

Youth Ministry Chaperone Training

Youth events like conferences, retreats, and mission trips allow your ministry to make a positive impact on young people over an extended period of time. However, this tremendous opportunity comes with great responsibility: keeping kids safe from themselves and others.

A team of strong and well-trained volunteers is a necessary ingredient for safe programs as well as a vibrant youth ministry that will help to form lifelong disciples. Please take the time to discern, recruit, and form every adult volunteer within your ministry. This training is essential for both short and long-term events!

STEP 1: RECRUITMENT

Just like an electric company would not hire a plumber to wire a home, it is important that a youth ministry program does not just recruit a warm body. Your first step in recruitment is to identify the criteria you are seeking in a youth ministry volunteer candidate who will have direct contact with your teens.

An ideal candidate has:

- A love for Jesus and for teens: It is important that a volunteer be able to articulate their passion for bringing young people into a deeper relationship with Christ. It should be evident that the volunteer has a core spiritual life as well as an active prayer and sacramental life.
- Have a strong sense of commitment and responsibility so that his or her presence is reliable.
- An ability to be a team player. Everyone needs to be willing to sacrifice their own ideas to follow the good ideas of another teammate. Collaboration is imperative!
- A life that reflects moral standards and Gospel living
- Is 21 or older (and should be at least 5 years older than the oldest participants to maintain an independent leadership role). So, a 21-year-old might be able to maintain an authoritative role with middle school youth but may have difficulty maintaining that role with an 18-year-old teen.

Once you have determined your criteria, it's time to INVITE, SCREEN, and DISCERN.

- A personal invitation is most effective in adding a key volunteer. Set up a meeting where you can learn more about that person and outline the goals of your ministry.

- Provide the ministry prospect with a volunteer application that allows you to learn important facts (see resources) as well as the CASE paperwork.
- Once the background check is completed, and you have reviewed the volunteer application, discern the person's fit with your program. If you mutually agree that the person is suited for the ministry, move forward with formation! Be sure to give your volunteer well-defined expectations, goals and responsibilities.

Keep your volunteers engaged by praying with them, showing your gratitude, and keeping them resourced. Help your volunteer to establish a sense of ownership within the youth ministry team by empowering them in their role.

REDIRECT or RELEASE those volunteers who have not proven to be a good fit despite your preparations. Sometimes you can redirect their efforts to a role that does not directly connect with youth. If the volunteer has been a danger or detriment, immediate dismissal is likely needed.

Taking these preparation steps in RECRUITMENT can benefit you by building a team that will be committed to the youth ministry of your parish for many years to come.

STEP 2: INFORMATION

Please begin by watching our Youth Ministry Chaperone Training video available in SharePoint.

Use the notes page to find expanded information and develop questions or personal insight to share with your chaperones.

After watching the video, lead the chaperones through the following training session.

STEP 3: FORMATION (SHARE THESE POINTS WITH YOUR CHAPERONES and include any personal anecdotes that highlight these points)

Our main role in chaperoning young people is to facilitate an experience for them that will allow them to draw closer to Jesus. For that reason, it is important for chaperones to be joyful in their own relationship with Christ. As a conduit to that relationship, your attitude is extremely important. Maintain a patient and friendly demeanor. Fully participate in the activity and model faith behaviors. Pray with and for your teens! If it becomes necessary to discipline a behavior, it is NEVER necessary or appropriate to lose your temper, use inappropriate language, or raise your voice. If you are unable to respond in a calm and authoritative manner, engage the assistance of another chaperone and remove yourself from the immediate situation, taking a step backward.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION: Be sure that you fully understand your role in the event. Be present at preparation meetings and communicate your questions to the group leader. Research your task as needed, so that you can speak with some authority to the young people you are accompanying. Help them to get answers to questions they may have and keep your group leader connected to what is happening within your group. It is also helpful to communicate with parents as you are able to keep them connected to the faith experience.

ACTIVE LISTENING: It can be tempting to “check-out” with your phone or other distractions. However, as a facilitator and chaperone, your listening skills are KEY! Engage in conversation with the youth in your care and get to know them. Ask open-ended questions to allow them an opportunity to elaborate on what they are seeing and hearing.

EMPOWERMENT: Give youth an opportunity to take a leadership role and reflect during conversations. Don’t become impatient and answer things for them or take over a role that someone is slowly leaning into. Encourage young people to lead prayer, take other responsibilities, and have the patience to let them do it. (Sometimes it takes a few minutes to get them going!)

LEADING SMALL FAITH CONVERSATIONS: Young people can spot a phony. Be authentic with them and willing to share stories that help to illustrate your witness of faith. (Always be certain that your personal stories are appropriate for sharing with teens). Never force sharing from your teens, as you may have a young person who is particularly anxious. Invite gradual sharing through simple things first like a high point of the day, and then move toward deeper conversations with your group. It is helpful to ask them to share where they saw God at work in their day or where they witnessed a need for prayer in their day.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: First and foremost, it is important for chaperones to maintain control of their emotions. Never be the aggressor or the cause of a conflict. Listen to understand rather than respond and let the person in conflict be heard so that you fully understand. Work to build a compromise that is sufficient for both parties. Be sincere in your attempt to reconcile and be a model of cooperation. Never insult another party or provoke a person. When possible, remove the person from others and have a quiet conversation, instead of causing a defensive reaction in front of a group.

OBSERVING AND REACTING: Free time for young people is not free time for chaperones. Unstructured time requires increased adult oversight. Watch what is going on around you. Observe any interactions that might be troublesome, such as exclusion, teasing, homesickness, etc. Work toward resolving those issues by redirecting behavior and engaging the group in a full group activity, such as a game, where everyone participates. At all times, remind the teens of Christian-like behavior toward their peers.

FOLLOWING THE RULES: Please remember that all of the rules have been established to create the safest possible environment for all participants. Even if you don’t agree with the rules, they are yours to follow. If there is a no food in the room policy, it applies to your room, too. If you

are asking young people to listen respectfully to a presenter, don't be the one talking in the back of the room. If you are at Mass, be an active participant instead of catching a nap. If your youth ask to go to the mall, and you are supposed to be at a conference, tell them why that is not possible. When young people witness you complaining about or breaking the rules, it gives them tacit permission to do likewise. As a chaperone, you are always on display. Also, be reminded that Safe environment training isn't just there to protect our youth, it is there to protect you, as well. Be familiar with all policies and regulations, especially if you haven't had to take the training in a few years.

FAIR SUPERVISION:

Treat your child as you would any other participant. Do not allow your child access to restricted spaces or items that other youth don't have access to, and don't allow your child to opt out of mandatory activities or misbehave during an event. If your child has a complaint or concern, it might be effective to redirect them to another chaperone for answers and assistance so that you can be impartial. In addition, don't allow your child to be at a disadvantage because of your presence. The goal is for our young people to obtain an independent understanding of our faith and build relationships with their peers. Give your child space to do so without your intervention. Allow your child the freedom to speak in group discussions without clarifying or responding to what they say. If you think your child needs to be redirected, first allow other adults to assess and address the situation.

PRAYER:

If you are going to accompany people on a faith journey, you have to be comfortable leading them in prayer. Have some traditional prayers you are comfortable with or engage the teens in spontaneous prayer using the formula: YOU, WHO, DO, THROUGH

For example: "God our father (YOU), who created all things (WHO), please guide us this day as we walk with one another (DO) in Christ (THROUGH)"

STEP 3: INVITE QUESTIONS/CONCERNS

STEP 4: PREPARE YOUR CHAPERONES for the unique setting they will serve in (for example, go over the retreat plan, give an overview of the Steubenville experience, show them the NCYC website, etc.)

RESOURCES

Youth Ministry Volunteer Application (or Interview Questions)

1. Why are you interested in volunteering in this ministry?
2. What do you hope to gain from this volunteer experience?
3. Do you work well with others? Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?
4. What are some differences you see in working with youth vs. working with adults?
5. Did any of your childhood experiences inspire you to work with young people?
6. What questions or concerns do you have about being a volunteer?

Resources

Adult Behavior Indicators that Might Signal They Will Not be EFFECTIVE or SAFE with Your Youth

- Behave as if the rules do not apply to them.
- Outspoken about their own non-Christian behaviors or personal judgments against others.
- Lack of empathy.
- Display low self-esteem but exhibit high levels of confidence.
- Refuse to take responsibility for actions and blame others or circumstances for failures.
- Appear to fear the adult world and surround themselves with children.
- Act like children or engage often in childlike behaviors.
- Use sexuality and aggression in behavior and language.
- Allow children to engage in questionable behavior.
- Have an absence of any meaningful peer relationships.

RESOURCES

Volunteer Evaluation

Think about the preparation of each of your chaperones and answer the following. You may want to fill out an evaluation for each chaperone to see how you can assist them individually, or you could let them complete a self-evaluation to review with them. As you review the evaluation, make plans to fill in any gaps in the preparation.

Communication Skills:	OK	NEEDS MORE
Talking to/in a group		
Drawing participants out		
Being brief and concise		
Thinking before speaking		
Keeping to the topic		
Actively listening		
Observation Skills:		
Realizing tension in the group		
Noting Who Talks to Whom		
Noting the Interest Level of the Group		
Noting who is being left out		
Noting reaction to comments made by the chaperone		
Sensing the feelings of individuals		
Problem-Solving Skills		
Stating problems or goals		
Asking for ideas and opinions		
Giving ideas		
Evaluating things critically		
Summarizing situations		
Clarifying issues		
Morale-Building Skills		
Showing interest in the group		
Working to keep people from being ignored		
Reducing tension		
Helping members to reconcile		
Giving praise or appreciation		

Supporting those who are experiencing group pressure		
Expressing Emotions		
Telling others their feelings in an appropriate manner		
Restraining emotions		
Working through conflict appropriately		
Expressing gratitude		
Refraining from sarcasm		
Displaying warmth and care		