

Leader Resources: Working With Teens

10 Things Adults Should Know

*Pointers for Adult Volunteers By Brian Kirk,
Adapted from www.ymtoday.com*

1) Teenagers are people, too. Resist calling them "kids" (unless you mean it as a term of endearment) or speaking about them as if they aren't in the room. Call them by name.

2) Teenagers need time. Particularly during discussions, young people need a little time to think about what they want to say. Resist the temptation to jump in with "the right answer," and don't feel you have to fill in every moment of silence with talking.

3) Teenagers like adults. Despite what you may remember from your younger days, teenagers do enjoy the companionship of adults. They just aren't always sure that we like them, so they can seem standoff-ish at times. In fact, many are at a point in their lives when they are trying to put a little independent distance between themselves and their parents, so they are seeking other caring adults to serve as mentors and role models.

4) Teenagers have a lot to teach us. Young people are unique individuals with unique talents, gifts, and perspectives. It would be a mistake to lump them all together as one homogenous group.

5) Teenagers' body clocks are different from adults'. Most teens need between eight and ten hours of sleep a night and get much less. Additionally, most teens are not at their peak until late morning and many are "night owls."

6) Teenagers are passionate. The first part of the teenage brain to fully develop is the emotions center. This means that teens can have high-highs and low-lows all in one day, can really connect with the hurt of others, and can be very passionate about the things they believe in.

What comes to mind when I read this list?

How does this list compare to me when I was a teenager?

Three things I can do to better relate to teenagers:

1.

2.

3.

PRACTICE POINT: One of the most important skills in youth ministry is the ability listen to young people. Many adults find it difficult to listen rather than judge, criticize or correct the opinions of young people. Since young people are in the process of developing their moral structure, they appreciate adults who will treat their opinions with respect, engage them in conversation, and ask them questions that evoke critical thinking.

This week: engage in a conversation with a young person and practice listening.

7) Teenagers want to "own" their experiences. We have a temptation as adults, when teens talk about their struggles, to say things like, "I went through the same thing at your age," or "I had the same problems and I survived it," or "Here's how I handled that problem." In many ways, the experiences of teens today are quite different from when we were young. Their struggles are real, and they want them taken seriously, not summarily dismissed with, "I survived that and you will, too." Often, the best approach with young people isn't to offer advice, but just to listen.

8) Teenagers are fun to be around. You might think hanging out with adolescents would make you feel old, but it's just the opposite. They often offer a perspective on life and the world that is refreshingly honest, hopeful, and new. And that sense of hope and possibility can be contagious.

9) Teenagers can be a great source of frustration. Teenagers are great, but let's be realistic about this, too. They can be incredibly frustrating to work with...unless you are willing to be flexible, and can take a little good natured ribbing and criticism, and remember that they still have a lot of growing up to do. Which leads to the final item on this list...

10) Teenagers are not adults. No matter how much they might look or act like adults, teenagers are still children, in the best sense of the word. For every moment of maturity, they have other moments where they grumble about taking out the trash, neglect their responsibilities, fight with their best friends and then make up an hour later, and choose goofing off over doing their work. Don't expect them to act like adults. Expect them to act like young people who are still growing, adjusting, stumbling, and trying to figure it all out.