



PARENTS AS ADULT LEADERS

If you are a parent of a youth attending the LCMS Youth Gathering, and an adult leader on the trip, you face some unique challenges. Whether you are a called church worker or a volunteer taking your son or daughter to Houston, you might think through a few things before you attend the Gathering.

At the Gathering next summer, you will have the challenge of being both a parent and adult leader, each with their own potentially conflicting expectations. As a DCE, I have in the past asked parents to be a part of the team of adult leaders at a Gathering. In those situations, I made sure to do a couple of key things.

- First, I did not place their own teen in their community groups.
- Second, I made sure to talk them through what it means to have others as the primary leaders for their own teen.

These two steps were meant to provide boundaries for parents and teens as they participated in the Gathering.

Now, you might be the only leader for your group, and you may have to be directly responsible for your teen. The same principles still apply; however, you just need to find a different strategy. Your son or daughter will still need to have space to participate like the rest of the youth at the Gathering. They will need to know that you will respect their freedoms in the same manner that you would respect those of other youth.

While there will be times that you will be there for your teen as a parent, this is often not your primary role over the days of the Gathering. Expectations for being responsible and self-directed should be true for all teens equally. 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. Easier said than done, right?



There is an art to relating to your teen while at the Gathering. There will be moments that your child will need you as a parent. There will also be times they will not want to be parented. It is important to be sure that you aren't doing more for your child that you would do for other youth, including managing the stuff they need, their food, or their session choices. Yet as a parent, you can be uniquely in tune to the changing moods and needs of your child. This can help you help them navigate the Gathering experience in a healthy, balanced way.

If there is trouble, you may not be the right person to handle a conflict with your child. If you can avoid being the one to discipline your teen, attempt to do so. Let that be handled by others. 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.

There may be times that you will find yourself offering counsel to other teens in the group. In those moments, make sure to not divulge personal information about your teen child which you might know because you are their parent. That is a good rule regardless, as it provides appropriate confidentiality, but is even more important to safeguard your relationships between parents and teens on the trip.

A few years ago, I took a large group to a Gathering and used multiple parents as adult leaders. One mom in particular had twin boys on the trip and was a leader for a small group of girls. She left the Gathering as a "bonus" mom for that group. In the months following the Gathering, it was clear that she was able to balance out her desire to be there for her boys with her role as small group leader for a group of teen girls. A great balance and an opportunity to invest in all youth from your group, is our hope for you as a parent attending the LCMS Youth Gathering in 2022.