

EQUIPPING YOUR SUPPORTIVE ADULT LEADER TEAM

Supportive Adult Leaders are the heart of your LCMS Youth Gathering group. Selecting, equipping, and training them well is one of the best ways to ensure a fantastic event for everyone. In this resource we will cover:

- Selecting Your Adult Leaders
- Thinking about Risk Management
- Parents as Adult Leaders
- Adult Leader On-Site Support
- Sample Youth Gathering Adult Leader Job Description
- "What is a Supportive Adult?" Bible Study for Adult Leaders

SELECTING YOUR ADULT LEADERS

Choosing adults to serve as leaders with your church's group participating in the LCMS Youth Gathering is both difficult and a blessing. You are inviting someone into a ministry commitment which will last a year, or longer, depending on your planning timetable. We know it can be a sacrifice of family time, vacation hours, and energy for Adult Leaders. Every congregation has a different group of people in charge of selecting Adult Leaders. It may be a pastor, other church worker, board chair, or Primary Adult Leader for your group.

For some congregations, they have more adults than suggested in the Youth-to-Adult Ratio. For these congregations, it can be difficult to know which adult will be the best fit for your young people and the experience. Saying "no" can be a disappointment and is difficult when an adult truly cares for the youth.

For other congregations, it might be an exhaustive search for an Adult Leader to attend. Adults may be unable to commit early enough, have other obligations, or be physically limited. Yet we know Adult Leaders are supportive adults tasked with the honor of walking with young people through this experience and helping point them to God's Word and teachings.

Taking the time to carefully select Adult Leaders shows youth and the congregation that you take the role seriously. It speaks to the importance of the supportive adults to healthy youth ministry. Here are some tips for your selection process.

- Create a job description (see the sample provide)) that fits exactly what you are expecting and clearly defines their role before, during, and after the Gathering.
- If you don't have enough Adult Leaders asking to attend, ask youth, other staff members, church council, and other leaders about adults who they believe would serve well or are adults who could be developed into solid leaders. Once you have that pool, discuss each candidate, and particularly lift up



leaders who can or do support youth and youth ministry for the long term, not just this event. Decide who you will ask first, second, and so on.

- Sometimes there are more adults who desire to attend than your ratios allow: create an application process where interested adults share their motivations for serving. When receiving the applications, sort through, pray over, and make the decisions for who will be on the team with your church's leaders.
- Provide the adult with the job description and ask them to prayerfully consider the position. Give them a deadline for when you need to have an answer. Give the Holy Spirit time to work on their heart.
- Ask them to talk about the invitation with others who know them well to discern if they would be blessed and could bless others through serving in this position.
- Graciously accept a "no" and move on to the next adult on your list. Do not guilt them into further consideration but do ask if they want to be considered in the future.
- If they say "yes", thank them and pray with them asking God's blessing on their service. Inform them of any initial meetings they should expect to be part of to further prepare them for their service.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT LEADERS

- LCMS Youth Ministry requires all Adult Leaders at the Gathering be:
 - at least 21 years of age and
 - a member in good standing of your congregation, with written approval by your pastor (that document will be a part of the registration materials)
- Although not collected, background checks should be mandatory for any staff or volunteer who works with minors in all ministry settings.
 - Please check with your congregation's leadership and your insurance to know any policies about background checks, training, and expectations for Adult Leaders. For example, some congregations require someone to be a member for more than a year before they can serve in youth ministry.
 - See protectmyministry.com/lcms to set up a free account that will allow your church to access reduced pricing for background checks and free training for Adult Leaders.

PRIMARY ADULT LEADER VERSUS ADULT LEADER

The LCMS Youth Gathering staff and planners ask that you select one adult to serve as your Primary Adult Leader. This person serves as the liaison between Gathering planners and the other leaders, youth, parents, and congregations. The Primary Adult Leader is responsible for registering the group through the Gathering Office. Typically, they also take on making the lodging and travel plans as well.

The Primary Adult Leader of the group leads the other Adult Leaders in accomplishing tasks like managing Community Group Time, meals, on-site logistics, and more. All adults are important to a successful Gathering, but having a Primary Adult Leader helps you have a successful Gathering experience.



QUESTIONS TO ASK IN SELECTION

If you are having difficulty choosing Adult Leaders, consider the following questions that might assist in the process. Does the adult who is being selected and asked to serve, especially if they will serve as the Primary Adult Leader, have...

- an understanding of what it means to be responsible with minor youth?
- a positive reputation within your congregation?
- previous experience with youth?
- respect from your church's youth?
- good organizational skills?
- a history of modeling faith practices, including regularly attending worship and Bible study?
- the ability to manage people in stressful or unplanned situations?
- the time availability for pre- and post-Gathering events and the entirety of the Gathering?

You should also consider...

- Is this person willing to submit to all risk management training and processes, including doing a background check?
- Do your church's leaders have a vision for youth ministry which would influence what kind of Adult Leaders would need to be selected?
- Is your church willing to mentor, train, and equip adults to serve as supportive youth leaders, especially if they are less experienced?
- Is this an adult who will continue the relationships developed at the Gathering into the future?
- If this adult is a parent, will they equally care for all youth participants and allow their youth to have a healthy, challenging experience?

Take time to pray with church leaders and youth about the selection process, asking God for His wisdom and guidance.

THINKING ABOUT RISK MANAGEMENT

Everything we do throughout our day has a little bit of risk to it. As an Adult Leader at the Gathering, it's important to think through the risks involved so that you can manage them and are prepared before an event takes place.

- It's a good idea to surround yourself with other Adult Leaders that can make good decisions. Make sure you have enough adults (please see the [Youth-to-Adult Ratio](#)). Choose Adult Leaders who can communicate well and work together.
- It is important to spend time as an Adult Leader team in advance. Talk through the expectations of leaders. It may seem like a lot but talk through what you might do in case of an injury or other emergency. Talking it through in advance helps everyone to contribute to providing the safest possible environment.



- Finally, make sure you always have an adult who is getting enough sleep. It might rotate, but when adults don't get a lot of sleep, it makes it harder to make good decisions.

We also can't stress enough the importance of background checks for all adult volunteers and staff in your church. LCMS has contracts with AAIM and Protect My Ministry. You can connect to them through the [LCMS website](#) or use another reputable companies that you can find to help you do the background checks and even train volunteers.

PARENTS AS ADULT LEADERS

Those who are attending as both parent and Adult Leader at the Gathering will face some unique challenges. It is important that parents, other Adult Leaders, and teens need to have clear expectations about how it will work. Every teen should have the space to participate and be able to earn the trust to make independent decisions. Parents should be willing to respect and treat every youth in the same way, regardless of if they are a parent or not. A few simple things can help:

- If possible, do not place a teen in the same community group as their parents. This allows the teen to be honest and to build a relationship with other supportive adults. Expectations for being responsible and self-directed should be true for all teens equally.
- While there will be times when that Adult Leader will function as parent, this is not their primary role over the days of the Gathering. When exercising the role of Adult Leader, you will need to be fair in dealing with all youth. You will need to resist the urge to be either more lenient or more restrictive because of your own teen's participation.

There is an art to relating to your teens while at the Gathering. It is important to be sure that parents aren't doing more for their child than you would do for other youth, including managing the stuff they need, their food, or their Session choices.

- If there is trouble, a parent may not be the right person to handle a conflict with their child. If you can avoid being the one to discipline your child, please attempt to do so. If you need to provide discipline, make sure to treat all youth involved the same. Avoid being harder or more lenient on your child than the other youth.
- Parents can be uniquely in tune with the changing moods and needs of teens. This can help you help youth participants navigate the Gathering experience in a healthy, balanced way.
- Parents may also be in a great spot to offer wise counsel to other teens in the group. It's important that they do not divulge personal information about their child which should be kept confidential. It is important to safeguard the relationships between parents and children.

ADULT LEADER ON-SITE SUPPORT

Adult Leaders are to be the first line of supervision and in relationship with the teens in their groups. Even though adults are there to serve the youth participants, there are plenty of resources on site for Adult Leaders as well. We want to provide you with networking opportunities, chances to learn and connect with God's Word as well. Here are a few of the on-site supports for adults at the Gathering:

CARE AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

HelpLine and Gathering Ambassadors will have resources for emergency or crisis procedures and may serve as a connection to emergency personnel and the care crew. We have a Care Team that can provide a listening ear and that will be found around the programming areas. We also have a Crisis Team. This team is made up of professionals prepared to help in critical situations requiring special assistance.

HOTEL SUPPORT

Each hotel has an assigned Gathering Ambassador who will be designated on a sign in the lobby. They will host a morning meeting each morning. Gathering Ambassadors serve as a liaison between the hotel management and community groups as an arbitrator only when assistance is required. Adult Leaders are to be the first line of supervision and in relationship with the teens in their groups.

ADULT LEADER REST AREA

The Gathering will again host an Adult Rest Area at the convention center which Adult Leaders can get a charge, receive information about the Gathering and Youth Ministry, and have an opportunity to rest.

AFFINITY GROUPS

Affinity Groups give Adult Leaders a chance to connect with other Adult Leaders who are in similar ministry situations, like urban, rural, near a military base, and experienced the impact of suicide. Each one is a 30-minute guided discussion to share best practices and ideas. We don't want one leader or expert, but just a good open discussion. When possible, we do invite people to join who might have additional resources to bring.

ADULT SESSIONS

These are breakout sessions held throughout the day in the convention center specifically for our Adult Leaders. Topics can include the 7 Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry, youth ministry program development, and how to approach difficult topics. There will also be sessions which mirror youth sessions to help you further those conversations.



SAMPLE YOUTH GATHERING ADULT LEADER JOB DESCRIPTION

LEADERSHIP CRITERIA

No matter how sophisticated the program may be, the success or failure of the LCMS Youth Gathering is largely dependent on the qualities displayed by a congregational group's leadership team.

- Must be at least 21 years old at the time of the Gathering.
- Agree to the applicable Adult Leader Job Description.
- Able to minister to the needs and dynamics of the group attending.
- Be approved by _____ (pre-determine whose approval Adult Leaders may need to shepherd the youth to the Gathering. Pastor? Elders? Youth Board? Steering Committee?)
- Financial commitment of _____ (pre-determine what expenses your Adult Leaders will be responsible for, or if the church will cover their cost)
- Submit all necessary forms (found on Gathering website) by the time online data entry begins as set by the Primary Adult Leader.

AN ADULT LEADER SERVING WITH OUR YOUTH FOR THE LCMS YOUTH GATHERING IS EXPECTED TO SERVE...

As a Supportive Adult, not a Chaperone. This means...

- Setting an example of faith in your worship, prayer, Bible study, and service to Christ and His church and church leadership as you take on this role.
- Intentionally building a personal relationship with every youth in our group, even those you may not know.
- Being honest, listening well to youth, and using confession and absolution when needed.
- Establishing a relationship with the parents of each youth. Parents will need to be kept well-informed and encouraged regarding their involvement in our group's pre-Gathering activities, with what is happening at the Gathering, and with any post-Gathering activities.
- Enabling and empowering each youth in your group to experience the journey to the fullest—spiritually, relationally, emotionally, etc.
- Actively encouraging each youth with their commitment and involvement in our group's pre-Gathering activities, while at the Gathering, and with any post-Gathering activities.
- Promoting trusting and loving relationship building with your group's youth and Adult Leaders and identifying and working through conflicts that arise.

By having a "first-fruits" vs. "leftover" attitude. This means...

- Making the youth and Gathering preparations a priority and investment.
- Taking a leadership role for Gathering planning and fundraising.
- Preparing before the Gathering so that you can be fully present and at all the programming.



- Readily sacrificing your own desires and wants in order to do what is best for your youth and whole group, rather than what is best for you.
- Attending ALL pre-Gathering Adult Leader meetings for which you are available. If you are unable to attend a meeting, it is expected that your absence will be clearly communicated.
- Following your Primary Adult Leader’s direction before, during, and after the Gathering.
- Taking an active role in post-Gathering activities and celebrations back home after the Gathering.

As a trusted authority yet one that may not have all the answers immediately. This means...

- Saying “let me look into that” when presented with a difficult question and following back up.
- Receiving the support of the Primary Adult Leader and fellow Adult Leaders as you work within the body of Christ.
- Taking time to personally rest and grow in Christ before and during the Gathering. This includes being regularly in worship, Bible study, and prayer.
- Making use of resources, such as personal and small group coaching and care services, provided to Adult Leaders before and during the Gathering.
- Participating in the Gathering with a growth mindset, ready to receive and/or give knowledge and resources.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS ONE OF OUR GROUP’S ADULT LEADERS, MIGHT INCLUDE:

(add anything specific and unique to your church’s process—see sample ideas below)

- Attend or plan our specific fundraising events.
- Provide consistent communication with our church about pre, during and after Gathering activities.
- Assist our youth with creating a post-Gathering thank you process.
- Lead two pre-Gathering parent meetings with your community group.
- Work with our church’s treasurer to track fundraising income, create a budget, and reconcile expenses after the Gathering.
- Assist with securing lodging, food, and travel arrangements.

AS AN ADULT LEADER YOU WILL BE SERVED BY OUR CHURCH IN THESE WAYS:

(add anything specific and unique to your church’s process—see sample ideas below)

- Consistent prayer as you serve.
- Financial support in this way:
 - All registration, travel, lodging, and meal expenses will be covered. Any additional incidental expenses are each Adult Leader’s responsibility.
 - Insurance covering your participation time at the Gathering.
- Care support in this way:
 - A parent representative will check in with you regularly before and during the Gathering to see how you are doing.
 - Our pastor will connect with you to provide you with encouragement and counsel before and during the Gathering.



PRIMARY ADULT LEADER ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS:

- Lead all pre-Gathering events, fundraisers, team builders with students, parents, and other trip Adult Leaders.
- Work alongside your pastoral staff and other church leaders to establish your team.
- Lead the logistics of the gathering: managing your group's registration, booking transportation, meals, excursions, etc. Collaborate with your students, parents, and other Adult Leaders to make appropriate decisions about all the logistics and details.
- Pray! Let the Holy Spirit guide your every move of this leadership experience. Ask for help when you need it from your pastor and other church leaders. You're not alone!



“WHAT IS A SUPPORTIVE ADULT?” BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULT LEADERS

CHAPERONE VS. SUPPORTIVE ADULTS...WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

The congregation has given the Adult Leader the awesome opportunity to serve the youth of the church. But for some, it may be hard to distinguish exactly what your role is. We desire all Adult Leaders to be supportive adults, rather than chaperones.

Consider the Adult Leaders who had the biggest impact on you as a teen. What was true about those adults for you? What impact did that have on your life? If you didn’t have those adults around you, what do you wish you could have had?

Distinguishing between a chaperone and a supportive adult can be difficult. They are both good and important jobs, and it can be difficult to find the right lines between the two. Let’s dig in more by answering these questions. You can have each person write their answers on a post it and then place them on two sheets up front. You can have one person writing while others shout out answers – or have them all write and plaster. Do what works best for the group.

- What do chaperones say?
- What do chaperones do?
- What do supportive adults say?
- What do supportive adults do?

Have everyone look them over and discuss what the key differences are. Here may be some key ideas if they struggle to answer...

CHAPERONE

Desires to protect
Temporary
Discipline
Control and Enforce Rules
Disconnected from the Programming
Transportation
Concerned with Risk Management
Lecture
Get kids back in one piece, the same as they got them

SUPPORTIVE ADULTS

Desire to Build Relationship
Long-Term
Disciple
Listen and Observe
Lifelong Learners Who Process Alongside Youth
Affirm Positives and Address Concerns
Consistent
Develop, Nurture, Challenge and Grow the Mental, Emotional and Spiritual Shape of Youth
Responsible, Godly Adult
Ensure Wholistic Safety—Emotionally, Physically, Mentally, and Spiritually



Read Luke 19:11–27

- When God entrusts us with his treasures (youth), what does He desire of us?
- What actions can we take that will help us multiple the treasures God has given us in our youth?
What can prevent their growth?
- What does this mean here and now? At the Gathering?
- What expectations do you have entering each day of the Gathering?
- How do you help the youth make the Gathering manageable without being overwhelming?
- How do you challenge the youth to take in the experience without getting caught up in shopping, sight-seeing, and “stuff”?
- What 2 or 3 goals do you have for yourself at the Gathering to be a Supportive Adult? Be specific.
What can you say or do that specifically reflects the goals you have set for yourself?

If you want to dig more into being a supportive adult, you can look at the material on YouthESource on the [Z Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry](#).

