

## Social/Emotional Health

### Best Practices & Check-in Guide

What are the needs of our youth in middle and high school right now? They are currently part of Generation Z, a generation approximately born between 1997 and 2012 (give or take a few years). Gen Z has a few notable markers in terms of mental and behavioral health. If you work with youth, you have likely noticed notable rises in depression and anxiety. Behaviorally this can look like sleep issues, interpersonal challenges, withdrawing socially or self-harm. Gen Zs are also described as lonely, overwhelmed, feeling unsafe in the world, worriers, and deeply concerned about the ethical and humanitarian needs of the world.

This was researched and studied before we added on a global pandemic, of which, we won't know the mental health effect totality on this generation for some time. Each generation has its own markings and needs from the church. So, what are the needs of our youth today? What are we called to do in youth ministry with this generation, our young people? How can the church meet the needs of these young people and share the Good News of God's deep love for them?

God wants our young people to thrive. The church and youth ministry can reflect this truth by setting apart group time to nurture our youth's mental health. This resource offers a list of check-in questions to use in group settings or as group text check-ins. Also included in this resource are a list of practices and activities to suggest to youth to try on their own or to try as a youth group.

**\*\*Please note that if a youth discloses a behavioral health concern, they likely need professional help more than youth leaders can provide. Walk with them and help them share this important information with their parents or guardians, so they can get the support they need immediately. Self-harm is not a secret we are required to or should keep; it's critical for the safety of your youth to tell their parents or guardians. These questions and practices are not treatment for mental or behavioral health diagnostics. However, they can be a way to play a small part in caring for our youth's social and emotional health and wellbeing.**

### **Check-In Guide:**

Oftentimes, a few icebreaker questions can be really helpful to get the individual or group warmed up...

- If you could be any animal, which one would you be and why?
- What's your favorite summertime (or fall, winter, spring) activity?
- Who is your favorite superhero and why?
- If you could be any flavor of ice cream, what would it be and why?
- What's your favorite thing to do after school?
- If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?
- How many books did you read this summer?
- What word would you add to the dictionary and what would it mean?
- If you won a million dollars, what would you buy?
- What's your favorite book or movie and why?
- If you could keep any animal as a pet, what would it be?

*\*Check-In questions can be written on popsicle sticks or wooden spoons that are randomly chosen. Questions can also be noted on a Jenga game, beach ball, wooden dice, or ping pong balls to keep youth active and engaged.*

Deeper questions that nurture social/emotional health...

- Share highs and lows (rose and thorns, peach and peach pits, pows and wows, etc.) from your week.
- What did you discover that was awesome this week?
- What's one thing that brought you joy this past week OR one thing you are looking forward to next week? *(This allows them to have had a terrible week and yet see a glimpse of joy and hope in the future.)*
- What will you engage in today that will bring you joy?
- What's one thing that is making you worried or anxious this week?
- Who else is having trouble sleeping? What do you do when you are having trouble sleeping? Then the group shares what tips have worked for different individuals among the group to help with sleep issues. *(Substitute out sleep with trouble eating, trouble finding time for physical activity, trouble keeping up with friends and other important relationships, trouble feeling happy, and so on. This addresses the behavioral health needs that can potentially stem from mental illness.)*
- If you feel overwhelmed, what thing do you do that helps you regain peace or composure?
- How have you been keeping up with your friends? If youth haven't, have the group share ideas how to and encourage youth to maintain friendships.
- Who are adults in your life you like to talk to and share important things with? Who are your favorite adults?
- Do you have any things you like to do to nurture your faith or spiritual life? Some examples are to journal, pray, meditate, or draw.
- What is your favorite self-care activity? What are you doing to take care of yourself today? Some examples are playing video games, running, being outside, taking a nap, doing art, walking, swimming, talking to a friend, or painting your nails.
- How did you share kindness (compassion, love, generosity) this week? And how was kindness (compassion, love, generosity) shared with you this week?
- If you had a magic wand to change one thing in the world right now, what would it be and why?
- What are you learning about yourself these days?
- What should someone do if they are bored/sad/depressed/stir crazy?
- What has the last year been like for you? What new things have you learned to do?
- What parts of your pandemic life do you want to continue as the pandemic fades?
- What's the scariest thing you've ever done? Why did you do it? What events, phenomenon, circumstances, trends are worthy of our fear? What helps you manage your fear?
- What's taking up most of your headspace right now?
  - If challenging or overwhelming feelings are reported, consider asking: What strategies have you utilized to practice processing and releasing it?
- Have you discovered something new this week? A new hobby? A book? A plant you watched grow?
- What is important to you right now? What are you curious about right now?
- Using one word (and it can't be good or bad) how are you feeling?

### **Group Practices & Activities:**

- Yoga
- Meditation, Stay Present
- Lectio Divina
- Gardening
- Breathing exercises
- Going on a walk
- Forest Bathing
- Pray together
- Creek Play (or other body of water in your location)
- Challenges:
  - Sleep - setup a challenge to encourage healthy sleep patterns and hours

- Relationships - setup a challenge to encourage youth to spend time with an important relationship in their life

**Individual Stressful Day To-Do List:**

- Call a Friend
- Tell Someone “I Appreciate/Love/Am Grateful For You”
- Write It out
- Celebrate What’s Going Well
- Eat Something Delicious
- Pet A Fur Friend
- Say A Prayer
- Take A Break
  - Take A Hot Bath or Shower
  - Read or Watch Something Funny
  - Go to a Park
  - Read Poetry
  - Drink Water
  - Engage in A Small Act of Kindness
  - Color or Doodle (Create Something)
  - Do Some Gentle Stretches
  - Dance It Out
  - Write A Letter
  - Watch the Clouds/Stars
  - Read...Anything
  - Turn OFF Electronics
  - Meditate
  - Eat a QUIET Meal
  - Practice Forgiveness
- Compliment Yourself “I Am Strong, I Am Worthy, I Am Enough”
- Look in a mirror and find one thing you are grateful that makes you YOU
- Listen to Happy Tunes
- Don’t Overbook -- Manage That Schedule, Save Space For YOU!
- Go Outside
- Wear Something Super Comfy
- Practice A Growth Mindset (the power of YET)

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