

# Guidelines for Leaders and Chaperones

## **Model for youth the behavior that is expected of them.**

- ✓ Be respectful and courteous to youth and to other adults. Never put down or make fun of a youth or another chaperone.
- ✓ No drinking alcoholic beverages. (Kids need to know that you can have fun without liquor.)
- ✓ Even though they can sometimes be exasperating, please do not use profanity (and please discourage kids from using it).
- ✓ So as not to encourage an unhealthy habit, please refrain from smoking when with kids.
- ✓ If you are driving, please model good driving habits.
- ✓ Follow all the schedules, rules, etc. of the program and facility. (Chaperones are not above the rules.)
- ✓ Please participate in the program *with* the youth.

## **While we all want the youth we are responsible for to like us and to think we're "cool," chaperoning is not a popularity contest.**

It is important to remember we are not kids -- we're adults who enjoy being with young people and who care a lot about them.

- ✓ Please don't allow youth to bend the rules (such as curfew, check-in, going off grounds, etc.)
- ✓ Please don't play favorites or give different youth different rules.
- ✓ Have fun and goof around with the kids, but don't hesitate to stop irresponsible or dangerous play. (Don't let young people do things where they could get hurt -- even if they say they do it all the time. Don't ask them to do things that could leave us open to liability. If in doubt, ask.)
- ✓ Don't be afraid to discipline -- but do it with love. (Never put-down a young person.)

## **Please mingle with the kids and get to know them.**

- ✓ Sit with them at meals, on the bus, in the auditorium, wherever. Please don't make a little clique of chaperones.
- ✓ Learn the names of your kids and call them by name.
- ✓ Enjoy these kids and have fun. Let them see adults as *more* than authority figures.

***Survival Guide***  
***For Youth Ministry***  
***Volunteer Leaders***

# **Welcome to the *YouthWorks* Survival Guide for Youth Ministry Volunteer Leaders**

Welcome to the wonderful world of youth ministry! You have chosen to respond to this particular call to ministry like thousands before you. Congratulations!

This booklet was designed specially to help you as a leader in youth ministry. It is full of ideas and suggestions designed to help you in your ministry. It contains an overview of insights and practical ideas to lead you in the right direction as you continue to learn more about this most fulfilling ministry. Use it as a guide to bring-out your own God-given gifts and talents as you respond to your call to serve. Return to it often for guidance and suggestions.

The sections in this manual are divided into three major areas:

## **Part One: Becoming a Youth Ministry Leader**

- So Now What Do I Do?
- What is Youth Ministry?
- What Do I Need to Know about Youth Today?

## **Part Two: Building Relationships with Youth One-on-One**

- 25 Guidelines for Good Communication
- Effective Communication Skills

## **Part Three: Building Relationships With Youth in Groups**

- Working with Groups
- Rules of Conversation in the Group
- Guidelines for Small Group Behaviors
- Tips for Leading Effective Discussions
- Six Ways to Discipline Teens Without Losing Your Cool

# PART ONE

## Becoming a Youth Ministry Leader

### *So Now What Do I Do?*

You are about to embark on a journey with young people that will take you to new and exciting places. Here are just a few thoughts before you begin your journey.

- ➔ Youth ministry, as you will discover, is primarily an exercise in building relationships -- relationships that allow young people to know adults who care about them and who are willing to walk as fellow pilgrims on a life-long journey of faith. That means that you and your ability to relate to and share your faith with teens is more important than any program or event.
- ➔ Youth ministry is designed to give young people an opportunity to grow into a mature faith in surroundings that support that growth. Those surroundings, aside from their family, are primarily you and your fellow youth ministers. In helping teens grow to a mature faith there is a presumption that you are a person of mature and healthy faith. This means that it is just as important to take care of your own faith life as it is to nurture that of the youth with whom you work.
- ➔ Be comfortable challenging the teens that you work with. Share with them that faith is a gift freely given by God but it is our response to that gift that requires effort and commitment on our part. That effort is not always met with support by the world they live in. The Gospel is challenging and exciting! Communicate it to young people with interest, excitement, and challenge.
- ➔ Relationships are difficult to build if you are not present to the people with whom you are building the relationship. Therefore ***be there***. Being present in the lives of young people is essential to effective ministry with them. They need to learn to count on you. So it's important that you attend as many functions as you can, even if you don't have a specific role. Try to be involved in their life outside of church. Go to their games and concerts and plays. Stop by where they work just to say hi.

# ***What is Youth Ministry?***

Quite simply, youth ministry is all the ways the parish community serves young people and their families, and equips them to live as Catholic Christians. Simple, but not easy. To give focus and direction to youth ministry, the Catholic Church in the United States developed a national vision statement, *A Vision of Youth Ministry* (USCC, 1976). Over the past two decades this vision has been expanded and deepened. Here's a brief overview of our contemporary approach to youth ministry

## **Goals of Youth Ministry**

Youth ministry seeks to help young people grow and develop in their faith in three distinct ways:

### **Goal 1: Youth Ministry works to foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.**

The first goal emphasizes *becoming*. We help youth develop a deeper and more personal relationship with Jesus Christ; experience a sense of personal well-being, security and peace; grow spiritually through study, reflection, prayer, and discussion with others; and develop a deeper understanding of the Scripture and Catholic Christian tradition and their applicability to life in today's complex society.

### **Goal 2: Youth Ministry seeks to draw young people to responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the faith community.**

The second goal emphasizes *belonging*. The faith community provides a context for the healthy development of Catholic Christian values and identity and opportunities to develop positive relationships between adolescents and adult Catholic Christian role models. Our challenge is become a "youth-friendly" faith community where youth have a conspicuous presence -- at worship and at all parish events. "Youth-friendly" communities recognize and tap young people's gifts, talents, energy, and power. They involve young people in leadership and ministry. "Youth-friendly" communities value young people. They listen to them; they support them with prayer, time, facilities, and money; they respond to their needs. "Youth-friendly" communities are those where youth are present, powerful, and valuable in the parish life and mission.

### **Goal 3: Youth Ministry empowers young people to become disciples of Jesus Christ who witness to their faith by living and working for justice, peace, and human dignity.**

This third goal emphasizes *transforming* and *servicing*. Helping young people realize that their faith in Jesus Christ calls them to serve others and work toward a world that is built on the values of the Reign of God is an essential task for youth ministry. As the Bishops of the United States state it, “Our faith calls us to work for justice; to serve those in need; to pursue peace; and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all our sisters and brothers. This is the call of Jesus, the challenge of the prophets, and the living tradition of our Church. ...Our efforts to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, welcome the stranger, and serve the poor and vulnerable must be accompanied by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering and injustice” (U.S. Catholic Bishops, *A Century of Social Teaching*). We do this by helping young people integrate faith and life, develop life-affirming Gospel values, develop skills for serving others and advocating for social change, and become personally involved in action. We are called to help young people learn *how* to be a disciple by *being* a disciple.

## **A Comprehensive Approach**

Youth ministry works toward these three goals by sponsoring programs and activities in eight distinct areas of ministry called components. Briefly, these components are:

**Advocacy:** *interpreting* the needs of youth and their families, especially the social problems facing them and *acting* with or on behalf of youth and their families for a change in the systems (policies, procedures, programs) which create or contribute to the social problems; *giving* young people a voice and *empowering* them to address the social problems that they face.

**Catechesis:** *sponsoring* youth toward maturity in Catholic Christian faith as a living reality through the kind of teaching and learning that emphasizes understanding, reflection, and transformation; *fostering* in youth a communal identity as Catholic Christians within the intergenerational community of faith *and* helping them to develop their own personal faith identity (*The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis*).

**Community Life:** *creating* an environment which nurtures meaningful relationships among youth and between youth and adults characterized by Gospel values (e.g. acceptance of all people, trust, respect, cooperation, honesty, taking responsibility, willingness to serve);

*helping* young people feel like a valued part of the church community; *providing* opportunities for social interaction and meaningful participation in the life of the church and civic community.

**Evangelization:** *proclaiming* through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to youth who have not yet heard or seen it and *inviting* them into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers; *ongoing witness* of the faith community as it attempts to live out the Gospel with such authenticity that the faith of all the members is sustained and nourished. Evangelization is the energizing core of all the components of youth ministry (*The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*).

**Justice, Peace, and Service:** *guiding* young people in the development of a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the scriptures and in Catholic social teaching; *empowering* young people (and their families) to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering, to serve those in need, to pursue peace, and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all people; *infusing* the concepts of justice and peace into all youth ministry efforts.

**Leadership Development/Enablement:**

*recruiting, training,* and *supporting* youth and adult leaders in youth ministry; *empowering* youth for leadership and ministry with their peers, in their schools, and in the church and civic community; *developing* a leadership team of youth and adults to organize and coordinate a ministry with youth; *partnering* with parents and families in promoting positive youth development and faith growth.

**Pastoral Care/Guidance:** *promoting* positive youth and family development through a variety of preventive strategies (e.g., developing life skills and parenting skills); *caring* for youth and families in crisis through support, counseling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; and *providing* guidance as youth face life decisions and make moral choices.

**Prayer and Worship:** *assisting* young people in deepening their relationship with Jesus through spiritual development and a personal prayer life; *providing* a variety of communal prayer and worship experiences with youth to deepen and celebrate their relationship with Jesus in a caring Christian community; *involving* young people in the sacramental life of the Church.

These eight components of youth ministry can be programmed in four different ways: with youth, with youth and families, with the parish community, and in collaboration with the civic community. A vibrant youth ministry takes advantage of each of these four program settings.

**Youth programming** involves organizing a variety of activities around the specific developmental and social needs of young people, involving youth and adult leaders in program planning and implementation.

**Family ministry** involves programs and activities geared to incorporating a family perspective in all youth ministry programming; in developing specific programs and activities for parents, for youth and parents, and for the whole family; and for supporting and strengthening in-home family life.

**Involvement in Church life** offers young people opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and loyalty to the community; to feel like valued members of the community, and to take responsibility as leaders in parish-wide programs, such as liturgical ministries, service ministries, educational ministries, and community/social events.

### **Collaboration with the civic community**

provides a way for youth ministry to utilize community-wide resources and activities, and to plan joint activities, programs, and meetings with the different youth-serving organizations in the community (churches, schools, scouting programs, youth agencies).

Programs and activities in each of these four program settings can be organized as gathered programs or non-gathered programs (small group or individual):

**Gathered Programs** focus on participation in organized, assembled programs for youth, families, parish community, or civic community (e.g., parish events, intergenerational programs, youth meetings, social events, trips, retreats).

**Non-Gathered Programs** include programs that provide maximum flexibility in addressing specific needs of youth and/or families using a variety of ***Small Group*** and ***Individualized*** approaches (e.g. home-based activities and resources, community service, spiritual direction, mentoring, independent learning, small group Bible study).

## **Conclusion**

That's a brief overview of what we, together, are trying to accomplish in youth ministry. It's quite a challenge, but when you have quality leaders, great programs, and a parish community coming together on behalf of its young people, it becomes much easier.

# What Do I Need to Know about Youth Today?

Keeping up-to-date on youth issues and trends can be a full time job. Our goal in this section is to give you some of the basics in understanding young people -- things to be aware of as you work with them, things to watch and listen for, things that are normal for this age group. Knowing what to expect goes a long way to making us feel comfortable with youth. The following charts outline the most important developmental needs of young adolescents (aged 10-14/15) and older adolescents (aged 14/15-18/19). It is important to remember that both sets of needs are present in the high school youth population. Understanding each set of needs helps us work more effectively with young people.

## Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents

- **Opportunities for Self-Definition:** to better understand, define, and accept who they are as growing adolescents.
- **Competence and Achievement:** opportunities to find out what they are good at doing and to know what they do is valued by others whom they respect.
- **Positive Social Interaction with Adults and Peers:** opportunities to develop interpersonal skills and form positive peer relationships, adult relationships, and new ways of relating to their parents as adolescents.
- **Meaningful Participation in Families, Schools, Churches and Community:** opportunities to participate in making decisions about activities that shape their lives *and* to contribute to the success of those activities as leaders or participants.
- **Physical Activity:** opportunities to utilize their energy and growing bodies through activities that require physical movement or expression.
- **Creative Expression:** opportunities to express to the external world who they are on the inside (feelings, interests, abilities, thoughts) through a variety of activities.
- **Personal Religious Experience:** opportunities to explore "the big questions" in life within the context of faith; opportunities for a deeper and more personal relationship with God.
- **Structure and Clear Limits:** provision of structure and guidance that helps young adolescents make decisions about their behavior, and helps them feel safe in their activities.

## Developmental Needs of Older Adolescents

- **Exploration and Experimentation:** opportunities to experiment with a wide array of behaviors, roles, attitudes, relationships, ideas, and activities as they develop their own identity and faith identity
- **Adult Sexuality:** opportunities to understand their sexual growth and integrate their sexuality into their personalities in a holistic way; opportunities to develop healthy values and attitudes regarding their own sexuality.
- **Interpersonal Relationships:** opportunities to form positive relationships and experiences with peers in a comfortable and secure environment and to develop friendship-making and -maintaining skills
- **Meaningful Roles in the Community and Society:** opportunities to participate as full members and leaders in the community, society and church; opportunities for service, locally and globally.
- **Preparing for the Future:** opportunities to acquire the competencies necessary for adult roles, such as goal setting, problem solving, time management, and decision making; opportunities to explore life options and plan their futures (education, career) and to help them acquire the skills, knowledge and experience for their chosen fields
- **Personal Value System and Decision-Making Skills:** opportunities to discuss conflicting values and formulate their own value system; opportunities to gain knowledge and experience in making decisions and to apply Christian moral values in making moral judgments
- **Personal Faith:** opportunities to explore and question the faith they have been given by family and the faith community and develop their own faith identity; opportunities to explore what it means to be and live as a person of faith today and develop a more personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- **Adult Mentors:** opportunities to develop relationships with adult Christians who affirm their journey and struggles, explore sensitive issues with them, listen to their stories and questions, share their own faith journey, and ask questions that encourage critical thinking and reflection

# **PART TWO**

## **Building Relationships with Youth One-on-One**

### **25 Guidelines for Good Communication**

Let's start with the basics -- good communication is at the heart of effective ministry with youth. Here are 25 guidelines that capture the essence of effective communication. Study them, practice them, learn from them. Good Luck!

#### **Be Committed**

1. We must be committed to communication.
2. We must be convinced that we are a gift to be given, and that through their self-disclosure others are a gift offered to us.
3. We must be determined to be honest with ourselves.

#### **The Successful Practice of Sharing Oneself (Speaking)**

4. In sharing ourselves with others, we must always take full responsibility for our own actions and reactions. As a consequence of this, we will make "I statements," not "Your statements."
5. We must speak only for ourselves. In communicating I should make it clear that I am speaking only *my* truth, and not *the* truth.
6. We must share all our significant feelings with those to whom we are relating.
7. We must be courageous enough to share our personal vulnerability with one another.
8. We should express gratitude to our listeners.

## **The Successful Practice of Accepting the Sharing of Another (Listening)**

9. We should be "present" and "available" to others who offer to share themselves with us.
10. We should accept others wherever they are.
11. We must listen attentively to learn the "inner consistency" of others.
12. We must not indulge in mind games by judging the intentions and motives of others.
13. We should register emphatic and reassuring reactions to others when they are sharing themselves with us.
14. We should clarify the message that is being delivered, trying always to understand accurately the meaning of others.
15. In the role of listener we should offer only suggestions and never directions.
16. As listeners we should avoid all blocks to communication.
17. We should explicitly thank those who have shared themselves with us.

## **General Practices that Promote Good Interpersonal Communication**

18. Good communication requires that the communicators spend special or quality time together.
19. Touching is an important form of communication.
20. To become more effective communicators we must "stretch" beyond our "comfort zones."
21. We must be ready to apologize when an apology is appropriate and helpful.
22. We must avoid a buildup of tension.
23. At times of crisis in communication we will need to use special approaches.
24. Whether speaking or listening, the motive of the good communicator must always be love.
25. We should pray for the enlightenment and the courage to communicate well.

# Effective Communication Skills

Developing skills for listening and speaking will enable us to more effectively communicate with youth. Learning and using communication skills is crucial in relationships and fundamental to effective ministry with youth. Robert Bolton, in his book *People Skills*, identifies three essential sets of skills for effective communication: **Attending**, **Following**, and **Reflecting**. When these skills are used appropriately and in balance with one another, communication will be clear and effective. A helpful analogy is the playing of a piano. You play chords and bass with the left hand (the non-verbal attending skills) while the right hand provides melody and harmony (following and reflecting skills). Putting the two together in a harmonious way creates a piece that is pleasing to the ear. An effective communicator listens to the music of another and responds with integrated and often improvised music of his or her own.

The following chart outlines the three skill clusters and the skills specific to each. After the chart skill cluster is described with examples.

<b>Skills Cluster</b>	<b>Specific Skills</b>
<b>Attending Skills</b>	A Posture of Involvement Appropriate Body Motion Eye Contact Non-distracting Environment
<b>Following Skills</b>	Door Openers Minimal Encourages Infrequent Questions Attentive Silence
<b>Reflecting Skills</b>	Paraphrasing Reflecting Feelings Reflecting Meanings Summation Reflections

# Attending Skills

Attending Skills involve total presence -- to “tend” to (versus checking an attendance list in class). To tend to another is to care enough to work at being as present as possible to the person before you.

## A Posture of Involvement

- ☑ **Relaxed Alertness:** body posture expresses balance between “I feel at home with you and accept you” and “I sense the importance of what you are communicating to me and am intent on understanding you.”
- ☑ **Inclining One’s Body Towards the Speaker:** “on the edge of your seat” with attention
- ☑ **Facing the Other Squarely:** no “cold shoulders,” be at eye level, particularly if you are an authority figure
- ☑ **Maintaining an Open Position:** keeping legs/arms uncrossed
- ☑ **Positioning Appropriate Distance from Speaker:** not too close or too far

## Appropriate Body Motion

- ☑ **Being Moved by Another:** body movement in response to the speaker
- ☑ **Avoidance of Distracting Motions and Gestures:** do not move to stimuli other than speaker

## Eye Contact

## Non-Distracting Environment

- ☑ **Cut Environmental Distractions to a Minimum**
- ☑ **Remove Physical Barriers:** desks, intrusive furniture

# Following Skills

Following Skills involve following the line of communication of the speaker without getting in his or her way, but fostering the better telling of his or her story. Following Skills focus on remembering who the center of the communication is -- the speaker.

## Door Openers

- ☑ **A statement that describes the other's body language** ("You look like you're not feeling quite up to par")
- ☑ **An invitation to talk or continue talking** (Want to talk about it?)
- ☑ **Silence:** giving the other person room, time, and space to decide whether to talk or how to begin to talk or what to communicate about
- ☑ **Attending:** eye contact and posture of involvement

## Minimal Encourages

- ☑ "Comma comments" like...

Tell me more	You bet	Oh?
Yes	For instance?	Really...
I see	I get it	Gosh
Right	And?	Then?
Go on	So?	Sure

## Infrequent Questions

- ☑ **Open questions:** asking for more than yes or no, leaving space for the speaker to choose to fill in/respond to
- ☑ **One at a time**
- ☑ **Don't over-rely:** beware of dictating the direction of the conversation more than allowing the speaker the chance to address/retell/explore their situation in their own way

## Attentive Silence

Appropriate silence is positive. A good listener attends bodily, observes the speaker, reflects on what has been communicated -- content and feelings.

# Reflecting Skills

Reflecting Skills provide a mirror to the speaker. The listener restates the feeling and/or content of what the speaker has communicated and does so in a way that demonstrates understanding and acceptance.

## Paraphrasing

- ☑ **Concise Response** stating the essence of the speaker's content in the listener's own words.

## Reflecting Feelings

- ☑ **Feelings -- not only content:** focus on feeling words, observe body language, infer feelings from content.

## Reflecting Meanings

- ☑ **“You feel....because....” also “I feel.... because....”**  
Keep it concise and be open to clarification -- it's an invitation, not an ultimatum.

## Summary Reflections

- ☑ **Giving summary of what is heard** -- what speaker brought up. Not a summary of listener's thoughts of the matter. Summaries invite the speaker to respond, pull together summary data for themselves.

# PART THREE

## Building Relationships with Youth in Groups

### Working with Groups

Much of your work with young people may involve working with them in groups -- planning an activity, participating in a project, leading a group discussion or activity, going on a trip. More often than not, you will be working with teens in groups that have some purpose or goal to be achieved. Knowing how to work groups of young people is essential. This section brings you a variety of skills and suggestions for working effectively with groups.

Let's start with two basics for effective group work. Whatever the nature or purpose of your group, you will need to remember that there are basically two functions that have to be carried out in order for the group to work successfully. Those functions are called ***Task*** and ***Maintenance*** (Relationship) functions. ***Task*** functions are things that will enable the group to get the job done. ***Maintenance*** (Relationship) functions will help to maintain the relationships in the group so that not only does the job get done but everyone feels like a valued contributor.

The following charts outline some of the specific actions needed to carry out each of these functions. Try them out. Be aware that it is not your responsibility to ***do*** these functions but rather to ensure that they are being done (by you or group members) when necessary. You may notice that different members of the group will be doing these things naturally. Your job is to monitor and ensure the quality of the experience. Keeping an eye open for these functions will help you to better manage the life of the group.

# TASK FUNCTIONS

## (Getting the Job Done)

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### Initiating

Starting the discussion, proposing tasks, goals and actions; suggesting a procedure. *“Let’s write the ideas on the board and analyze them.”*

### Information or Opinion Seeking

Requesting facts or information about group concerns or opinions. *“How many people are going to attend?” “What do you all think about...?”*

### Information Giving

Providing facts or information about group topics or concerns. *“In the past five years, we have collected only 90% of the expected amount.”*

### Consensus Testing

Checking with the group to see how much agreement has been reached. *“Does anyone object to our doing this?” or “Could we go around quickly and let each person say a sentence about their view on this question?”*

### Summarizing

Pulling together related ideas; restating suggestions; offering a decision or conclusion for groups to consider. *“Those who have spoken thus far seem to have made these points...”*

### Clarifying

Interpreting ideas or suggestions; clarifying issues before the group. *“I think what she means is that we do not know if we can afford that program.”*

# MAINTENANCE FUNCTIONS

## (Maintaining Relationships)

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### Encouraging

Being friendly, warm and respectful to others; showing regard for others.

*"I am glad to see everyone here at the meeting."*

### Expressing Group Feelings

Sensing feelings within the group and sharing feelings with other members.

*"I think we all need a break."*

### Harmonizing

Reconciling disagreements; reducing tension; getting people to explore differences.

*"You would both be better off if you could be specific rather than just accusing one another."*

### Compromising

When your opinion is involved in a conflict, bring resolution through a compromise.

*"I appreciate Jane's idea, but I see things very differently. Since we're pretty evenly divided between these ideas, I'd like to suggest we look for another option or concentrate on developing Jane's."*

### Gate Keeping

Attempting to keep communication channels open, inviting everyone to participate, suggest procedures that permit sharing remarks.

*"John is trying to say something and is being cut off."  
"Mary, what do you think about what Paul is saying?"*

### Process Observing

Watching how the group is operating; sharing these perceptions with the group.

*"Haven't we gone pretty far afield in this discussion?"*

# Rules of Conversation

These are basic rules which may be shared with and modeled for your group as you begin the discussion. These will assist you in keeping on-track with a discussion and requiring “ownership” by the individual members.

- ➔ **Always speak for yourself, never for someone else.**  
“ I think . . .,” not we, he, she, they, some people think.
- ➔ **When speaking of someone who is in the group, address them personally.**  
Instead of “John over there,” say “You, John....”
- ➔ **Don’t ask questions when you are really expressing your own opinion.**  
Instead of saying, “Don’t you think that....”, say “I think that....”
- ➔ **Humor has its place, but don’t use it to avoid an honest, serious expression of your own feelings.**
- ➔ **For some people, answering a certain question may be too personal for them. Allow them to state their feelings about the question but then use your common sense in letting them pass.**

## Guidelines for Small Group Behaviors

Within a large group, young people often don’t get a chance to or feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts and feelings. This is why small groups can be so valuable. (It’s much harder to get lost or to hide in a group that numbers only eight.) As you know, much of what will be discussed and worked on will be within small groups. The following guidelines may help you and your group to get more out of the time you spend within the small group.

- If possible, meet the participants prior to the group gathering.
- Be prepared prior to the group gathering. Have all needed materials.
- Be sure that the environment is appropriate and supportive of the kind of activity or event that is planned.
- Be there as the group arrives. Unsupervised free time invites disruptive behavior.
- Greet the young people by name. Be genuinely happy to see them.

- Define the expected behavior for the kind of event they will be involved in.  
*(The difference between listening respectfully to a speaker or cutting loose during a wild game of volleyball.)*
- Be specific when giving instructions and setting expectations.
- Ask for an agreement. (verbal contract) *Ask whether everyone understands and accepts the guidelines for the experience. Give them the opportunity to opt out if they need to. Agree on any changes to the original plan before you begin and review the appropriate consequences for deviation from the agreed upon standards.*
- Remind the group of their agreement (if needed). *If disruptive behaviors arise, remind the group of the guidelines set at the beginning of the meeting. Do not single out one person to discipline. That is a nonproductive way to keep order. It also puts the young person on the spot in front of others and can be very frightening.*  
  
*Also, remind the group or individuals of guidelines with nonverbal cues: a serious look, a hand gesture, silence, etc.*
- Affirm desired behavior.
- Respond appropriately to disruptive behavior. *If the group's talking is unproductive or if you feel as if you've lost control of the group, try being silent and looking downward until the group quiets down. Often they will discipline themselves. Don't get into a power struggle. Don't give undo attention to an undesired behavior.*
- Don't forget to pray! Always keep in mind why we're doing what we're doing.

# Tips for Leading Effective Discussions

Discussions are an integral part of youth ministry programming. Young people like being given the chance to express themselves and to seek out the opinions of others. They enjoy insightful and interactive discussions. They dislike being talked down to or having a discussion manipulated toward a pre-determined end.

Good discussions will give young people the opportunity to *think* about a question and *decide* how he or she feels about the topic. By encouraging participation in meaningful discussions the you can help young people to open up, to find expression for those things they long to share, and to help them discover a community that is open to them and their ideas and dreams.

Here are some helpful hints for leading a discussion:

- Be familiar with the subject matter. Take some time in advance to prepare or review the kinds of questions you want to ask.
- Give a brief introduction to the subject matter if it has not already been done. Then ask the group questions, beginning with easy or non-threatening ones. Then move on to the more difficult or specific questions.
- Be sure to address everyone in the group by name. If the participants are not already familiar with one another, be sure they have name tags.
- Ask focused or specific questions. Try to frame your questions in the context of their lives. How something would affect their lives or the lives of their family or friends will elicit much more response than something theoretical or disconnected.
- Encourage the participants of the discussion to ask questions of one another. This will keep from having the focus continually come back to you and maintain the conversational tone of the discussion.
- Explore how the participants *feel* about the topic. This will keep the conversation interesting and meaningful and away from simply reporting the facts.

- Avoid questions that require a simple yes or no for an answer. If yes or no questions are necessary be sure to ask why or why not. The best tactic is to ask open-ended questions such as, “If you had to....,” “What do you think the most effective way....,” “If it were up to you how would you have handled....,” “What do you think or feel about this?”
- Understand and be comfortable with silence. This might seem contradictory to maintaining a good discussion. But there will be times when the participants will fall silent. It is good to know that this happens because they might be taking some time to think about their response. Another reason for silence is they may not have understood what you asked. Be aware and alert to their body-language and facial expressions in order to respond properly. Clarify when necessary.
- Avoid evaluating people’s answers with comments like “good answer,” “nice point,” etc. Help the other participants understand why responses should not be evaluated. This will serve to keep the atmosphere open and objective.
- When you ask questions, be sure to ask in kind and non-confrontational ways so as not to put anyone on the spot.
- Do not take disagreements personally; these are simply opportunities for the group to think about a variety of views on an issue.
- Be orderly and on target. Beware of tangents; people should eventually be able to call the group to task when they stray from the topic or when the group gets too noisy.
- Give everyone a chance to talk, but don’t exhaust the topic. Watch for signs of boredom.
- Throughout the discussion, and particularly at the end, summarize all that has been said, to check whether or not the subject was covered thoroughly and everyone had the opportunity to have their say. A variation on this idea is to ask if there are any participants who would like to summarize.

# Six Ways to Discipline Teens Without Losing Your Cool

Why should you read this? You got into youth ministry to enjoy the company of teens on a shared journey of faith, not to keep them in line and out of trouble. Why should you have to be the *heavy*, just another adult who comes down on them and reminds them of their place?

Because they need it and because you *are* the adult, the one with more experience; and you are, after all, responsible for them. Besides, they'll love you for it. Find that hard to believe? Go and rent the movie *Lean On Me* and you'll get a sense of what we're talking about. Or stop and think of the adults in your life that you have admired or looked up to. Did they let you get away with whatever you wanted? Not a chance. They were undoubtedly people who helped you learn about yourself and helped you set and define the limits that allowed you to grow.

This is what your teens need from you. Here are a few tips to keep you from being the tyrant you (and they) fear or the "easy mark" that will keep you from being effective.

- **Set Clear Limits.** Establish what behaviors are and are not acceptable. If you are able to do this in concert with your young people, it gives them ownership and a sense of responsibility for maintaining those limits. Make sure that everyone knows what the limits are, and be consistent in enforcing them.
- **Set Clear Consequences for Exceeding the Limits.** Just as important as the limits you have set are the results for going beyond them. As with the limits, establish the consequences for unacceptable behavior with the teens. Be sure that the consequence is reasonable and relevant.
- **Disapprove of the Action, Not the Person.** It is important that you differentiate between not liking a negative behavior and not liking the young person who did it. Be clear about why the behavior is inappropriate and how it affects you and other people.
- **Use Mistakes as an Opportunity for Learning.** Help them work through the behavior and its consequences and give them the opportunity to explore the alternative options for the next time.

- **Be Patient and Realistic.** Remember they are still kids. It's important to maintain the standards but be sure to do it in a way that allows them the room to breathe and grow. Always remember you are the authority but it is not something you have to prove by coming down hard and heavy. A deft and good-natured touch will have a lasting impact. Keep your sense of humor healthy and don't sweat the small stuff.
  
- **Always Show Them You Love Them.** Be sure they understand that you set these limits because you care and that maintaining a relationship with them is very important to you.