



Families Count™

A ministry of Lifeline Children's Services

INTRODUCTION

What is **FAMILIES COUNT™**?

Families Count is a family restoration and preservation ministry of Lifeline Children's Services (www.LifelineChild.org). Our aim is to minister to the parents of children who have been placed into the local foster care system, or are at risk of entering it.

We believe that God is a reconciling God who has given the ministry of reconciliation to his church (2 Corinthians 5:18). The word reconcile can mean to make consistent or to restore to harmony, and we believe this is the work that a family in crisis desperately needs.

Nationally speaking, one-third of children who are placed in foster care and then reunited with their birth family, will have re-entered care within three years. Lifeline envisioned a ministry that would get to the root cause of family disruptions such as these, and equip birth families with the tools and support needed for permanency and success. To this end, Families Count provides birth parents with Biblical, Christ-centered parenting help through classroom instruction and 1 on 1 mentoring. Lifeline's vision is to empower local churches to own this ministry in their area, by providing professionally written curriculum, training classroom teachers and mentors, and serving as a strategic partner as the local ministries expand.

Families Count is a 6-week, biblically-based parent education program that is designed to meet the standards for state-approved parent education programs. Through **Families Count**, local churches are positioned to meet, mentor, and care for parents who are working to fulfill a court-mandated plan for reunification or parents who the court deems at-risk for a court-ordered disruption. Through **Families Count**, churches teach the curriculum while engaging the parents through providing transportation, childcare, a weekly family-style meal, and a voluntary mentoring program. Each participant has the opportunity to choose to have a mentor assigned to them that will spend 1-2 hours a week outside the parenting classes to help them process and implement the things they are learning through the class.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

There are 2 Primary components to the **Families Count** Program

- **Classroom Teaching and Fellowship**
- **1 on 1 Mentoring**

For this program, you will need:

A host location for classes. Classes will run for 6 weeks at 3 hrs per session.

Co-Leaders for classroom teaching. Each class should have 1 set of Co-Leaders [using the same set for the entire 6 weeks]. We strongly recommend a man and woman; preferably a married couple. We recommend that you look for Co-leaders who are doctrinally sound, capable of teaching and engaging with the students, empathetic, and non-judgmental.

Mentors. Every person in the class should have the opportunity to receive a mentor if they wish. A mentor will commit to supporting a student as they go thru the class by making weekly contact -preferably face-to-face, encouraging them and, discussing class material. Mentors should not be expected to give financial assistance to students during the program. We recommend that people do not serve as class Co-Leaders and Mentors simultaneously. Furthermore, mentors do not attend classes with their mentees as we seek to insulate the classes and limit outside participation in order to promote an atmosphere where confidential information can be shared freely.

Transportation Providers. Many of the moms and dads may not have transportation to the weekly class. Having volunteers who are willing to transport, is a way to remove an obstacle for the students. The ride can also be a great time for gospel and fellowship conversations. Providing transportation is not required to be a mentor, but if possible it would be a good way for the mentor and student to have time with each other.

Provide a meal. People willing to provide a meal [catered or cooked]. The meal is a key component of the classroom portion of the program. Not only does the meal meet a physical need, but we also believe that hospitality is an apologetic for our Gospel message. The meal breaks down walls of mistrust, anxiety, or shyness; and the meal is a great time for connections to be made.

Childcare workers. Like transportation, providing childcare will remove obstacles for those parents who do not have a safe place for their kids to go during the classroom time. Lifeline has also developed some material called Kids Count, which can be used for the children in the program. We recommend that children join their parents for the meal, so that families can eat together. And we also recommend that you stress childcare should be limited to children whose parents are in the class.

Ministry Coordinator. It is our recommendation that, if possible, you have a **Ministry Coordinator** [or team of coordinators] who are responsible for overseeing both aspects of the Families Count program. This coordinator [or team] would recruit volunteers, plan out classroom logistics, secure training, and work with the local Child Welfare Services agency to

accept referrals, provide student reports, and handle paperwork. It is recommended that the classroom teachers [Co-Leaders] not be tasked with conversing with child welfare agencies. Co-Leaders should be able to establish themselves as a neutral advocate for parents and children. These parents often feel that everything has been taken from them and they have no power over their situations. Co-Leaders seeking to establish themselves apart from the system is key to gaining trust.

Materials: Each class participant will need their own **Families Count curriculum book**. They should be encouraged to take notes, and to take their books home with them for study. Each participant should bring that book back for class. Each class participant should also receive a Bible to keep. We highly recommend you use the same type of Bible for each participant so that page numbers can be referenced, and the translation reads the same. An easy to read translation is recommended. Please note the Families Count curriculum uses the HCSB. We recommend having extra books and Bibles on hand for those participants who forget their material. These extra books are collected at the end of each class. Students can be provided blank paper to take notes on and then transfer those notes to their books later. In Birmingham we give the parents a kid's Bible on the last night of class. We use the Jesus Storybook Bible. You should also be prepared to provide Pens and/or Pencils.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The classes are based on God's Word, the Bible, and what it says about how we are to view our families and children. Since many of these parents have been separated from their children, the focus of the teaching is to re-establish familial relationships. Childhood development and nurture at every stage are emphasized, and parents are challenged to view their families as created in God's image with inherent value.

Count One: Families Are Meant to Be Successful

This session emphasizes the purpose and benefits of family and the valuable contributions that every family member makes. The circumstances and/or choices we make that draw us away from the ones we care most about are identified, along with ways to re-focus on the unique strengths and abilities every parent possesses.

Count Two: Families of Origin and How They Affect Our Families Today

This session highlights families of origin and how both positive and negative learned behaviors are passed down from one generation to the next. Participants will be able to identify both positive and negative cycles within their families and how they affect their families today.

Count Three: Families Function as Teams

This session uses a "teams" analogy to help participants gain a better understanding of parental roles versus children's roles and the unique contributions that fathers, mothers and children make within their families. Childhood development is explored and explained, helping parents recognize the importance of a child being a child.

Count Four: Families Thrive with Discipline

This session distinguishes between punishment, or punitive methods of behavior change, and discipline, or teaching positive behaviors. Participants will learn alternatives to physical punishments that they can use within their families and how their responses to misbehaviors can lay a foundation of trust between them and their children.

Count Five: Families Were Created with a Purpose and for Permanency

This session focuses on families serving a purpose within their communities and neighborhoods. Participants will have an enhanced understanding of how families are not accidental, but put together for good things. Permanence and its importance to all family members, especially children, will be explored. Personal responsibilities, such as managing family finances and performing in a job, are closely examined, and practical tools for balancing a budget and interviewing for a job are presented.

Count Six: Broken Families Can Be Restored

This session discusses the brokenness of families in care and how restoration can be achieved in part by recognizing the gifts that families are.

Questions or for more information about how to get involved with Families Count, please contact connect@lifelinechild.org.