers will sometimes miss out on adult experiences. They must be focused enough on children that they receive as much from volunteering as they give. People who work with kids should genuinely appreciate kids, understand kids, and have a heart for kids.

Fifth, teams share a sense of symmetry, a trait hard to describe, but one easy to sense. When a team possesses symmetry, they share value and purposefulness in working together. Teams require many skills and different talents to function effectively. It is not wise to fill a team with people who are all alike. Look for people who make the existing team better, more energized, and more effective. That's symmetry based the harmonious interplay of differing abilities toward a shared goal. Christian service should bring out the best in each of us as we function as one body with one goal: to carry out the mission of Christ.

Getting Organized for Teamwork

Once a ministry possesses a number of people with varied skills but common purpose, they still need organization to function effectively as a team. To insure a positive experience, there are several strategies that provide a stronger sense of organization, making the team more efficient (less time and effort wasted) and more effective (creating a stronger impact in the ministry). The strategies include:

1. Provide written (even if brief) ministry descriptions for every team member. Everyone functions better when the expectations are clear and reasonable. A ministry description should include:
 - Task responsibility (Don't forget training obligations and specific expectations for preparation as well as performance.)
 - Qualifications
 - Relationship definitions (Who will supervise, troubleshoot, and assist in making the individual successful in this job?)


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Limit the job description; be as brief as possible. When you give the description to a new team member, go over it together.

2. Plan for periodic opportunities for feedback and review. Reviews do more than evaluate how team members succeed in their responsibilities and where they need help. Reviews should include a review of the job description and resources the ministry might also provide for each team member. Reviews give members the opportunity to affirm volunteers and address any areas of concern on a regular basis, rather than responding during a crisis. Reviews allow members opportunities to determine whether to continue or to seek new opportunities for service.

Reviews should always focus on celebration and not serve as a threatening experience. On a team, everyone succeeds or fails together. For new team members, the reviews should be more frequent to assist members if questions occur. After the first year of service, celebrate the volunteer's anniversary with an annual review lunch.

3. Commit to regular team meetings and frequent communication. Since communication or a lack of communication can either make or break a ministry team, plan regular team meetings and frequent opportunities to communicate. Most volunteer staffs find that quarterly meetings help to keep everyone on the same page. This is a good opportunity to distribute curriculum for the coming quarter, address any important issues that have arisen, provide teacher training, plan for upcoming events, share dreams and ideas, and check to make sure you are on track with the mission and vision of the church.

Depending on the size of your group and the amount of activity in your church, consider printing a monthly calendar, a weekly news update, or an annual scrapbook to help volunteers feel connected.

Ready, Set, Go!

When Jesus recruited His disciples, He said, "Come follow me," and the disciples left everything and followed Him. Modern disciples seem to need a little more wooing! After creating ministry descriptions, review plan, and communication schedule, we will need to find the precise people who are called to become team members. There are some "rules of recruitment" that have been tested and proven in the past.

Don't advertise a job; share a vision. Be creative. Use recruiting presentations or videos to establish the need for passionate children's workers. Let the children help you demonstrate how rewarding it is to be part of their spiritual development.

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Tell their stories and their families' stories. Tell your own story of falling in love with children's ministry. Tell the story of how children's ministry fits your church's overall ministry plan. People want to become part of a ministry that matters.

Let people know this is not an indefinite commitment. Break down the commitment into manageable chunks. For some congregations, a three-month commitment is a long one. For others, ask people to give one year at a time. Be clear that volunteers are indeed joining a team, and they will not be alone to figure out what to do and how to do it. You make the commitment to them first, and they may be more willing to commit to you.

Be selective; demonstrate that working with children is an honor and not a chore through a screening process in which you find out a candidate's passions and talents and fit those to an open opportunity. This can be done through interview or through an application process. Let candidates know they will be screened, using the criteria required by your church. Many churches require background checks to reduce the risk of child endangerment. *Safe Kids* from Beacon Hill Press will provide information about safety and legal issues.

Be Spirit-sensitive; don't ask for an immediate commitment. Ask candidates who have passed your screening process to meet with you to answer any questions they might have. Ask them to spend at least a week praying about their commitment, and allow them a trial period that fits with your review schedule. For many new volunteers, a period of mentoring with an experienced team member helps them to feel more comfortable when they begin, while others will be comfortable from the first day based on previous experiences. If an individual decides to decline the opportunity to serve, accept their answer without judgment. You may wish to ask for their permission to contact them at a later time or for another program. Keep the following process alive throughout the ministry: evaluate your needs, plan, recruit, and train.

Pray continually. Jesus told His disciples when they were beginning in ministry, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38, emphasis added).

Adhering to these basic communication and organization principles insures a strong, relationally-oriented leadership. Nevertheless, we cannot always insure harmonious relationships; ultimately leaders must resolve conflict as a part of the normal process of ministry.

CONFLICT



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Conflict may prove inevitable in leadership. Conflict does not always signify someone has failed in relational leadership. The challenge remains to understand the nature of the conflict, the various styles employed in dealing with conflict, and basic strategies for conflict resolution.

The Nature of Conflict

Conflict surfaces as a part of creativity, during times of change, and in the normal flow of moments of miscommunication within relationships, and sometimes as a result of a struggle for power in directing a ministry. When ministries find themselves in flux, facing positive as well as negative changes, people tend to react in different ways to the situation. Simple miscommunication, without the opportunity for clarification, might result in conflict. Sometimes the issue rests more in the personalities of the people and how they respond to situations. A task-oriented leader may desire decisions be settled in the most effective and efficient way, while relationally-oriented leaders may reach decisions based on the number of people affected by the change. Both forms of leadership are important; however, when these two leaders begin to seek a resolution, conflict may occur based on their assumptions about what is best.

Some people enter into conflict with a lack of sensitivity. Psychologist Eric Berne noted that we tend to respond to people out of three basic interpersonal orientations. At times, we are “parental” in our responses, offering directives like a parent to a child, that subtly communicate we are parenting the other person. Children’s leaders often use this type of response with children, particularly when they are misbehaving.

At other times, we respond to people in adult-to-adult conversation. This includes the typical give and take of mutual respect and problem solving. Still other times, we in a childlike or playful fashion. Adults who participate in games often recognize times when their childlike nature surfaces, joking and fun-loving in nature. Berne argues that conflict occurs when we offer one form of communication to someone (say a person who playfully invites someone to a meeting) but receive an unexpected response (say another leader who “scolds” the host for not taking the meeting seriously). A volunteer may even ask for a “parental” response of specific directions, yet remain confused if the leader treats the session as an adult-to-adult, problem solving session. Our insensitivity to communication expectations may create conflict because the “tone” of the conversation does not match the expectations, even if the content of the message is valid.

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Leaders will find it impossible to avoid conflict. Yet, conflict can be important as a part of creative change. Conflict may bear negative consequences if avoided.

Styles of Conflict

Not every person responds to conflict in the same way. As noted in an earlier lesson, some people merely try to push conflict aside, preferring to discuss a problem rather than resolve relational strife. Other people seek to resolve issues “through” the conflict, often aggressively disagreeing but also willing to set aside differences once a decision is made. One way to understand conflict surfaces around the use of different animals to describe different styles of responding to conflict: Tortoise, Shark, Teddy Bear, Fox, and Owl. Each animal reflects a basic orientation of how to deal with conflict. Based on two major tendencies, the animals define five orientations:

Tortoise (avoids/withdraws): The tortoise will try to avoid conflict situations. Leaders may discover the tortoises taking different routes through the church just to avoid whomever they are in conflict with. The tortoise tends to withdraw from situations where otherwise he or she is actively involved. The tortoise sees this withdrawal as a form of protection, dreading interpersonal strife and requiring space and time to resolve issues rather than in the moment.

Shark (competes/forces): The shark is a predator. Sharks attempt to intimidate, overpower, and out-argue the adversary. Sharks employ position, friendships, subterfuge, or whatever strategies are at their disposal to prove their point and get their way. Sharks are out to win at any price.

Teddy Bear (accommodates/smoothes): Teddy bears love to be loved. The Teddy Bear will do whatever it takes to have peace. They will bend, give in to the other person, and even take the blame for situations that are not their fault in order to smooth things over and be lovable.

Fox (compromises): The wily fox always attempts to compromise. Foxes willingly give up certain aspects of their position as long as the other person is also willing to do the same. Foxes will meet people in the middle in order to negotiate a peace acceptable to all parties.

Owl (collaborates/problem-solves): Owls are known for their wisdom. The owl recognizes there may be a solution that is better than a compromise. The owl will talk with individuals who have expert knowledge surrounding the conflict and attempt to find workable solutions to the problems that are better than first imagined.


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Obviously, some styles of conflict resolution appear better than others, but rarely will everyone respond equally. Different cultures validate certain styles, life experiences may shape a personal style, or context may dictate a response (when protecting children for instance). Leaders need to recognize their own style and understand how to respond to different styles without reacting personally by rejecting the person. Understanding styles does not resolve the conflict but it helps to understand differing reactions in the midst of the conflict. There are strategies to help people push past individual styles, but ignoring the styles rarely helps.

Resolving Conflict

While there may be no simple formula in resolving differences, we can exercise certain principles that help to minimize the conflict and resolve differences. First, it helps to focus on the issues and not personal investments, but we cannot ignore people's feelings and their perceptions. One way to help people check perceptions and feelings is to use a simple approach:

“When you _____ (describe a behavior), I feel _____
(describe your feelings).”

When people start by describing behaviors they reveal their perceptions concerning a problem. This describing process allows people to put their perceptions of an issue out in the open. It allows people to discuss openly how they see an issue and clarify what they believe to be important concerning the issue. People often find themselves surprised by the differing interpretations of the issue and appreciate the opportunity to clarify their understanding.

Allowing people to express their own emotions also gives people a chance to both express and acknowledge the consequences. Many times, people want leaders to respond to their feelings as a part of their personhood. They may be less interested in a resolution than acknowledgement of their personal investment in what is happening. We cannot be held hostage by one person's feelings; however, we cannot ignore the relational issues at hand either. Much like perceptions, people may read and interpret emotions differently, so giving voice to feelings often surprises other members in the conflict.

Such an approach avoids several problems, including blaming the opponent by ascribing behavior and motivation. When someone accuses another of both action and intent (“you want to control this ministry because you are selfish”), people feel defensive and leaders have little space to clarify and resolve the conflict. Scripture offers an approach to conflict resolution by first approaching a brother or sister privately and, if not reconciled, returning with witnesses. The witnesses should also try to insure a proper meeting, not merely join a personal attack. Remember that the goal should be reconciliation, not punishment or retribution.


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Once people have had a chance to both describe the issues in their own terms and express their feelings, the resolution may come as simply as saying, "I would prefer _____ (express a preferred future)." No one can express the best outcome for everyone. Still, people should be able to find several options that they can discuss openly and ultimately resolve the conflict. Sometimes, the simplest answer is having the ones in conflict work in different aspects of the ministry, so that they can respect each other's abilities while avoiding interpersonal strife. When differences involve multiple parties, the process can be tedious, but leaders should remember that the goal is to solve the actual problem while also reconciling the people involved. Failure to resolve the problem only increases tension for the future. Failure to reconcile the relationships inevitably brings additional problems to the foreground, often consuming leaders and crippling the ministry. When people are able to express both their understanding of the underlying issues and their feelings, real reconciliation can occur.

Redirecting a Team Member

Even with organization, structure, and screening, we may need to redirect a team member to another area of ministry or remove them from children's ministry as a last resort. Most often, the decision will be mutual, one that can be handled in the context of periodic reviews. However, sometimes an incident will require immediate action that cannot be avoided.

Clarity is our best tool. Spell out even those things we think appear obvious. Children's safety must come first. No physical punishment is ever acceptable. Ungodly behavior or refusal to engage in conflict management should result in immediate termination. Whatever boundaries and principles guide the ministry, state them clearly. If these things occur in either a volunteer or a paid position, you must comply with both Christian ethical principles and legal obligations. These include:

1. Document problem areas particularly with paid staff. Reviews should include a written record. In addition, make a note of any problems that arise between reviews. This process will help volunteers and workers understand they are not being discriminated against; instead, there is a written record of expectations and attempts to correct the failures.
2. Our approach should be caring and sensitive, even if the person was unkind to members or children. Be kind and attempt to help the person discover a more suitable area of service in consultation with other staff members. Note appreciation of their strengths and affirm their value to another setting.



3. If we are actually terminating employment due to a lack of funds, offer your networking assistance to help the people find new jobs. If possible, negotiate a way to extend any benefits until they can find new employment. If appropriate, provide recommendations or support that will help them during this time of transition.

Relational leaders require a commitment to community, both by volunteers and for the sake of children. Clear communication and organization assists ministry. However, conflict is inevitable even if due to more positive factors. Sound relational leaders model respect, trust, and admiration in the way they recruit, organize, and solve conflict in their ministry.

APPLICATION



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1. Talk with volunteers in the ministry and ask them for the traits they see in good leadership.
2. Interview a leader in the ministry about a time when he or she had to deal with conflict. What were some key issues and strategies used to resolve the conflict?
3. Review to see if the ministry uses ministry descriptions or team meetings. Why or why not?

EXAM



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1. Leadership requires:
 - A. Mutual obedience.
 - B. Mutual trust.
 - C. Mutual commitment.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.

2. When children's leaders are disrespected:
 - A. Their role is challenged.
 - B. They have to force people to follow.
 - C. Ministry can become glorified daycare.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.

3. Leaders can demonstrate appreciation through:
 - A. Acknowledging even the small efforts of workers.
 - B. Focusing only on private expressions to avoid public attention.
 - C. Encouraging volunteers to continue in their ministry.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.

4. Usually pastoral leaders do not need clear lines of communication since they trust people.
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. The first priority in any good communication is learning to listen.
 - A. True
 - B. False

6. Real communication includes:
 - A. Making sure you get it right the first time so you do not have to repeat back what the person said.
 - B. Clear wording so that non-verbal issues are not a concern.
 - C. Complete honesty.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.



7. A competent leader or worker has mastered the assignment so they do not require further teaching.
 - A. True
 - B. False

8. Each worker should have a ministry description.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. Once a worker has a ministry description, he or she does not need regular feedback.
 - A. True
 - B. False

10. Volunteers often respond to conflict quite differently and need direct guidance to move forward.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What traits (trust, respect, admiration) are most challenging when it comes to leadership?
2. When it comes to organizing for ministry, what are the greatest challenges in our local context?
3. What are some key obstacles to recruiting in children's ministry?
4. Why is it important to recognize the different styles of conflict in ministry—how might they be a help or hindrance in resolving conflict?

Review your answers with your mentor, then respond to the following:

How many responses focus on supporting children (particularly in areas where they are not yet fully self-reliant), and how many answers focus on empowering children?

Which of these answers support the goal of living Christlike relationships? Why?

What do we need to add to our list to make our approach more comprehensive, more faithful? Which do we need to incorporate into the role of the children's leader as one who both supports and empowers Christlike relationships with children?