

# BASICS FOR TEACHING YOUTH

## PURPOSE

This workshop introduces participants to the characteristics of adolescent learners, a variety of teaching methods, and the role of adults as facilitators.

## OUTLINE

- I Welcome and Introduction (*10 minutes*)
- II Understanding Youth Learners (*30 minutes*)
- III The Facilitator's Role in Teaching Youth (*35 minutes*)
- IV Effective Methods and Settings (*30 minutes*)
- V Closing (*15 minutes*)

## PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

- Review the entire workshop, select options and prepare examples.
- On the left side of a white board or newsprint, print: Physical; Intellectual; Spiritual; Social/Emotional.
- Photocopy handouts (1 copy each of C-1, 2, 3, 4 and 1 copy per participant of A, B, D, and E ) and gather the following materials:
  - newsprint, whiteboard or chalkboard
  - markers or chalk
  - tape
  - blank paper or individual sheets of newsprint
  - pens or pencils
  - modeling clay and a larger figurine or object (optional: see activity III)

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## CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

### I Welcome and Introduction (*10 minutes*)

Welcome the participants and express appreciation for their commitment to learning how to be more effective facilitators with youth.

Identify where the facilities are and point out that there will be a break halfway through the workshop, making sure that they know it is okay to take a break any time they need one. This practice is a good way to model showing concern for the physical needs of learners.

Invite each participant to briefly share his or her name, home church, and how they are involved in youth ministry.

Read 1 Timothy 4:12–16 and offer an opening prayer or invite the group to sing a short praise song.

Review the purpose and outline of the workshop by explaining that your work together will be structured around the following four basic elements:

1. understanding who adolescents are and their issues
2. understanding your role as a facilitator with youth
3. using creative teaching methods and planning
4. understanding the place of curriculum materials, setting and resources.

### II Understanding Adolescents (*30 minutes*)

**A.** Explain that one of the first steps of being an effective facilitator with adolescents is to remember what it was like to be an adolescent ourselves and then proceed with one of the options below.

**Option A:** Tell a brief story that describes what you were like in your freshman year of high school—some of the interests and life-concerns you had, and some of your personality characteristics. Then, divide the group into pairs or triads, and invite them to take 5 minutes to share their stories at that same age. Share in the larger group as time allows.

**Option B:** On newsprint, white board or Power Point slide, print the following “conversation starters”:

- |                     |                       |                  |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| ▸ Favorite Activity | ▸ Embarrassing Moment | ▸ Greatest       |
| ▸ Coolest Fad       | ▸ Highest Hope        | ▸ Accomplishment |
| ▸ Biggest Question  | ▸ Darkest Fear        |                  |

Form pairs or triads and invite discussion of each conversation starter as if participants were the age of the young people they are currently teaching. Explain that answers may well be different for those working with younger youth compared with those working with older youth. The goal is to hear each other and not comment on or evaluate each others’ responses. Share in the larger group as time allows.

**B.** Divide the group into new pairs and distribute paper or newsprint to each pair. Ask each pair to draw a quick “body outline” that takes up the whole page. Give them 5 minutes to discuss and list around the body outlines the types of life-concerns an adolescent might be experiencing. Hang the posters on the wall around the room and ask each pair to share two concerns from their posters.

Explain that there are a variety of ways to try to capture an understanding of adolescence. Review the list (Physical; Intellectual; Spiritual; Social/Emotional) and explain as follows:

- Physical development includes things we might normally consider part of puberty as well as basic physical coordination and skills.
- Intellectual development includes what is generally understood as intelligence and also the ability to comprehend abstract thought.
- Spiritual development is the ability and interest in understanding and applying faith to life.
- Social/Emotional development is about relationship with self and others, as well as perspective on one’s place in the world context.

Distribute and review Handouts A and B, “Discipleship Formation & Older Elementary/Early Adolescents” and “Discipleship Formation & Older Adolescents.”

Explain that the developmental information is a general guide; along with differences in personality and life experiences, people develop at different rates and somewhat unevenly. For example, a 14-year-old boy might be beginning physical changes related to puberty but be advanced intellectually and a 16-year-old girl might be advanced physically but emotionally immature.

Invite discussion of connections between the concerns they identified and the development information you have presented.

### III The Facilitator's Role in Teaching Youth *(35 minutes)*

**Note:** *If you have a group of larger than 5 people, you might consider breaking into smaller groups for this discussion. If so, allow the smaller groups about five minutes for their discussions, and then reconvene for sharing the highlights.*

**A.** Invite discussion of the following statement: “Good youth facilitators sees youth as partners with them in learning about the gospel.” Remind them that there are no “right responses,” rather participants are encouraged to offer whatever responses, ideas and thoughts the statement triggers for them.

**Optional activity:** Distribute a small mound of modeling clay to each participant and display a complex object or figurine. Give them 20 seconds to mold a representation of the figurine with the modeling clay. After 20 seconds, invite class members to express their feelings about the exercise. Explain that we essentially only have “20 seconds” in the life of youth to help them become disciples, which is an impossible task, unless we take the perspective of facilitator or coach rather than “professor.”

Explain that young people are beginning to explore for themselves the rich meanings of life. They are becoming more independent, yet they are not sure what will happen next. Many are able to conceptualize the main ideas of their faith but unable to see how these ideas are lived out in daily life. We cannot shape people. God is the artist. We can help provide a bridge for young people to move from one learning to another, enabling a process that is ultimately about the

person and God. The strongest bridges we provide are built of faithful examples, personal integrity, and caring, respectful relationships.

Share the following example or one from your own experiences:

*In one American Baptist church, the Associate Pastor, charged with responsibility for the youth ministry program, was going about the task of developing a good adult leadership team. One skilled and faithful volunteer had a husband who was uninvolved in the youth group because he didn't feel he had much to offer to such a leadership position.*

*As they were planning for a retreat, the pastor mentioned how nice it would be to have someone responsible for taking pictures of the event. The woman suggested that her husband, who loved his new digital camera, might enjoy doing it. The retreat came, and her husband showed up and began quietly taking pictures from the background. Later, during free time, a small group gathered around as he was downloading some of the photos onto his laptop. One of the youth showed him how to utilize some features on the photo software to create a slideshow. After returning home, the group asked him to show the slideshow of the retreat at church. The man became a youth leader and showed up to every event for the next three years, developing mentoring relationships with several of the young people. The photography and digital slideshows became a tradition in the youth ministry, and the youth felt valued and affirmed, all because one man showed up one time to take some pictures.*

**B.** Divide the participants into four groups and assign each group one of the case studies on Handouts C-1, 2, 3, 4). Explain that they will have 5-7 minutes to answer the questions and prepare a brief report for the entire group.

After the groups have reported, underscore that an important role of youth teachers is helping them discover and develop their God-given gifts—for their own fulfillment and the benefit of the church and the world.

#### **IV Effective Methods and Settings (30 minutes)**

Explain that most of us have a primary teaching style, often reflective of how we have been taught or related to our interests, such as music or art. Invite the participants to consider the following questions:

- What teaching method do they automatically shift into?
- Is this method effective?
- In what ways could you improve your teaching methods?
- How might only using one type of teaching limit your effectiveness?
- What new methods would you like to add to your storehouse?

Invite the group to share their reflections with the same small groups they were in for the previous exercise.

Explain that there is no single ideal and effective teaching method for a given group. As learners grow and change, teaching methods need to be adjusted accordingly. Some youth learn better by one method and others by another. Certain content lends itself to certain methods. Familiarity with a variety of teaching methods, therefore, is essential.

Distribute Handout D, "Some Teaching Activities," explaining that the list is not exhaustive, and some activities could be used in a variety of ways. Review the instructions and give them time to complete the activity. After everyone has completed the list, invite sharing about activities that they would be willing to try. If time allows, create small groups around particular activities and give them time to discuss some ways to use those activities.

#### **V Closing (10 minutes)**

Distribute Handout E, "Suggested Resources," and take a few minutes for participants to share about those on the list and others that they have found helpful.

Express appreciation for the time together. Close by rereading 1 Timothy 4:12–16 and with a group or directed prayer.

## HANDOUT A

### DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION & OLDER ELEMENTARY/EARLY ADOLESCENTS

#### Understanding of God:

- God is at work in systems that shape the world.
- God is the creator and a friend who cares about me personally.
- God's works are puzzles to investigate.

#### Characteristics:

- spiritual inquirers
- abstract, reflective, & practical thinkers
- active/observational learners
- increasing attention span
- capable of scientific inquiry
- self-identity tied to performance—often anxious, worried & competitive
- enjoy language games
- friends are vital; peer group supersedes family in identity-formation
- need for independence/increasingly self-sufficient
- physical growth spurts may make them tired, moody or self-conscious
- understand time & geography
- beginning logic and symbolic thought
- developing individual ideas, skills, interests & talents
- tend to adopt heroes & emulate adult role models

#### Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- Communicate belonging to the family and the church family.
- Welcome participation and contribution within the family and within the church family.
- Provide models of grace, authenticity and integrity in faith.
- Provide respite from increasing pressure and competition of school.
- Introduce Bible history and chronology through charts.
- Introduce the concept of literary genre in the Bible.
- Encourage them to identify and interpret biblical themes, such as forgiveness, grace and covenant.
- Encourage making connections between Bible stories and their real-life experiences.
- Nurture inquisitiveness and investigation.
- Begin developing Bible study skills.
- Tell stories of heroes of the faith.
- Provide freedom to investigate faith
- Provide opportunities for choice-making.

## HANDOUT B

### DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION & ADOLESCENTS

#### Understanding of God:

God is confidant, guide and counselor.

God is concerned with personal moral behavior.

God operates behind the scenes but not always clear where God is at work.

#### Characteristics:

- crossroads in which emotions, hormones, judgment & body image are in flux
- seeking identity
- grappling with big questions
- capable of abstract conceptualization
- logical-hypothetical thinkers who engage in deductive reasoning & critical thinking
- experiential & experimental learners
- preoccupation with self characterized by ego-centrism (“Everyone’s watching me.”) & extreme sense of uniqueness (“No one understands me!”)
- sense of indestructibility/immortality
- prefrontal cortex, the area of brain that provides judgment, is not yet developed
- diminishing reliance on authority of community
- need to commit to causes and groups
- struggling to distinguish God’s work from human activity
- aware of multiplicity of perspectives

#### Ways to Nurture Discipleship:

- Develop action-reflection (shared praxis) experiences in which activities are evaluated according to beliefs and beliefs are unpacked in experiences.
- Provide guided practice in disciplines of discernment, such as stillness, meditation, critical reflection and service.
- Teach basic skills of biblical interpretation and provide opportunities to explore the Bible through study tools, such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias and concordances.
- Allow space to ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions, and explore a variety of perspectives.
- Practice acceptance and trust—avoid communicating fears about “wrong” ideas or doubt.
- Provide opportunities to participate in rituals of belonging, such as Baptism and the Lord’s Supper *when they feel they can do so with integrity.*
- Allow them to take the lead in identifying areas of exploration so that discipleship efforts connect with their actual experiences of daily life.
- Create safe places for experimentation and exploration—this includes setting appropriate parameters for behavior and providing adult oversight.
- Encourage reinterpreting traditions and expressing them in language and rituals that reflect their understandings.
- Offer support groups and education to parents of adolescents that emphasize the need to allow youth to move outside the authority of the family in order to mature in faith balanced by the need to provide enough structure to accommodate the not-yet-developed judgment center of their brains.

## HANDOUT C-1

Candice is 16, peppy and constantly smiling. She is a cheerleader at her high school, and in her spare time is in demand as a babysitter. Her grades have consistently been “A’s” and “B’s” with some struggles in foreign languages. Having recently earned her Silver Award as a Cadet in Girl Scouts, she has begun looking around for projects she could use towards her Gold Award. She has particularly enjoyed the campouts that she’s been on with her Girl Scout troop, speaking excitedly of canoe trips and winter camping challenges. Candice seems to have many friends, although you’ve not noticed her spending time with any of them in particular.

When you’ve taken her to regional or national youth events in the past, you see that she quickly becomes a magnet for a larger group of youth, helping others to form friendships as well. However, in your own ministry with her, you have some questions. You often feel as if you’re getting a “surface story” and not finding out what she’s really thinking or feeling. She has been very active in youth group in the past, but recently has begun to attend sporadically. When questioned about it, she merely smiles and says, “Oh, I’m just so busy,” but on at least one occasion, she rolled her eyes during a youth planning session and muttered, “We’ve done all this before.”

1. What skills and interests does Candice have?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Based on the list in #1, are there parts of your church’s ministry that Candice might be particularly interested in?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Are there any clues to new directions/ideas/programs for your youth ministry that Candice might be interested in being involved in or even heading up?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How might you make use of Candice’s scouting experiences in your youth group?



## HANDOUT C-3

Misook is a 13-year-old Korean girl who immigrated to the U.S. two years ago and is working toward US citizenship. She and her family had been Christians in Korea and were thrilled to be active in the church. They had fond memories of their Baptist congregation in Korea and had made connections with your church through ABCUSA. Misook's command of English is fairly good, although she has difficulties following group conversations, so she remains quiet during youth group. Although the other youth are friendly to her, no one has made particular friends with her and the youth often overlook her in the group.

Misook is a very kind girl and you've noticed several occasions when she has gone out of her way to help the elder members of your congregation. When you sat next to her at a church dinner a couple of months ago, you commented on her helpfulness. She smiled shyly then told about her beloved grandmother who had passed away a year before her family came to the U.S. She spoke of the time with her grandmother, hearing her stories and learning how to draw some of the traditional artwork her grandmother did. She glanced at an elderly woman sitting several seats down from the two of you and said, "I like to remember my grandmother by knowing other grandmothers."

1. What steps could you take to understand Misook a little bit better?
2. What skills and interests does Misook have?
3. Based on the list in #2, are there parts of your church's ministry that Misook might be particularly interested in?
4. Are there any clues to new directions/ideas/programs for your youth ministry that Misook might be interested in being involved in or even heading up?

**HANDOUT C-4**

Samuel only has one friend in the youth group and they spend all of their time talking about the latest computer games, MP3 downloads, and the ways they've upgraded and "personalized" their computer systems, and showing each other their latest gadgets. Samuel's father is on the Board of Christian Education, so you've had several opportunities to speak with him. He rolled his eyes when talking about Samuel's passion for anything technological, but had a proud smile when he said, "I don't have to worry about my computer crashing—I just call Samuel and he tells me how to fix it!"

Samuel also works on the tech crew for the community theatre. He used to do it for the middle school, but got tired of kids picking on him all the time, so he tries to remain as invisible as possible in school. The community theatre snatched him up when they realized how good he was at lighting, sound and creating special effects. He could tending to his hygiene better—a behind-the-scenes joke at youth group (never said directly in your presence) features Samuel's jeans and mismatched socks. Samuel only attends because his parents make him. He's pretty bored and looks down his nose at worksheets and group games. He still participates in youth discussions, but only when specifically called on. The senior high youth tend to go a little easier on him than his middle-school peers, and a couple of particularly sensitive high school girls have taken to occasionally sitting with Samuel and his friend in worship and at church dinners.

1. What conversation, if any, might you want to have with Samuel's father?
2. What skills and interests does Samuel seem to have?
3. Based on the list in #2, are there parts of your church's ministry that Samuel might be particularly interested in?
4. Are there any clues to new directions/ideas/programs for your youth ministry that Samuel might be interested in being involved in or even heading up?

## HANDOUT D

## SOME TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Mark each method as:

U—have used successfully      T—have tried without success      W—would like to try  
 N—new to me, would like more information      N—not interested in this method

Starting a Session

Paired conversations  
 Triad interviews  
 Responding to statements  
 Unfinished sentences  
 Values continuum  
 Circle response  
 Interviewing your neighbor  
 Survey or opinion poll  
 Movie or TV clips  
 Role play

Simulation games  
 Service projects  
 Listening to music  
 Exploration,  
 experimentation and  
 analysis  
 Meditation on artwork  
 Charts or timelines  
 PowerPoint  
 Singing

Retelling stories through  
 new reports, plays, or  
 creating a Web site  
 Responding with art:  
 · Banners  
 · Cartoon strips  
 · Bumper stickers  
 · Graffiti boards or boxes  
 · Mobiles  
 · Wire or clay sculptures  
 · Fabric painting/Quilt

Interacting with InformationProviding Information

Web research  
 Christian Ed software  
 Word study  
 Interview  
 Field trip  
 Lecture  
 Discussion/debate  
 Listening teams  
 Audiovisual resources  
 Map study  
 Demonstration  
 Role play  
 Play reading

Creative writing (e.g.  
 alternative story endings,  
 journals, poetry, plays)  
 Dance  
 Drama  
 Models and mock-ups  
 Music:  
 · MP3 or midi  
 · Paraphrasing  
 songs/hymns  
 · Writing new lyrics to  
 familiar tunes  
 · Writing new music  
 Photography

Closing a Session

Commissioning  
 Movement prayers  
 Responsive readings  
 Rituals created by the  
 group  
 Sentence prayers

Add Suggestions

## HANDOUT E

### SUGGESTED RESOURCES

*32 Ways to be a Great Sunday School Teacher* by Delia Halverson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

*Basic Teacher Skills, Handbook for Church School Teachers* (Rev. Ed.) by Richard E. Rusbuldt (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1997).

*Contemplative Youth Ministry*, by Mark Yaconelli (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2006).

*Faith Shaping: Youth and the Experience of Faith* (rev. ed.) by Stephen Jones (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1987).

*Junior High Ministry: A Guide to Early Adolescence for Youth Workers* by Wayne Rice [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers (Youth Specialties), 1998].

*Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest of a Passionate Church*, by Kenda Creasy Dean (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Group, 2004).

*The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* by Kenda Creasy Dean (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998).

*Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* by Dorothy C. Bass (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2001)

*We Are Baptists: Studies for Youth* by Jeffrey D. Jones and Debra L. Sutton (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999).

[nationalministries.org](http://nationalministries.org)—connects to denominational youth resources

[judsonpress.com](http://judsonpress.com)—curriculum resources for youth Sunday School, and Bible Study

[ymsp.org](http://ymsp.org)—The Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project

[youthministry.com](http://youthministry.com)—*Group* youth ministry resources

[youthspecialites.com](http://youthspecialites.com)—includes the *Youthworker* journal, online articles and resources

[waytolive.org](http://waytolive.org)—can also be used with *Way to Live* by Dorothy C. Bass