

Youth as Leaders of Children

*“Let no one despise your youth but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”
-1 Timothy 4:12*

Just as babies seem intuitively fascinated with children, children are natural followers of youth. This can be a gift to the youth, the children, and the church if the relationship is intentionally nurtured. The admiration of a child is intoxicating affirmation for teens, reinforcing a blossoming understanding of their power to shape the future and make a difference in other’s lives. A responsible church will offer such opportunities, but also provide training and supervision for these newcomers to the world of teaching and mentoring.

As you nurture youth as leaders, pay attention their gifts, skills, and interests. Give them more responsibility as they grow more confident. Nurture and affirm their gifts. Some churches make teaching a children’s Sunday School class a privilege after confirmation. Many youth would never consider leaving the peer experience in the youth class, but often there is that certain teen who may be more serious, more interested in leading, or not as able to “hang” with the majority. Such a person may thrive as a leader of children if given the opportunity with a good mentor teacher. They may easily be one of those teens who, otherwise, would slip away from the church during these significant years because they don’t fit in or can’t find their place. Pay attention to the personalities of your youth and the needs of your congregation and extend invitations but allow young people to turn them down. Be there with invitations and resources but allow them to come to it in their own time if need be. Most importantly, ensure your young people feel respected, affirmed, loved, and safe as you assist them in finding their calling within leadership roles.

Youth as Leaders

1. Invite them with clear expectations.
2. Include them in training that works with their existing schedule.
3. Co-teach with a supportive mentor and role model.
4. Empower them with actual teaching responsibilities-not simply helping or assisting.
5. Constructive Dialogue-How do they think they’re doing and what do you see?

Nurturing Youth as Leaders

1. Show appreciation and say, “Thank you!” Give recognition their peers will see. Remember, “Praise in public; Criticize in private.”
2. Ask other pastors and staff members to acknowledge young people for their gifts and sacrificing their time.
3. Connect youth to other staff members, pastors, elders who can mentor them and be someone they can trust.
4. Offer new opportunities and the training resources needed.
5. Offer to write letters of recommendation for applications.
6. Pray for them and give thanks for the gift they are in your life.

Youth as Recreation Leaders

1. Help them Plan, offer resources like Holy Motion or The Playbook.
2. Review disciplinary policies, safety standards, and emergency options.
3. Always have at least 2 leaders-if all are youth, be sure they know who is responsible for what prior to the event.
4. Ensure they are comfortable with their roles and responsibilities.
5. Remind them that this is ministry-that they are modeling Christ to younger generations and are fulfilling their baptismal vows to them by nurturing them with God's love and playfulness.

What Not to Do

1. Do not issue open-ended invitations with no clear schedule of who is needed for what. Ministry with children needs to be intentional and the youth deserve the respect of being asked to do a specific task at a specific time.
2. Do not treat them like babysitters. They have a purpose above keeping the children safe.
3. Do not assume they won't appreciate being able to ask questions and be trained. You may need to adapt based on the youth, but certainly offer them tips, training, and a time to ask questions. This gives them knowledge, while also letting them know you take them seriously enough to answer their questions.
4. Do not use them and ignore them. Young people, like all of us, appreciate encouragement and constructive feedback, and opportunities that challenge us and allow us to use our gifts in new ways.

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