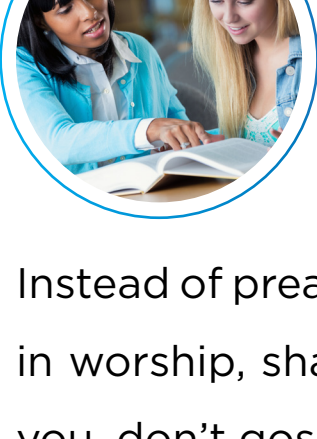


10 WAYS

TO FORM MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR TEENS

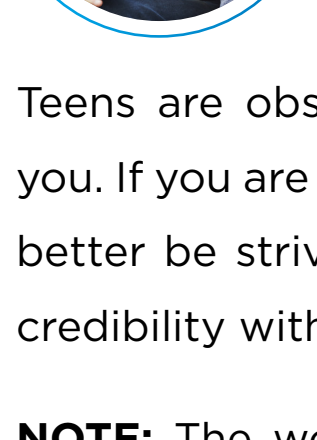
The real work of youth ministry takes place in the context of relationships. It is through deep and real relationships that our teens experience the transformative love of Christ, are inspired to draw closer to the Church, and will feel comfortable turning to the Church, their clergy, or youth worker in times of struggle.

Ask any youth worker and they'll tell you, it can be hard to get through to our teens to build meaningful relationships. That's why we've created a collection of tips to better equip you. This is not a list of steps and they are not listed in any particular order. Some of these suggestions you'll find you strive for continually and others, you will want to be more intentional about when and how you implement them.



1 BE AN EXAMPLE

Instead of preaching how to live, show them. Be present in worship, share the things about the faith that move you, don't gossip, don't play favorites, pray, participate in the Holy Sacraments. The kids will start to follow your lead. They're much more likely to follow your actions than what you tell them to do, anyway.

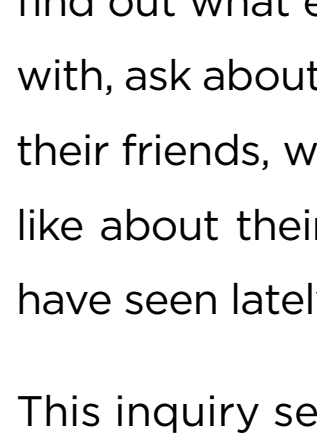


2 BE REAL

Teens are observant and they will see right through you. If you are teaching them to live a Christian life, you better be striving to live one as well, or you will lose credibility with them fast.

NOTE: The word strive is used intentionally because none of us are doing it perfectly. It's good for your teens to know you are not perfect. Be real with them and (when appropriate) allow them to see your weaknesses. Remind them regularly that you are not perfect.

Teens will connect better with an imperfect youth worker than a perfect one.



3 INQUIRE ABOUT THEIR LIVES

Ask them what they do with their time outside of Church, find out what extra-curricular activities they are involved with, ask about their friends and what they like to do with their friends, what kind of music they listen to, what they like about their favorite TV shows, or what movies they have seen lately.

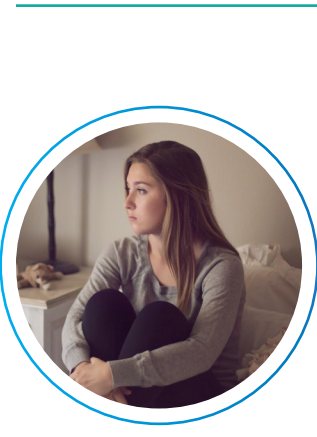
This inquiry sends the message that you are interested in who your teens are, not just that they come to Church. It opens communication, gives you insight into their lives, and is the springboard for deeper relationship. If we want our teens to share their struggles with us, we first have to get them to share their joys with us.



4 REMEMBER WHAT THEY HAVE GOING ON IN THEIR LIVES

If your teenagers tell you that they have a big game coming up or an important art show or a major test, follow up with them and ask them how it went.

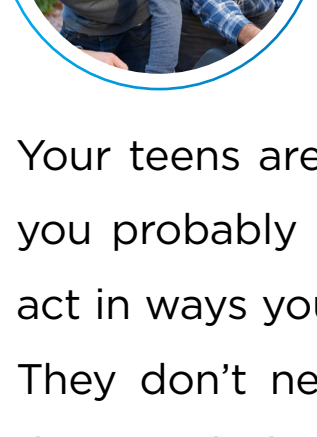
Following up with them shows them that their lives are important enough for you to remember; this builds trust.



5 BE PRESENT IN THEIR LIVES OUTSIDE CHURCH

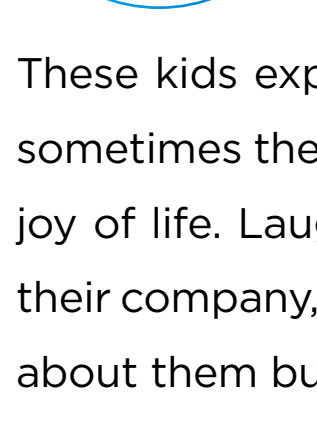
You can't possibly be at every important event for every kid, but make it a priority to get to at least one extracurricular event for each teenager; this is as much youth ministry as hanging out with them at Church is.

When you enter into their space outside of Church you are ministering to them as Christ ministered to us, by coming into our space.



6 PAY ATTENTION FOR MOOD SHIFTS

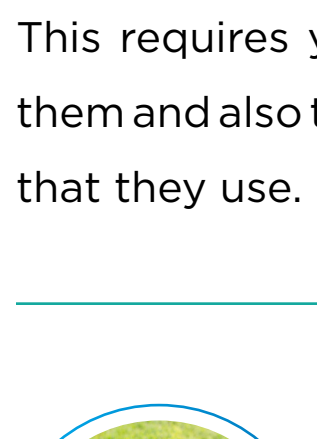
If your teens seem off, distracted, sad, quieter than normal, ask them how they are doing, gently identify the shift in mood and ask them about it. If you know them well enough to notice the mood shift, you know them well enough to inquire. If the teen seems closed off to sharing, respect the boundary; your inquiry will communicate your care. If they open up, be a listening and supportive presence.



7 BE SLOW TO CORRECT AND CRITICIZE

Your teens are going to say a whole lot of things that you probably don't agree with and they will probably act in ways you wish they wouldn't; be slow to criticize. They don't need you lecturing or condemning them; they need a loving space to work out their teenage stuff.

When you have to call them out on a behavior, do it in a firm but loving, and if possible, lighthearted, manner.



8 LAUGH WITH THEM

These kids experience so many pressures in their lives, sometimes they just need to unwind and experience the joy of life. Laugh with them, have fun with them, enjoy their company, this will show them that you not only care about them but that you enjoy them.

As mentioned earlier, if you want your teens to feel comfortable sharing their struggles with you, they have to be able to share their joy with you.



10 GET TO KNOW THEIR FAMILIES

Youth ministry falls short if it is not supported in the home. It is important that you get to know the families of your teens and encourage the whole family to be centering their lives on the Church. When the Church becomes part of the fabric of the home, teens will more naturally turn towards the Church on their own and will seek guidance from their clergy and youth worker in times of need.