

Instructions: The following excerpts from “99 Thoughts for Small Group Leaders” have been selected for discussion on this weekend.

- *Please take turns reading aloud the different sections on these pages.*
- *Discuss each page where instructed. Select a scribe to document the main discussion points of the group.*
- *Some suggestions to think about for your discussions*
 1. *Are we doing this now?*
 2. *If so, could we do it better? How can we do it better?*
 3. *If not, should we do it, and if so, how can we make it happen?*
 4. *If we should not do it, why not?*

THE 5 ROLES OF A YOUTH GROUP LEADER

(take turns reading, don't need to discuss and document unless you want to)

What you are doing is a big deal—you will have to wear many different hats. Here are a few of the ones you will need to wear: **You are...**

1. A spiritual leader

Your students are listening to your faith and watching your life. They are counting on you having a genuine (not perfect) walk with Jesus. Always know that your faith is lived out loud by your actions and not just your words. Even when you slip up, you show spiritual leadership in the way you humbly and correctly deal with mistakes and strive for God's best.

2. A youth pastor/shepherd

Your students are counting on you to notice when they're gone. They expect you to call them out (in love) when they miss the mark on God's standards and their intended commitments. They are waiting for that personal challenge. You get to lead students into this deep-level relational and spiritual journey.

3. Part of the youth ministry team

Your leadership can greatly help or cause crippling hurt to the student ministry of your church. Be a team player and remember that you are part of the whole.

4. A teacher

Your students are counting on you to open God's Word and help them learn how to discover and live by God's plan. You don't need to have a doctorate in theology, be a stand-up comic, or have a Shakespearian stage presence. Your heart for God and your relationship with him will shine through your teaching.

5. A relational guide

The youth group is all about community. You are the facilitator of those connections and relationships. Students come to group carrying a variety of emotional baggage (dejection, rejection, insecurity) and high on life (life happened to go well that day, closeness with God, eager to grow in their faith). Caring for a group of students who bring such a wide variety of circumstances with them will require your flexibility, sensitivity, and wisdom. After all, how do we rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn simultaneously? Experience will bring the answer.

Hang in there!

INTRODUCTION TO RELATIONAL YOUTH MINISTRY

Relational youth ministry happens when you take any step toward building a friendship with a student in your youth group. It could be a big or small step—either way, it is an effort toward entering into a relational community and sharing life together.

I want our students known, loved, and cared for. It all takes time—and one of the entries into a teenager's life is to enter into their world in a tangible way. This can happen through some simple starting options.

- When you go to a student's sporting event, that's an example of an amazing start toward relational ministry.
- You couldn't make it to the game, but sent a text asking if they won or not? Still, that's a great move toward developing and deepening a relationship.
- You thought about them or prayed for them while they played? I'll take it!
- I spoke with a leader recently who told me about simple ways he connects with students—from road trips to campouts, from birthday parties to a "good luck on the SAT" text. All efforts make a difference and help toward building relationships.

Too often, youth group leaders think the key relational steps require a lot of time. Well, some weeks they may, and some weeks, small steps are huge. As a youth group leader, just commit to taking some steps to be relational and build community with the students God has entrusted to you!

*Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.
(1 Peter 4:8-9)*

Discussion Notes:

6 TEACHING TIPS TO HELP YOU HOLD THEIR ATTENTION

(discuss and document in the space after each point)

63. Humor

Humor breaks down barriers and disarms people to accept truth. The highs of laughter make the serious points much more compelling. Try to use humor in some form every week—remember you don't have to be funny to use humor. You can start by not taking yourself so seriously and share some funny moments that you experienced throughout the week.

64. Authenticity

Find ways to inject yourself into the lesson to demonstrate the very real journey of following Christ. Unpack your life with your learnings, struggles, and flaws. Show that you are human and not always the hero at the end of every story.

65. Object lessons

Object lessons help connect students to a particular concept. Recently, we were talking about the debt we owe Christ and I dropped several nickels on the floor. These coins became a compelling image of forgiveness and debt. A few weeks before that, I used a little water-dropper to illustrate the world's love, and a large water pitcher to illustrate God's overflowing love for us. Object lessons don't need to be elaborate, just simple. Simple is both clear and memorable.

66. Using multiple senses

Don't allow students to just hear you teach. If you want half an hour of their attention, you must engage more than their ears. For example, if you're talking about Jesus turning water into wine, pour them a glass of Cabernet. Just kidding. But a lesson on the crucifixion could be accompanied by a large nail being passed around the group. Don't just use the ears, consider their sense of touch, smell, and sight, too.

67. Testimony

Students will typically pay better attention to story. When someone shares from their experience it's a great attention-getter.

68. Call to action

A great way to connect with your students is to call them to something much bigger than themselves. Show them what could be and challenge them to take actions they didn't know they should take. Dare to challenge students to live a different life with practical actions connected to the teaching time.

4 RESPONSES WHEN A STUDENT SHARES SOMETHING BIG

When a student in your youth group opens up and shares a secret or a sin, many leaders have the instant tendency to panic or respond negatively. Here are four actions to take when you first hear the news.

74. Take a deep breath

Don't panic—set aside your own feelings of shock and try to make some clear-headed judgments. Stay calm; you can do this. In a weird way, this is what you were hoping would happen, that they would open-up their lives so your group could move below the surface.

75. Show up

Don't let a confession spook you away from helping students—unintentionally in busyness or intentionally because you're not sure how to handle it. Make sure you follow up with the student as soon as possible. Leaving them hanging may trigger regret and fear. They may regret sharing the secret with you and second-guess any further transparency. Your feedback is essential to their healing process. It also helps them realize they are loved and accepted despite their sin. They don't need you to absorb their problem as your own; they just want you to help direct them to a path of peace.

76. Go to God

Pray, pray, pray. Never underestimate the power of God to work in this situation. Beg for his wisdom. When my pastor talks about prayer, he says, "Prayer can do what God can do." Commit to seeking his power and presence in your life and in the life of the teenager.

77. Team up

You are not alone in this! Talk with your youth leader or a veteran youth group leader to help guide you through this situation.

Discussion Notes:

HOW TO HANDLE DISCIPLINE IN YOUTH GROUPS

Handling discipline is never easy. First, determine who really needs to be corrected. If it's a group problem, address it as a group. If it's a couple of people, pull them aside together. If it's an individual issue, address the individual. Here are a few ways to handle discipline issues:

82. Pull them aside

Don't pull off a major correction in front of the entire youth group; make sure you pull people aside after group time and begin a conversation. If you are fortunate enough to have a co-leader and the situation is distracting enough, the co-leader could remove the student and have a corrective conversation.

83. Be clear on what they're doing wrong

Address the problem directly. If it is causing a problem with the whole group, help the student to see how his or her actions are distracting everyone. Usually a student will know, but some are so self-absorbed, they don't realize how they are affecting those around them.

84. Show grace

Be quick to model grace. Be strong and firm but follow quickly with extra love and grace. The more seasoned the youth worker, the easier it is to show grace. If you are new to youth ministry, carefully temper your response. I will usually say something like, "You can never do that again in our youth group. I love you, but that was inappropriate and unacceptable. Cool? You know I love you, right?" Sometimes solving a behavioral issue will be that simple.

85. Look for and encourage correct behavior

When you see appropriate behavior, make sure you comment on it and encourage the student when he or she has a good night. Your affirmation will be meaningful and restorative. Chances are high that what is encouraged will be repeated.

86. Follow up later after a set amount of time

If appropriate, set a follow-up date to make sure that the student has made the appropriate changes. Use this time to build a stronger relational connection; this bond may prevent it from happening again—or if it does happen again, you'll have an open, relational door to help correct the behavior.

Discussion Notes:

6 WEEKLY TASKS OF A YOUTH GROUP LEADER

(discuss and document in the space after each point)

103. Pray for your youth group members

Pray for your students every week! You do the possible and ask God to do the impossible in their lives. Creating a list of their prayer requests during youth group will help you remember to follow up on how God is answering prayers and give you something to talk about every week.

104. Prepare to teach your youth group lesson

A good youth group leader doesn't arrive to youth group unprepared to teach (or facilitate the discussion). The earlier in the week you prepare, the fewer times you'll be caught off guard by a difficult-to-grasp Scripture, issue, or oddly written curriculum. Good preparation will always lead to better discussion.

105. Let God's Spirit lead you during; your youth group time

Be prepared to teach the lesson, but if you sense God doing something, move with it. Don't hide behind the Spirit and be unprepared, but don't fight the Holy Spirit stirring either. Other legitimate factors that may justify ditching your lesson may include:

- Crisis in a student's life—allow the group to minister to each other.
- Questions about Christian living—anytime students are asking questions about spiritual issues, a leader should weigh out the competing values: Do you finish the curriculum? Do you pause and address the students' questions? Can you do both?

106. Seek out the one

Be on the lookout for students who may need special attention. The signs can be subtle; they are more quiet than usual, more high-strung, or they use a word that hints at a repressed feeling or secret. Chances are good that someone will be a little needier each week. Seek out that student for a follow-up one-on-one conversation during the week.

107. Direct students toward next steps

Remember, the youth group is an open door to discipleship. Challenge your students to take a next step by growing on their own and serving in a ministry. Don't forget to praise them as they follow through.

108. Follow up with students who missed youth group

A short text or call goes a long way. Make quick contact with the students who missed. Maybe the door will open to a significant conversation, and at the very least they'll feel cared for. When you call, use their home phone number so one of the parents might answer. This parental opportunity can create a great chance to brag on their kid while you have their attention—that's great youth ministry.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY WITHIN YOUR VOLUNTEER TEAM

Healthy youth ministries have healthy teams. Here are some thoughts about the importance of unity within your team:

117. A unified vision makes for an impactful ministry

A great youth group leader is unified with the vision of the youth ministry and aligned with the purposes and goals of the church. If you're not on board with the vision, please help the health of your church and either get on board or get off the bus. Personal agendas birth divisiveness and impede a ministry's movement toward health. Even good agendas can conflict with the vision and be divisive. You can make suggestions about the direction of the ministry, but your job is to lead within the role and boundaries ultimately decided by the lead youth worker.

118. A unified team focuses on changed people rather than church politics

Interpersonal issues, personality conflicts, and church drama distract us from our all-important mission to walk with students. We are called to be relational and a spiritual influence to teenagers. Allowing your focus to be diverted by distractions robs your students of a focused leader. Rise above the noise and simply serve the teenagers within your youth group.

119. A unified heart is led by God's Spirit

A heart that is united with the church and student ministry isn't distracted by problems. There will always be problems. When a ministry is ensnared in strife, selfishness is present somewhere as it's the root of most problems. When we don't get what we think is right or best, the sulking, outbursts, resignations, and visits to complain to the senior pastor begin. Remember that the youth leader is put in place to provide vision and strategy. As difficult as it may be at times, align yourself under that vision for the greater good of the ministry. You may discover that your way, though good, was not the best path for reaching the end goal.

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Discussion Notes:

WHAT TO DO IF THE LINE BETWEEN LEADER AND FRIEND IS BLURRED

Imagine: the line between youth group leader and friend has blurred. Instead of being a responsible leader, you're now just "one of the guys." When this happens, respect drops. Your role as adult leader is compromised. Now what?

Well, it happens—please realize you're not the first person to fall prey to this trap. Here's a few items to restoring your rightful place as a loving adult leader:

120. Analyze the situation

How did this "blurring" happen? What's your role here? Have you done something that triggered this change? Were you lax in discipline or overly interested in being accepted? Were you focused too much on humor and hanging-out rather than leading them into deep discussion and spiritual depth? What happened to the respect level after that situation? Do you need to ask for forgiveness? Are you just being run over? Figure out how you got there so you can get out of it and avoid getting stuck there again.

121. Talk to a trusted few

It's wise to talk to a few of the students in your group and cast a vision of how you want to change and why you need their help and support. Explain that you want to have fun and be friendly, but you also want to be able to turn the corner into deeper conversations.

- Have "the talk" with your entire youth group and make sure the ones who you talked to first are modeling agreement to the others in the group.
- Apologize if necessary. Humility and authenticity always win.
- Share your vision and heart for them and how a healthy relationship with them is critical for everyone to keep growing.
- Set boundaries you and your students will follow to maintain each of your roles.
- Show them the path toward getting back to a healthy place: "I think it's time for us to move to a deeper place..." or "this group is more than hanging-out and having a good time..." or "it's probably my fault for not pushing us enough and playing too much..."

122. Be the leader

This is the time when you will have to lean a little on the leader side of the continuum and less on the friend side. After a course correction, be strong and faithful and lead your group. Have fun but keep a watchful balance to make sure the lines are clear. Guard your decisions so that "a leadership blur" doesn't happen again. Leading isn't easy, but you'll figure it out!

Discussion Notes:

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU MESS UP

It wasn't that long ago a youth group leader in our ministry called to talk about a big mistake he had made. It involved a group of guys, Buffalo wings, and a little restaurant called... Hooters. The next few hours after that phone call were critical—we were fortunate that it was an experienced volunteer who followed these steps to re-establish trust with the parents of his youth group. (By the way, most parents don't view Hooters as a "family restaurant.") Here's what we did:

123. Own it without excuses

When you make a mistake, own it! Honesty and openness are essential for rebuilding trust with the offended party. The last thing you want to do is to minimize what happened and pretend it isn't a big deal. It is a big deal, and it needs an owner. You committed the foul, so take your lumps.

124. Apologize for what you've done and start over

So you've been honest about what happened; now it is time to apologize for it and admit you were wrong. This isn't going to be easy, but it is a sign of humility, repentance, and your humanity. Don't try to appear perfect... it doesn't set a realistic example for your students to follow.

125. Earn trust back one good decision at a time

It might take some time, but try not to repeat the same bad decision and continue to make good decisions. You are a leader and it is time to get back to leading again. One good decision is to give detailed plans of your intentions with teenagers at least a week in advance. This will give parents an opportunity to address concerns and gain peace of mind that your plans are sound.

126. Keep in mind: The longer you've served and the more relational deposits you've made into the "longevity bank," the more you will be trusted despite an occasional mess up. Also, keep in mind, messing up does happen—you won't be the first.

Discussion Notes:

3 RULES FOR YOUTH GROUP LEADERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

We love our youth group leaders to use Twitter™ and Facebook™! It seems like everyone is enjoying the benefits of social networking—so youth group leaders can actually use the technology to benefit the group. However, from time to time we've had tough conversations and even had to remove youth group leaders for a season of leadership because of what they put online. Apply these three simple guidelines when updating your social networks:

147. Remember your post is public

Here's the big deal—a joke that is funny between a few friends might not be funny when it's taken out of context or displayed in public view. Remember that every picture, status update, or essay becomes completely public the second you push "submit."

You can never really take it back once it's out there, so be wise and discerning with everything you post.

148. Remember your post can/will influence students

Impressionable teenagers are checking out your profile. Because they look up to you, they are eager to make a connection. Since they're always on Facebook™, they'll almost always read what you post. But it is so much more than just reading, they are seeing what you write, what you value, and what you show yourself doing. It all influences students—the good, bad, and ugly. Of course, it works the other way as well; when you use social media positively, it can have a significant influence on them, too. Unfortunately, when we slip up publicly, it can devastate or confuse students personally.

149. Remember your post is a reflection on your student ministry/church

Your character and faith are reflected in every post that you make, so if you are doubtful about something, here's a simple rule to follow: DON'T POST IT.

Just like behavior on a youth ministry trip is a reflection on the church and student ministry, know that what you post adds or detracts to the reputation of the church and ministry—and ultimately Christ.

Discussion Notes:

THE APPRECIATION VACUUM

The reality of being a youth group leader is that it is often a thinly rewarded, thankless job. The following statements are true for most leaders:

150. You won't get thanked very often

In the craziness of a teenager's life, the last thing they'll think about is thanking you for investing in their life. You could be making a world of difference, but more often than not, it slips their mind. When they do say thanks, it could well be several years down the road. You may find thankfulness more in their actions than their words (invitations to their games, graduation, baptism, wedding, baby dedication). But, when the thankfulness eventually arrives, it will be both memorable and meaningful.

151. You will hear more about problems than praise

Being a youth group leader is a calling—if you're in it for the appreciation, you're going to quickly become disappointed. If you know that leadership is going to be a mixture of good, bad, and ugly, you'll likely last longer as a youth group leader. Deal with the problems and savor the praise. I've been chastised after doing great work in students' lives by parents upset by one minor detail. The good news is if you struggle with pride, youth ministry has a way of humbling (or breaking) you into submission and reliance on God.

152. Your strength must come from your walk with God

God will give you the strength you need and endurance to finish the race. youth groups are a huge investment of your life. Make sure your leadership role is constantly supported by your growing relationship with Jesus.

Discussion Notes:

3 REASONS WHY YOUR MINISTRY TO STUDENTS MAKES A DIFFERENCE

160. You are helping; teenagers grow spiritually

You are making a difference every week with your students because you are teaching and modeling the Word of God. You are loving them and helping them grow spiritually on their own, which is a gift that will last them a lifetime.

161. You are modeling Christian community

You are making a difference every minute you spend in ministry as a youth group leader. Every time you call or text a teenager to check up on them, they are experiencing one of the beautiful realities within the body of Christ—a life-on-life, spiritual relationship. Every minute teaching God's Word in your youth group, every minute giving a spiritual challenge over a Coke® or coffee, every minute comforting tearful students after a huge loss, you are building a caring community. All these actions are great examples of genuine fellowship.

162. You are developing your faith as you serve others

God is not just working through you to make a difference in a teenager's life, but he's also working in you to make a difference in your life. There are some spiritual truths that God will only teach us when we are serving others. We're never more like Jesus than when we serve others. The longer you're working with teenagers, the more you'll be like Jesus. Your ministry is making an eternal difference in others... and in you.

Congratulations!

Discussion Notes: