IT'S JUST A PHASE
SO DON'T MISS IT

WHY EVERY LIFE STAGE OF A KID MATTERS
AND AT LEAST 15 THINGS YOUR CHURCH SHOULD DO ABOUT IT

FREE SAMPLER

REGGIE JOINER & KRISTEN IVY
We hope you enjoy this complimentary sample of the leader edition of 
It’s Just a Phase—So Don’t Miss It, by Reggie Joiner and Kristen Ivy.

This sample contains the phase profiles and first section, information 
about the authors and collaborators, information about additional Phase 
resources, and the complete table of contents.

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IT'S JUST A PHASE
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WHY EVERY LIFE STAGE OF A KID MATTERS
AND AT LEAST 13 THINGS YOUR CHURCH
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REGGIE JOINER & KRISTEN IVY

ORANGE BOOKS
IT’S JUST A PHASE, SO DON’T MISS IT:
WHY EVERY LIFE STAGE OF A KID MATTERS,
AND AT LEAST 13 THINGS YOUR CHURCH SHOULD DO ABOUT IT.

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FROM REGGIE JOINER:

To my mother, Dee.

For believing in me at every phase and seeing in me what no one else sees.

To my Aunt Geneva (Nennie) Bray.

For raising my mom and proving to me that God is real. Your lifetime of prayers impacted me in more ways than I will ever know, and the food around here hasn’t tasted nearly as good since you left.

FROM KRISTEN IVY

To my mother, Cindy.

For raising me through every phase—some of which tested both of us—and for sharing with me both your faith in God and your love of children.

To my Grandma Street.

For leaving a legacy of learning and love in each your four children, seven grandchildren and 13+ great-grandchildren. We all look forward to the day we will see you again.
One thing that robs kids of their childhood is the phrase, “I can’t wait until . . .” In a culture where everybody wants to hurry through to what is next, *It’s Just a Phase* presses pause and reminds leaders to pay attention to what’s critical in every stage so kids will know they matter.

**CAZ MCCASLIN**  
PRESIDENT & FOUNDER, UPWARD SPORTS

This is a crash course in child development that could radically change the way the church relates to kids and teenagers. Kristen Ivy, Reggie Joiner, and the Orange team have once again done the hard research and work to make it easier for the rest of us.

**SHERRY SURRATT**  
CEO, MOPS INTERNATIONAL

If you are a youth leader, you need to study both Scripture and your students. Ivy and Joiner have given us an amazing tool to transfer sound theology to the hearts of the next generation, one phase at a time.

**KARA POWELL**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FULLER YOUTH INSTITUTE
ENDORSEMENTS

The first step in reaching the next generation is building a team that places high value on the next generation. “It’s Just A Phase” is one of the best resources to keep that team on the same page fighting for the hearts of kids and teenagers. Every staff should make this required reading.

MARK BATTERSON
NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLING AUTHOR
LEAD PASTOR, NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

Parents and church leaders both usually overestimate the time they have and underestimate their influence. You will love how this book helps you, as a leader or a parent, leverage both time and influence at every stage of the adventure.

CAREY NIEUWHOF
LEAD PASTOR, CONNEXUS
# Table of Contents

**Phase Profiles** .................................................................................................................. pg. 7

## Every Phase Has Significant Relationships to Influence

1. **Keep Staff on the Same Page**
   - pg. 42

2. **Influence Whoever Has the Influence**
   - pg. 48

3. **Reactivate Parents Every Year**
   - pg. 56

4. **Inspire Leaders to Show Up**
   - pg. 64

## Every Phase Has Present Realities You Need to Understand

5. **Know Who They Are Now**
   - pg. 74

6. **Read Their Mind**
   - pg. 84

7. **Discover Their World**
   - pg. 94

8. **Interpret Their Motives**
   - pg. 108

(WE DON’T BELIEVE IN LUCK, WE BELIEVE IN JESUS)

## Every Phase Has Distinctive Opportunities You Need to Leverage

9. **Treat Every Kid the Same**
   - pg. 132

10. **Play to Your Audience**
    - pg. 148

11. **Lead Like Love Matters**
    - pg. 166

12. **Recycle What’s Most Important**
    - pg. 180

13. **Celebrate the Big Moments**
    - pg. 208

**Closing** ............................................................................................................................. pg. 222
PHASE

A TIMEFRAME

IN KID’S LIFE WHEN YOU CAN

LEVERAGE DISTINCTIVE OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE

THEIR FUTURE.
The average educator will spend over 5,000 hours studying child development before they try to teach a class. That’s a lot of homework.

A typical pediatrician will spend ten years and nearly half a million dollars so they can practice medicine with children. That’s a big investment.

The manufacturer of the top-selling toy, Barbie, will spend an estimated $600,000,000 a year to win the heart of a typical eight-year old girl. That’s a lot of ads.

The point is sometimes it takes a lot of time, effort, and investment if you want to have influence with kids.

It’s true for . . .
teachers who want to help kids learn.
doctors who want to help kids heal.
toy makers who want to help kids play.

And it’s also true for any church that wants to help kids grow in their relationship with God.

You have to make an ongoing investment learning about kids if you hope to have consistent influence with kids.
That’s why “It’s Just a Phase” is not just this one book. These pages are not designed to be everything you need or want to know. This is not intended to be a final authoritative resource, but actually just the beginning of a continuing conversation.

This project includes hundreds of hours of research and interviews. We’ve met with over a dozen licensed professional counselors, surveyed 250 state teachers of the year, dialogued with hundreds of age group ministry staff, and collaborated with 13 national leaders and authors with countless hours of combined experience working with age-group ministries.

The result? A myriad of resources, including a series of short guides for parents and small group leaders, digital training tools, video elements, and graphic summaries.

“It’s Just a Phase” is not the effort of one or two people, but over 50 discussing and debating for over 30 months reading more than a hundred books and periodicals to learn everything they can about how kids learn and develop.
The goal is to summarize and simplify an overwhelming amount of research related to child development so the average leader and parent can understand kids better.

A parent has 936 weeks between a child’s birth and graduation. We don’t want you to miss what’s happening during the critical phases of growing up.

A PHASE IS DEFINED AS A TIME FRAME IN A KID’S LIFE WHEN YOU CAN LEVERAGE DISTINCTIVE OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE THEIR FUTURE.
And since the church is strategically positioned to influence those who influence kids, this book targets those who lead and work with kids and teenagers.

When it comes to children and youth ministries, a host of churches admit that too often . . .
Parents just don’t get what the church is trying to do.
Staff don’t get each other.
Volunteers don’t get their role.
And too many kids get lost in transitions.

But when churches become intentional about understanding and leveraging what is actually happening in the stages of a kid’s life, it changes how they . . .
Partner with families at pivotal transitions.
Teach comprehensively from preschool through college.
Train leaders how to work with specific age groups.
Improve dialogue and cooperation between ministries.
Resource parents to interact with kids in the home.
At the heart of this initiative is one primary concern.

Too many kids grow up and miss experiencing God’s unconditional love and forgiveness.

Some miss it even though they grow up inside the church. Others miss it because they grow up outside the church. But we think many miss it because we missed something.

Maybe we missed . . .

**EMBRACING** them physically as toddlers when they were yearning to know they were safe and loved.

**ENGAGING** their imagination as second graders so they could discover how God’s story intersected with their story.

**AFFIRMING** their worth as they transitioned through puberty and middle school toward increasingly challenging questions.

**MOBILIZING** them to serve in high school, so they walked away never experiencing what God can do through them.

The point is that we can’t afford to miss it.
EVERY PHASE IS CRUCIAL.

Every phase has its own

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS</th>
<th>PRESENT REALITIES</th>
<th>DISTINCTIVE OPPORTUNITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

So we have to pay attention.
We have to do our homework.
We have to show up consistently.
We have to rally the church to know that kids matter at every phase.

The “Phase Profiles” on the following pages are designed to remind parents why every phase matters and to highlight at least 13 things leaders like you can do about it.
ZERO TO ONE

THE PHASE WHEN AND ONE MESMERIZING BABY CONVINCES YOU, “I NEED YOU NOW.”

NOBODY SLEEPS, EVERYBODY SMELLS,
THERE IS NOTHING LIKE SLEEP DEPRIVATION IN THE HOME OF NEW PARENTS.

Maybe that’s why every book on babies seems to be primarily dedicated to keeping them happy (stop the crying, please!) or helping them sleep longer (so parents can sleep longer). Sleep is the most prized commodity of parents at this phase. In fact, if you’re the stop-by-the-home-of-new-parents type just remember this: a sleeping baby is your cue not to stay.

IF YOU WONDER WHY EVERYBODY SMELLS, CONSIDER THIS;

When faced with the choice between sleep or a shower, there are days (no one’s counting how many) when cleanliness doesn’t win out. That’s not to mention the dirty diapers or spit-up. The smells aren’t all bad though. Just watch how long it takes grandma to lean over and sniff a new baby the first time she meets him.

THE GREATEST CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS PHASE BY FAR IS JUST HOW MUCH A BABY NEEDS YOU.

They need you more desperately, more consistently, and more frequently than at any other stage of life. They need you to feed them. They need you to clean up their messes. They need you to help them get to sleep. They need you to comfort them. They need you to smile at them, entertain them, and engage them. They’re completely dependent on you in a way they never will be again. There is remarkable potential in the life of a new baby. And although the days are long, and the task can feel demanding, only one thing matters most at this phase—you show up.
One & Two

The Phase When

And One Eager Toddler

Will Insist,

"I Can Do It."

Nobody's On Time,

Everything's A Mess,
Expect families to be late during this phase.
Maybe a parent had to wait for their toddler to “do it myself” (just try and stop them). Maybe someone impressively filled a clean diaper just as everyone was ready to get into the car. Or maybe someone slept late for the first time all week and everyone took advantage. This phase is destined to make even the most punctual adult miss the mark occasionally.

You can also look forward to a few fashion statements.
You may notice mismatched outfits, magic marker tattoos, sticker collages, and other various states of creative expression. In this phase, parents and leaders will learn to choose not only their battles, but also which messes will just have to be tolerated (or enjoyed, depending on your personality).

One of the greatest tensions of this phase can be summed up in the phrase “I can do it.” Some toddlers insist more strongly than others. Some throw tantrums with greater theatrics if you try to help. This is when the struggle for independence begins to kick in. You feel it the first time they try to feed themselves and dump applesauce down the front of their shirt. In this quest for independence, three things are true: They will make mistakes. They will move too slowly. There will be a mess. Remember, they are not only learning new skills, they are also developing the confidence they need in order to move on to the next phase.

884 weeks and counting . . .
THREE & FOUR

THE PHASE WHEN ANYTHING CAN BE IMAGINED,

AND ONE CURIOUS PRESCHOOLER EVERYTHING CAN BE A GAME,

WANTS TO KNOW, “WHY?”
IN THIS PHASE, THERE IS NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN IMAGINATION AND REALITY.
They might have imaginary friends or become self-proclaimed princesses, pirates, or superheroes. You might walk into a room to discover it's really a train station, a castle, an exotic island, or all three. While that's delightful at times, the imaginary may also turn scary. Fear may set in when at any given moment a monster can show up in the hallway, a snake can be under the bed, or a dragon can walk through the living room.

ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT THIS AGE IS EVERYTHING CAN BE A GAME.
You can easily get them excited about cleaning up their room if you just turn it into a game. You can make learning irresistible when you take the time to make it fun. When you’re having fun, they’ll have fun with you. And there may simply be nothing more entertaining than the spontaneous laughter of a three-year-old.

THEIR NEWFOUND CURIOSITY MAY BECOME A LITTLE EXHAUSTING.
Spending time with this phase may seem like a visit to your therapist or an investigative reporter: “Why?” “Why?” “Why?” But when a four-year-old asks why, they aren’t looking for a deep philosophical answer. They just want to know how things are happening. When they ask why the second and third times, they aren’t doubting the truth of your answer. They’re just looking for more of the wonderful knowledge they know you must have as an adult person.

780 WEEKS AND COUNTING . . .
Kindergarten & First

The phase when life becomes a stage where your kid shouts, "Look at me."

Unfiltered words make you laugh, homework makes you cry.
THIS PHASE IS FULL OF PERSONALITY AND MEMORABLE STATEMENTS.
By this age, a child can talk in sentences . . . and long run-on sentences, paragraphs, and wandering monologues. Sometimes it may seem as if the only goal for conversation is to Just-Keep-Talking. You will be amazed and entertained by all the profound and uncensored things they say. “I’m half Irish and half human.” “How did you get the wrinkles out of your hair?” “When I grow up, I’m going to have bracelets on my teeth.” “You’re talking so much I can’t hear you.”

AMID ALL THIS DELIGHTFUL EXCHANGE, THERE IS ONE MAJOR CULTURAL SHIFT—SCHOOL.
This means less time for play, more early morning alarm clocks, and a higher demand for focused attention. While kids at this age thrive on routine and predictability, they also crave opportunities to have a little unstructured play, a chance to skip and run, to throw and catch, and to use their imagination.

WHEN FORMAL EDUCATION STARTS, SO DOES COMPETITION FOR ADULT ATTENTION.
Where previously a kid might have been one adorable toddler drawing the attention of multiple adults, they are now in a classroom with multiple kids—some even as cute and as smart as they are. At school, at church, or on the soccer field, one thing is true: the moment you show up, they will start talking to you if they are the only one there. They want your undivided attention. They want your focus. They want your approval. So give it, as freely and as often as you can to as many as possible.

676 WEEKS AND COUNTING . . .
SECOND & THIRD

THE PHASE WHEN

AND YOUR ENTHUSIASTIC KID THINKS ANYTHING

FAIRNESS MATTERS MOST, DIFFERENCES GET NOTICED,

"SOUNDS LIKE FUN!"
THESE CONCRETE THINKERS ARE PRIME FOR ENFORCING THE LAW IN EVERY SITUATION.
Rules are rules. Gifts should be distributed equally. Consequences should be consistent. But now your loving child has become the heat: CSI, Nancy Drew, Barney Fife. Whatever their badge, should you deviate from these guidelines to, say, surprise one kid with a treat not given to the rest, you will find yourself quickly apprehended and convicted for offenses of unfairness.

EVEN THOUGH LIFE SHOULD BE FAIR, IT’S OKAY THAT PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT.
As second and third graders settle into formal education, they begin to notice (yes, even for the first time) that “not everyone is like me.” Until now, everyone was on equal footing. Seriously, what Kindergartner isn’t “the best” at everything? By second grade, kids take notice of qualities that make one kid athletic and another artistic, one kid blond and another brown-skinned. Expect a new world of adjectives in this phase as kids begin to tell you more about their growing social world.

KIDS IN THIS PHASE ARE A BEAUTIFUL BLEND OF CAPABLE AND DEPENDENT.
It’s the golden age of childhood. No one should have a favorite phase—especially since life should be fair—but if you like this phase a whole lot, you aren’t alone. Kids aren’t especially needy; some might even begin to stay home alone for a couple hours without a babysitter. But they are still kids. Impressionable, enthusiastic, eager, and excited about what you are excited about. You still set the schedule, and if you think something sounds like fun you can convince them that it really is fun.

572 WEEKS AND COUNTING . . .
FOURTH & FIFTH

THE PHASE WHEN AND YOUR CONFIDENT KID WILL INSIST,

“ I’VE GOT THIS. ”

FRIENDS ARE BEST FRIENDS,

GAMES ARE FOR COMPETITION,
IN THIS PHASE FRIENDS MATTER A LOT MORE.
Call it a club. Call it a clique. Call it a team. A tribe mentality begins to form during fourth and fifth grade. Some friends will become “best friends” and some other kids won’t get invited to the party. If you see a fourth or fifth grader doing, saying, or wearing something that confuses you, check out what their peers are doing, saying or wearing. Peer approval (and disapproval) is significantly motivating in this phase. Don’t worry, your opinion will matter again . . . in maybe another ten years.

IF YOU WANT TO GET THEIR ATTENTION, MAKE IT A COMPETITION.
With a “lifetime” of experience under-their-belt and a “no fear” attitude, a kid in this phase is virtually unstoppable. They are ready to prove themselves, ready for the world to take notice, and they lack the self-consciousness that might otherwise hold them back or slow them down. They can’t wait to show you just how smart and fast and strong they really are.

THIS IS THE TOP OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FOOD CHAIN.
Everybody’s morals are roughly aligned and their life experience is still limited enough that everything makes sense. Maybe that’s why this phase usually demonstrates a clarity of mind that comes with knowing the ropes and feeling knowledgeable about what makes the world tick. Lean into that confidence and build it. Let them know you see their potential and you believe in it. There’s no such thing as an overly confident middle schooler.
SIXTH

THE PHASE
WHEN
AND A DRAMATIC KID THAT NEEDS SOMEONE
TO PROVE,
"WHO CARES."

THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH GROCERIES,
TOO MANY HORMONES
NO PHASE HAS LESS CONSISTENCY THAN SIXTH GRADE.
Some sixth graders still sleep with stuffed animals and some want to sleep with their new cell phone. Most sixth graders are alternately one and then the other on any given day—or any given hour. They may appear sloppy and unkempt one moment and preppy and overdressed the next. That’s what makes every day a new day to discover who this growing person really is.

IN THESE 52 WEEKS, A KID MAY GROW THREE INCHES AND GAIN TEN POUNDS.
But the place you’re most likely to notice the growth is in your grocery bill. Keep the pantry stocked. If you are leading sixth graders, bring french fries. Ultimate mic drop. Win.

DURING THIS YEAR, THERE WILL BE TEARS (BOTH YOURS AND THEIRS).
Doors will slam. Drama will happen. Hormones will soar. Friends will break up. Abnormal has become the norm. But amid all the ups and downs, in these changing tides of emotions, now is the time to lean in even more closely. When they push, prove you can’t be pushed away. When they change, prove you will love them consistently. When they break your trust, prove you are someone who can be trusted. It may seem challenging, but keep up the chase so in this phase there’s never any reason to wonder, “Who cares?”

364 WEEKS AND COUNTING . . .
SEVENTH & EIGHTH

THE PHASE WHEN

AND ONE SMART KID

WILL KEEP REMINDING YOU,

"YEAH . . . I KNOW."

NOTHING YOU DO IS COOL,

EVERYTHING IS FUN IN A CROWD,
NOW YOU WILL BEGIN TO REALIZE JUST HOW EMBARRASSING YOU CAN BE.
Figuring out the new rules for your social behavior can be intimidating. When is it acceptable to “like” their Instagram post, and when are you allowed to openly comment? When are you expected to show up to the game, and whose parents are you not supposed to talk to? When are you supposed to dress up and be impressive, and when are you supposed to just be casual?

INSECURITY IS AN UNSPOKEN FORCE THAT KEEPS THIS PHASE WONDERFULLY AWKWARD.
Even the most confident seventh grader may choose a “group” Halloween costume. (“Let’s go together as rock, paper, scissors!”) They walk the hall in pairs. They go to the mall with a herd. They build unfathomably large social media platforms. The name of the game is to never be caught alone and to always associate with the coolest crowd possible.

YOU MAY BE SURPRISED AT HOW SMART KIDS IN THIS PHASE REALLY ARE.
In fact, there may be no phase quite as smart as this one—just ask them. Being so much smarter than everyone else can really become a burden. Sometimes the patience just runs out, and they simply can’t explain it to you one more time. The important thing will be what they know, and how they begin to personalize it in this phase. So look for ways to encourage their process (just remember that it’s their process and they know it).
NINTH

THE PHASE
WHEN
YOUR TEENAGER
HAS TO EXPLAIN

FRIENDSHIPS SHIFT, GRADES COUNT, AND INTERESTS CHANGE SO OFTEN

"THIS IS ME NOW."
YOU MAY NOTICE FORMER BEST FRIENDS FADING AND NEW FRIENDS APPEARING.
The average high school has 750 teenagers, 250 dating couples, and more than 50 options for extracurricular activities. With so many opportunities to connect, it’s no wonder teenagers in this phase abandon the general quest for popularity and search for acceptance in more specialized groups. A teenager may find their place in shop class or on the debate team, in drama club or on the baseball field, in Future Farmers of America or Beta Club.

THESE 52 WEEKS ALSO BRING A NEW ACADEMIC REALITY.
The demand for personal responsibility increases and teens are held to more rigorous standards. For some, this is when grades begin to count toward admission to the exclusive and elusive college of their dreams. Even if a selective college isn’t obviously in the cards, grades still count toward a high school diploma, and sometimes toward extra privileges at home. No matter what, for every ninth grader, grades count.

THIS IS A YEAR OF IDENTIFYING TALENTS AND ABILITIES.
Freshmen gravitate to where they are most accepted. By the end of this year, your teenager will likely have a more stable sense of who they are than they have for the past three years. Frankly, they may be a little frustrated that you haven’t known who they were all along. (Why not? It’s been so obvious.) Listen carefully. Pay attention. Stalk them openly. The greatest thing you can do in this phase is to know them and know where they are finding acceptance. Perhaps nothing will affect the trajectory of the next four years more.

208 WEEKS AND COUNTING . . .
TENTH

THE PHASE WHEN
AND YOUR RESOLUTE TEEN

“EVERYONE ELSE CAN . . . . ,”
“NOBODY ELSE HAS TO . . . . ,”

“WHY NOT?”

WILL PUSH YOU TO ANSWER,
THIS PHASE MARKS A YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE.
Sweet Sixteen means sweet freedom. Whether this is getting a driver’s license or having friends who have one, there is a deliverance from authority when a teenager no longer depends on Mom or Dad for transportation. Just how much freedom they should have, and just how much freedom their peers have, you will never really know. If you ask them, no other adult on the planet limits the activities as much as you.

SOPHOMORE YEAR IS A BLEND OF FRESH SKEPTICISM AND NEW DISCOVERIES.
With newfound freedom comes greater life experience. Whatever a tenth grader believed in theory has now been tested. That really life-shattering bad thing you warned them about? They know someone who survived it. The standards you held up for them in the past? They realize you haven’t always lived by them. Get ready for them to challenge the process.

THE DAYS OF “BECAUSE I SAID SO” ARE FAR BEHIND YOU.
A sophomore still needs boundaries, but unless the boundary makes sense in light of their personal (and changing) beliefs, they won’t stay within it. You’re probably the same way. Unlike you, however, a sophomore doesn’t have your past experience or your future orientation. So when you “debate” (loudly) boundaries with a sophomore, remember to stay in the present. They aren’t challenging what you both want ten years from now, they just need you to understand what they need right now.

156 WEEKS AND COUNTING . . .
ELEVENTH

THE PHASE
WHEN
AND YOUR VERY BUSY TEENAGER

THERE'S LESS DRAMA,
MORE STRESS

ANSWERS ALL YOUR QUESTIONS WITH

"JUST TRUST ME."
Juniors are more ready than ever to be who they really are.
The rapid influx of hormones has regulated, the fight for peer acceptance has subsided, and the intensity of conflict over independence . . . well, they’ve worn you down. This confidence is enough to let you relax emotionally, and allow yourself to be amazed at all they can accomplish.

“Accomplish” is the best word to describe the activity in this phase.
Many must pass an end-of-year graduation test to receive a high school diploma. Some may also begin an after-school job. Many juniors focus on building a college resume by adding a growing number of AP courses, an internship, volunteer activities, extracurricular leadership roles and SAT prep. For a select few, it’s when recruitment for college sports begins. Whether your teen is caught up in the race to win or simply trying to survive, junior year easily has the highest pressure.

With all that’s happening, don’t be surprised if it’s hard to keep up.
“Where are you going?” “Who are you going with?” “When will you be back?” “How long have you been dating?” Your relationship may begin to feel a little one-sided. It’s okay. They don’t expect you to keep up. What they really want is for you to trust them. After all, they will be out of the house soon and you will have to anyway. Let this be a practice year for both of you. Help them prove the ways they can be trusted, choose your battles wisely and parent them in the areas that seem to be most challenging for them personally.

104 weeks and counting . . .
TWELFTH

THE PHASE WHEN

AND YOU BOTH

START ASKING,

“WHAT’S NEXT?”

YOUR EMERGING ADULT PULLS AWAY, GETS CLOSER,

DOES THINGS FOR THE LAST TIME
IF SIXTEEN IS “SWEET,” THEN EIGHTEEN IS “LEGAL.”
This kid is no longer a child. Technically speaking, they are fully responsible for their actions and decisions. (Of course, you may still have to pick up the pieces from time to time.) You may feel them pull away as they drive to a first job, deposit a paycheck, register to vote, or maybe even disengage from youth ministry programs.

THE COUNTDOWN CLOCK IS COUNTING DOWN TO THE END.
There may seem to be an urgency to these last 52 weeks. As a senior takes on more responsibility, they will also lean in relationally in a different way. They discover—especially late in the year—that they need the adults in their world a little bit more than they thought. All of a sudden the decisions have very high stakes. Like, “Will you try to date him long-distance?” And there’s nothing like having “last time” moments to bring out a little sentimentality.

THE GREATEST QUESTION OF THIS PHASE FOR EVERYONE IS, “WHAT’S NEXT?”
In fact, it can drive you both a little crazy. At times it can feel like walking on a moving sidewalk that’s about to end with no real defined floor to walk onto. Just remember to focus on “next: few months” more than “next: rest-of-your-life.” They may be legally adults, but they aren’t adults really. Your job hasn’t ended. Even the most accomplished seniors will take a few years (and maybe some counseling) to figure this adult thing out.

52 WEEKS AND COUNTING . . .
EIGHTEEN+

THE PHASE
WHEN

AND YOU BOTH

KEEP ASKING,

"WHAT NOW?"

YOUR EMERGING ADULT PULLS AWAY MORE, NEEDS YOU AGAIN,

DOES THINGS FOR THE FIRST TIME
THIS IS THE YEAR YOU HAVE IMAGINED FOR EIGHTEEN YEARS.
You may be surprised how loud the emptiness sounds when someone who has been familiar in your world suddenly disappears. Of course, you may also rediscover a little personal freedom of your own. What do you mean there’s no game to attend, no form to sign, no forgotten books to take to the school at the last minute? And how did we not finish the milk before it expired?

THEY MAY COST YOU MORE EVEN THOUGH YOU SEE THEM LESS.
Even if they aren’t physically present, their presence may still be felt—especially in your bank account. Whether you are helping fund their continued education or making a deposit for their first apartment, there’s a good chance you haven’t stopped paying for some expenses in their world. They may also cost you some unpredictable time as well. You never know when they may call looking for advice, affirmation, or maybe just a reminder of home.

GIVE ADVICE WHEN THEY ASK FOR IT.
The good news is that every 18 and 19-year-old knows what they want and has a precise plan for their life. Wait? That’s not true? They might amaze you with all they can do on their own, but there’s also still a lot left to figure out. Where will they live? Will they get married? What kind of work will ultimately bring them fulfillment? They want your advice, but only in small doses, and only when they ask for it. This is a season to re-engage your child in a new way, not as a parent but more as a peer as you transition your relationship for the future.

STILL COUNTING . . .
Every phase has significant relationships to influence so

Keep staff on the same page
Influence whoever has the influence
Reactivate parents every year
Inspire leaders to show up
That includes parents, small group leaders, decision makers, first cousins, and senior pastors. If you gain influence in a kid's life now, you stand a better chance of having influence with them later when it matters even more. That’s why every phase of a kid’s life gives your church a new opportunity to connect kids to a significant relationship. Remember, churches are not really losing influence with an entire generation. They are actually losing influence with Individual Families, Individual Parents, Individual Kids. So don’t miss it. Influence someone who will influence a kid at every phase.
KEEP STAFF ON THE SAME PAGE

SO KIDS AT EVERY PHASE WILL BE CONNECTED TO A MASTER PLAN
Now that you have read a quick description of each phase, here’s a complicated question.

WHICH PHASE OF A KID’S LIFE DO YOU THINK IS MOST IMPORTANT?

There are actually two answers to that question.

ANSWER 1. **THE PHASE THAT SHOULD MATTER MOST IS THE ONE YOU ARE WORKING WITH NOW.**
In other words, you should learn to champion the age group you work with so you can become a specialist. That’s why churches need age-group pastors or directors. Specialists provide focus, and focus gives a ministry momentum and relevance. The difference between a stagnant swamp and a flowing river is focus and power. Which one do you want to characterize your ministry?

* A specialist stays focused on what a kid needs now.
ANSWER 2.

THE PHASE THAT MATTERS MOST HAPPENS BEFORE AND AFTER THIS PHASE.

Hopefully that sounds confusing. Why? Effective ministries know how to focus on a specific age group and see the overall vision for a kid’s life. That means as an age-group leader you need to develop the skill to be a specialist and a generalist, simultaneously.

A generalist owns the vision for where a kid is going.

Specialists will champion a few phases. Generalists will champion every phase.

It’s okay to be 80 percent specialist and 20 percent generalist, as long as you know how to take off the specialist hat occasionally and think like a generalist. Thinking like a generalist prevents your ministry from becoming an island. It also forces you to think about the master plan so a kid keeps moving in the right direction.

Just remember:
Some leaders are better at being generalists.
Some leaders are better at being specialists.
But every leader needs to get better at both.
GENERALISTS

- See the forest
- See the similarities
- See the connections

SPECIALISTS

- See the trees
- See the distinctives
- See the separations
When your staff members start thinking like specialists and generalists, everyone begins to see each other’s ministry in a different light. They make fewer wrong assumptions about each other’s age group programs. They won’t ask... Why do preschool leaders just sing silly, rhyming songs? Why do middle school leaders play stupid, gross games? Why do high school leaders... wait, why can’t we find the high school leaders?

When you’re on the same page as a staff, it’s easier to get other significant relationships like parents and volunteers on the same page.

When everyone is on the same page it... magnifies your focus, synchronizes your efforts, and increases your momentum.

When you wear the hat of a specialist and a generalist... respect between age group ministries goes up. families know how to cooperate with your strategy. staff value meeting and collaboration. kids transition between age groups effectively. you develop a common language that connects everyone.
You can actually start speaking a common language immediately. Here are four words that can connect every parent, staff, and volunteer to everything they need to know about phases. (How is that for oversimplifying?)

Just remember:

**EMBRACE | ENGAGE | AFFIRM | MOBILIZE**

These words will grow in meaning over the next few chapters.
THE PHASE PROJECT IS A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT
We want to say a special thank you to those who have not only done research, given hours their time, and debated words and phrases, but who have also made a lifetime commitment to helping kids and teenagers grow in faith so they can have a better future. You can also look for new Phase resources coming soon from the authors in bold.

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Reggie Joiner, founder and CEO of the reThink Group, has journeyed through the phases with four kids of his own. He and his wife Debbie raised Reggie Paul (RP), Hannah, Sarah, and Rebekah, and now they’re well into the phases not covered in this book.

The reThink Group (also known as Orange) is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to influence those who influence the next generation. Orange provides resources and training for churches and organizations that create environments for parents, kids, and teenagers.

Before founding the reThink group in 2006, Reggie was one of the founders of North Point Community Church. During his 11 years with Andy Stanley at North Point, Reggie was the executive director of family ministry where he developed a new concept for relevant ministry for children, teenagers, and married adults.

Reggie has authored and co-authored ten books including *Think Orange*, *Seven Practices of Effective Ministry*, *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*, *Lead Small*, *Playing for Keeps*, *Creating a Lead Small Culture*, and *Zombies, Football and the Gospel*.

For more information about Reggie Joiner, visit ReggieJoiner.com or connect with him on Twitter @ReggieJoiner.
Kristen Ivy, executive director of messaging at Orange, and her husband Matt are currently parenting through the phases. Their Kindergarten son, Sawyer, and preschooler, Hensley, were in the room while most of this book was being written. Their third child will race this book to the presses for a similar release date.

Before beginning her career at reThink in 2006, Kristen earned her bachelors of education from Baylor University in 2004 and a Master of Divinity from Mercer University in 2009. She worked in the public school system as a high school Biology and English teacher, where she learned firsthand the joy and importance of influencing the next generation.

At Orange, Kristen has played an integral role in the development of the elementary, middle school, and high school curriculums and has shared her experiences at speaking events across the country. Kristen is a co-author of Playing for Keeps and Creating a Lead Small Culture.

Kristen lives in Cumming, Georgia, with her husband Matt. For more information, visit KristenIvy.com or connect with her on Twitter @Kristen_Ivy.
ENDNOTES
The research data in this volume is collected from individual interviews, academic resources, and group conversations around the “It’s Just a Phase” concept. Some of the specific findings are found on the following pages:


3 Leslie Haley Wasserman and Debby Zambo, *Early Childhood and Neuroscience: Links to Development and Learning* (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Springer), 62


4 Stages of Life

1. Preschool Curriculum
2. Elementary Curriculum
3. Middle School Curriculum
4. High School Curriculum

2 Combined Influences

1 End in Mind

Try it for free ThinkOrange.com
THE PHASE WHEN NOBODY SLEEPS, EVERYBODY SMELLS, AND ONE MESMERIZING BABY CONVINCES YOU I NEED YOU NOW!

THE PHASE WHEN NOBODY'S ON TIME, EVERYTHING'S A MESS, AND ONE EAGER TODDLER WILL INSIST, I CAN DO IT.

THE PHASE WHEN ANYTHING CAN BE IMAGINED, EVERYTHING CAN BECOME A GAME AND ONE CURIOUS PRESCHOOLER WANTS TO KNOW WHY?

THE PHASE WHEN UNFILTERED WORDS MAKE YOU LAUGH, HOMEWORK MAKES YOU CRY, AND LIFE BECOMES A STAGE WHERE YOUR KID SHOUTS LOOK AT ME.

THE PHASE WHEN EVERYTHING IS AN ADVENTURE, NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE, AND YOUR ENTHUSIASTIC KID THINKS ANYTHING SOUNDS LIKE FUN!

THE PHASE WHEN FRIENDS ARE BEST FRIENDS, GAMES ARE FOR COMPETITION, AND YOUR CONFIDENT KID WILL INSIST I'VE GOT THIS.

THE PHASE WHEN THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH GROCERIES, TOO MANY HORMONES AND A DRAMATIC KID THAT NEEDS SOMEONE TO PROVE WHO CARES.

THE PHASE WHEN NOTHING YOU DO IS COOL, EVERYTHING IS FUN IN A CROWD, AND ONE SMART KID WILL KEEP REMINING YOU YEAH...I KNOW.

THE PHASE WHEN FRIENDSHIPS SHIFT, GRADES COUNT, AND INTERESTS CHANGE SO OFTEN YOUR TEENAGER HAS TO EXPLAIN THIS IS ME NOW.

THE PHASE WHEN "EVERYONE ELSE CAN…", "NOBODY ELSE HAS TO…", AND YOUR RESOLUTE TEEN WILL PUSH YOU TO ANSWER WHY NOT?

THE PHASE WHEN THERE'S LESS DRAMA, MORE STRESS, AND YOUR VERY BUSY TEENAGER ANSWERS ALL YOUR QUESTIONS WITH JUST TRUST ME.

THE PHASE WHEN YOUR EMERGING ADULT PULLS AWAY, GETS CLOSER, DOES THINGS FOR THE LAST TIME AND YOU WILL BOTH START ASKING WHAT'S NEXT?