



## BUILDING COMMUNITY WITH YOUTH AND ADULTS

We want every church to develop a group that has solid relationships, trust, and grace. Every adult leader should desire to be a supportive adult to the youth in at the Gathering. This might be intimidating at times, so here are some tools for you to get beyond shallow questions like “How’s school?”. Instead we hope it empowers you to initiate relationships with students and demonstrate your interest in them.

Supportive Adults are a critical part of healthy youth ministry. These adults should regularly check in, provide a listening ear, and develop mutual trust with a young person. They should model and encourage faithful worship, Bible study, and prayer. Supportive adults show consistent, genuine interest and find ways to celebrate and encourage them. All this helps each young person to feel seen and known by an adult who has their best interest at heart.

Work with your other adult leaders to identify how you might work together to ensure every youth has an adult they can count on. If you can, meet regularly together as adults in preparation for caring for your youth.

Engaging with students is overwhelming for many adults. Teenagers seem to speak their own language, observe their own social codes, and in some cases behave as a culture unto themselves. As an adult, it is not your role to become part of the culture, but to be an effective ambassador. Listen, share, laugh, give, and take delight in the students in your care. Here are a few ideas that can get you started.

### Consider These 10 Tips for Supportive Adults Engaging Youth

1. Don't stand in a corner and wait for a teen to talk to you. Be bold and brave. Approach teens standing alone or teens in groups and introduce yourself. "Hi, I'm\_\_\_\_\_. I should know your name but I'm sorry I don't." This is scary but remember, you're not in high school and you don't have to be cool... just genuine, kind, caring. Be yourself! Teenagers can smell inauthenticity.
2. Ask about safe things and then listen for connections. What year are you in high school? Where do you live? What's the best thing about your life right now? What inspires you? (There are more listed below and a “game” to help you get started). Be genuine about your interest and earn the right to hear their vulnerabilities. Don't dig too deep too soon, but over time, continue to listen and learn about them to earn that right.



3. At youth events, join in as much as possible. Be a participant with youth: play games, be in discussion groups, spread out. Don't just sit on the sidelines and watch.
4. Affirm teens honestly every way you can: you're having a great hair day, I noticed you are so comfortable talking to others, I noticed you always willing to help, I noticed you seem to be a great listener. Even if they seem confident, teens need to hear positive things you see in them.
5. If there are 10 teens in the room tonight, make sure you talk to all 10 tonight. If that's too much, make sure each teen gets a personal conversation with at least one supportive adult.
6. Don't try to be a teen but don't go parental if you're not their parent. Listen, affirm, if you feel life advice is needed, ask permission to give it: "Would you like to know how a parent might think in this situation?" Even: "Is it more important for me to just listen right now or are you looking for guidance on that?"
7. Build bridges between parents and teens: do listen but don't take sides. When you can, help teens understand what it means to honor parents, even when it is hard. A good question to ask is... "Wow, what do you think God wants you to do in this situation?"
8. Men, build relationships with guys. Women, build relationships with girls. When you are building relationships across gender be very sure to keep the topics safe and be clear about healthy boundaries. In general, never be alone with teens or plan outings alone. Always have parental permission for any outing with your group.
9. Always listen more than you talk. Listen for understanding. Ask open-ended questions. Don't share your wild teenage experiences to impress teens or build common ground unless something you learned could be of benefit in a situation they have discussed.
10. Always be looking for ways to protect teens in groups. Help engage those who are more hesitant. Steer the group away from put downs or sarcasm. Make sure that you correct students away from the group if possible. In general, never yell, use profanity or ever use any kind of physical discipline.



## Three Ways to Engage Youth

Talking with youth can sometimes be a challenge, especially when you are getting to know them. It can be additionally challenging when you are doing it in a group. Here are three ways you can get a conversation going with your youth.

### Either / Or

This is a forced value or forced choice game similar to “Would You Rather” style question games. Explain that they may sometimes feel like they are neither, but they "get" to choose one or the other. You can do this casually at a meal or involve them physically by having them go to opposite sides of the room. Either way, have people share with a small group or with the whole group for what reason they choose what they did.

You may preface each choice with a question (i.e. Would you rather travel in a Hot air balloon or sports car? Or when you shop for groceries are you...Random/Deliberate?) or simply have read the two items and let their minds fly with the reasons why they might be Either/Or.

- Morning person / Night person
- Planner / Wing-er
- Plain / Jelly-filled
- Cake/ Pie
- Phoebe / Monica (from *Friends*)
- Dwight / Jim (from *The Office*)
- Extrovert / Introvert (This is how you recharge your energy stores, either with people or alone.)
- Random / Deliberate
- iPhone / Android
- Netflix / Amazon Prime/Disney Plus
- Hot air balloon / sports car
- Mountain Cabin / Oceanfront cottage
- Sunset / Sunrise

Come up with your own creative Either/Or choices. The possibilities are endless!



## 20 Questions to Get Started

This is extremely effective tool for listening and engaging. Start off by asking a basic question. For example, "Sarah, what is something you like to do?" Then after she responds, take a bit of information and ask questions about that.

**Sarah:** "I like to listen to music."

**You:** "What type of music do you like to listen to?"

**Sarah:** "Ed Sheeran, The Weeknd, Taylor Swift, and Olivia Rodrigo"

(Note: take 1 piece of information and ask about it.)

**You:** "Oh yeah, what is your favorite Taylor Swift song?"

**Sarah:** "The whole folklore album is amazing."

**You:** "What about it is amazing?"

The great thing about this game is that you can truly invest in a relationship and not know a thing about Taylor Swift. You are showing interest and care about their life and passions. This game is almost foolproof if you're committed to asking questions as long as the response provides more to ask about.

See if as you ask questions if you can find connection between the student and yourself. If you keep asking, they'll keep talking and eventually you will find some commonality that will help you build relationship. Or you will simply get to know them better. Keep your interest up, because students will know if you are apathetic. Avoid making it sound like it's an interrogation!

Practice asking a student from your church questions and see where you can go with it. Set some goals like, "I'm going to talk with a new student each time I'm at church." Soon enough you will be engaged in their lives and have the opportunity to share your faith or speak truth.



## 9 Conversation Starting Questions:

1. What's your favorite food? Favorite sport? Type of music?
2. Which is better: the mountains or the beach? Playing video games or sports? Hamburgers or hot dogs? Coke or Pepsi?
3. What's your family like? How many brothers/sisters do you have?
4. Who's your best friend? What do you like to do together?
5. What's the best movie you've watched lately?
6. If the earth was destroyed and you were able to escape, which three people and what three things would you take with you?
7. If you go anywhere, where would you go?
8. What activities are you involved in?
9. If you could do anything this year, what would you do?

## 10 Questions to Take Your Conversation to the Next Level

The point of talking with students is to develop a trusting relationship with them. After finding out their fun facts, begin asking questions that will move your conversations deeper.

Note: You should not move through all levels of questions in the first night or use all questions with the same youth. Building relationships takes time and shows that you are committed to developing your understanding of the youth. Earn the right to hear their fears, vulnerabilities, stories and celebrations. Respect and trust are mutually earned.

1. What is your big dream in life? What hurdles are preventing you from reaching that goal, and how do you plan to overcome them?
2. Who can you be really honest and your authentic self with and who you can trust to be open and honest with you?
3. Who or what has recently impacted your life? How has it changed you?
4. What life-lessons have you learned? How did you learn them?
5. Do your friends challenge you to be better? Do you challenge them?
6. What one thing do you want adults to know about you or about your generation? What could adults learn from teens today?
7. What types of situations create uneasiness? Fear? Doubt?
8. What about the Youth Gathering might be a brand-new experience for you? How do you react in new situations? What are you hoping to learn through this experience?
9. How might our adult leaders help you get the most out of this experience?
10. What can you uniquely bring to the group and to the experience of the Youth Gathering? Leadership? Humor? Encouragement?



## Other Ideas for Engaging Supportive Adults for Your Youth

- Search online for Group Building Games, Team Challenge Games and other group mixer games! You can also check out YouthESource (<http://www.youthesource.com/category/free-resources/activities-games/>) or [downloadyouthministry.com](http://downloadyouthministry.com).
- Go on a pre-gathering retreat overnight to bond! Go to another church in town and stay overnight, playing games, diving into the pre-gathering Bible studies, and having great conversations.
- Go to a local escape room for a youth ministry outing. You learn so much about your team in that 60 minutes of time crunching mystery!
- Have your both youth and adults take the Myers Brigg personality quiz at <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test> discuss how this information helps you work together. Who in your group are the early risers or the night owls? Who is a planner and who just goes with the flow? How might this help avoid conflict in the future?