

A Time for Peer Affirmation

The purpose of peer affirmation is to give teens an opportunity to practice the fine art of uplifting and encouraging one another—as well as the fine art of receiving a compliment. Here are some guidelines to share with the guys—

You'll need—

- Paper
- Pens

- Sincerity, sincerity, sincerity
- Encouragement, encouragement, encouragement
- Consider pairing up with someone other than your best friend so you can strengthen another relationship. (If you choose the partners, keep this point in mind when making your selections.)

quote

“Initiation takes place over a period of years. It includes planned, institutional, accidental, incidental, and ritual rites of passage. A rite of passage is a part of initiation, not all of it, just as a bar mitzvah is only the beginning, not the whole, initiation of boys into manhood...Any educational structure that leads the boy through a social and personal journey of growth becomes an initiation experience.”

—Michael Gurian in *The Wonder of Boys*
(Tarcher/Putnam, 1996, page 151)

However you handle peer affirmations, be certain you plan the details so everyone is included to the same degree. Being left out or underrepresented in this activity can have an adverse impact that is difficult to overcome. Leaders should be prepared with affirmations for each guy (that aren't being used during A Time For Leadership Affirmation) to use if necessary.

Happy are people of integrity, who follow the law of the Lord. Happy are those who obey his decrees and search for him with all their hearts. How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word and following its rules.

—from Psalm 119:1-2, 9, NLT

Here are some ideas about how to handle peer affirmations—

Affirmation chats—paired up, one-on-one, face-to-face communication

Give the guys several minutes to affirm one another verbally with statements that begin with one or more of these phrases:

- You are... (*You're easy to get to know.*)
- You have... (*You have the ability to help everyone join in.*)
- I admire... (*I admire the way you seem comfortable in many different situations.*)
- I've noticed... (*I've noticed that you act friendly with all the guys, not just friends you usually hang with.*)

Affirmation letters—paired off letter writing

Have students spend some time writing a letter to a partner listing affirmations like those listed above. Give students an opportunity to read their letters when time is up or let them take the letters home to read later.

Affirmation groups—multiple words of encouragement

Divide students into groups of four or five. Instruct them to take just a few minutes to write down an affirmation for each guy in the group. When they're done, have the guys read their affirmations out loud to the group so everyone can be a part of the encouragement.

A Time for Leader Affirmation

The purpose of leader affirmation is to demonstrate to each and every student that you notice him, you know him, you value him, and you're cheering for him.

You'll need—

- The determination to do this well
- Index cards (optional)
- Materials for affirmations, such as masculine-looking paper and envelopes (optional)

option [individual activity]
The Price of an Eye



Give each teen a copy of **The Price of an Eye** (page 94) and a pen. Say something like this—

You'll need—

- Copies of **The Price of an Eye** (page 94), one for each student
- Pens

In the New Testament, Jesus said, "Here's another old saying that deserves a second look: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.' Is that going to get us anywhere? Here's what I propose: 'Don't hit back at all'" [Matthew 5:38, The Message].

Jesus isn't saying that it's wrong to defend yourself if you're in danger or being harmed. He's saying that taking revenge on someone because you're angry at them for what they did is not the way to live. It's the action—like hitting—or lack of action—like the silent treatment—that follows anger that's usually wrong.

Give your students several minutes to think about the information and questions on **The Price of an Eye**. When they've finished, discuss the following questions—

- How does our culture tell or show teen guys to deal with their anger? Talk about that.
- Do our culture's ways tend to ease the problem or make more trouble or something in between? Talk about your ideas.
- How do you usually deal with your anger?
- What are some ways that you and a friend can help each other deal with anger?
- What situations or people can you—or should you—avoid to help control your anger?

Bible study
Gettin' into the Word

Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:1-12

After finishing the Diggin' a Little Deeper activities, say something like this—

You'll need—

- 3 copies of **Am I My Brother's Keeper?** (page 95)

Anger, especially for males, has the potential to be out of control. In general, men are instinctively competitive and protective, among other things. Those can be positive traits. Being competitive can push a guy to do his best in everything. Being protective can push a guy to watch out for those who are weaker or in need.

But those characteristics can also be negative. Being too competitive can cause a guy to do whatever it takes to get ahead of everyone else, no matter how hurtful or unethical. Being too competitive can also make him angry at someone who is better than him in certain areas. Being too protective can cause a guy to overreact to actions that happen to his friends. Being too protective can make a guy angry when someone hurts or ridicules the person he loves the most, namely himself.

Let's look at a story in the Bible that deals with those very problems.

Ask for three volunteers to read **Am I My Brother's Keeper?** (page 95), the scripted story of Cain and Abel. When they've finished, ask for a volunteer to tell what happens next (the end of the story) or read Genesis 3:8-12 as an epilogue. Follow up with questions like these—

- How did Cain view his relationship with his brother?
- How did Abel view his relationship with his brother?

Make your celebration as simple or as elaborate as you want. Your closing event will probably include—

1. A time for play
2. A time for food
3. A time for reflection and goal setting
4. A time for peer affirmation
5. A time for leader affirmation
6. A time for blessing

A Time for Play

The purpose of a time for play is to say, “Let’s have fun being together just because,” “I enjoy hanging out with you,” and “God enjoys seeing us laugh and play together.”

As noted in the Session 7 introduction, guys tend to bond through physical activity, so what you choose as the framework for this session may have a direct impact on the overall effectiveness of your young men’s ability to give and receive affirmations, to reflect, to set goals, and to accept the blessings.

quote

“As a culture, we could use more wholesome rituals for coming of age... We need more positive ways to acknowledge growth, more ceremonies and graduations. It’s good to have toasts, celebrations and markers for teens that tell them: You are growing up and we’re proud of you.”

—Mary Pipher in *Reviving Ophelia* (Ballantine, 1994, page 291)

If your guys all have a special interest, consider crafting your session around it.

You may want to package this event into an extended trip—a week, a weekend, overnight, dawn-to-dusk—to go biking, camping, mountain climbing, skiing, surfing, or caving. Or consider a building, music, or computer project. Even a change of scenery helps if you can’t get the time or the resources together for something more extensive.

Whether you do this session in your usual setting or as a special event what matters most are the words you speak to your guys, the

quote

“Rafting trips, ropes courses, and other rites-of-passage experiences need to become regular parts of a boy’s adolescence. Through them, boys learn their gold, their spirituality, their shadow, and grow up.”

—Michael Gurian in *The Wonder of Boys* (Tarcher/Putnam, 1996, page 144)

encouragement you give them, and the honor and acknowledgement you express to them as on-your-way-to-adulthood individuals. Your words of blessing and affirmation are the best gift you can give them.

Here are some guidelines—

- Monitor competition—or compete as a group against “the last group’s” skill, time, whatever. (The last group can be entirely fictitious!)
- Nothing new, embarrassing, or difficult to master.
- Leaders participate, not just observe.

Here are other ideas about what to do—

- Game tournaments—spoons, Uno, Twister, computer races
- A short video—bloopers, Wallace and Gromit, home movies, cartoons
- Stupid human tricks
- Retro fun—Hot Wheels and race tracks, squirt gun tomfoolery, Legos, yo-yos (let your guys reminisce about their “childhoods” through these activities)

A Time for Food

The purpose of eating together is to gather as a family around the table. You’ll have to adapt if you’re planning an extended event. Here are some guidelines you may want to use—

You’ll need—

- Food and drinks
- Plates, silverware, and glasses
- Tables and chairs
- CDs and CD player
- Decorations (optional)

- Sit, do not mingle.
- Sit in one group, not in clusters.

So what's your role? Simply this—to help your guys recognize the potential each one has for anger, to teach them God's guidelines and suggestions for dealing with anger, and to encourage them to work with one another in forming some simple anger-management strategies they can put into use immediately.

opening activity

Warmin' Up

Face-to-Face Anger

Begin by identifying anger as a universal and common emotion. Everyone in the room

has been angry at times. What makes one person angry may or may not make another person angry. The actions that result from angry feelings can range from shrugging it off to yelling to breaking something to inflicting physical pain.

Use this activity as a way to help your guys express what makes them feel anger. They will talk to a single person at a time. The pace is quick.

Instruct the guys to partner with one other person. Read the first item in the list below. Both students should give a response, one at a time. Remind them to pay attention to their partners' responses for the follow-up discussion. After a few seconds, blow the whistle as a signal to get a new partner. Only give them a few seconds to pair up again. (You may want to arrange your teens in two concentric circles so that with each switch one circle moves to the next person on the left. This prevents students from feeling left out and is more efficient timewise.) Read the second item and repeat the process. Be sure they understand they have to give first-thought answers as the time will be brief.

- Name something your parents do that makes you angry.
- Name something a teacher does that makes you angry.
- Without naming the friend, name something a friend does that makes you angry.

You'll need—

- Whistle

- Name something at school that makes you angry.
- Name something you do that makes you angry.
- Name a rule at home or school that makes you angry.
- Name something that made you angry today.
- Name something that makes you angry every single time it happens.
- Name something that makes you angry sometimes, but not all the time.
- Name a small, insignificant thing that makes you angry.
- Name something that makes *you* angry but not others.
- Name something that makes other people angry but not you.
- Say a phrase that makes you angry whenever you hear it.

When you've finished the list, ask the guys to share some of the answers they heard without mentioning any names. Then discuss the following questions—

- What similarities did you notice about what makes us angry?
- It can be difficult to think of answers quickly. What answers have you thought of that you didn't get to mention earlier?
- Did any of your own answers surprise you? Talk about that.
- Why is it a good idea to talk about your anger with others?

quote

“About 20 percent of all violent crime is committed by children under the age of eighteen; most of those offenders, whether jailed or not, return to committing crimes; 90 percent of these offenders are boys.”

—Michael Gurian in *The Wonder of Boys* (Tarcher/Putnam, 1996, page 183)

exploring the topic

Diggin' a Little Deeper

Transition with some comments like this—

Anger isn't a new emotion or response. Cain was angry when Abel's

sacrifice was more pleasing to God than his. God was angry when the people of Noah's time lived corrupt and unrighteous lives. The Bible is filled with stories of people being angry at other people and of God being angry with people for their wickedness. Not all anger is the same. Some is justified. Some isn't. Some results in sin. Some doesn't. Some is violent. Some isn't. Human anger, though, always has the potential to end in sin.

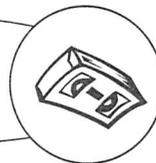


The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

—Gen. 4:4-5, 8

option [video clip discussion]

Remember the Titans—Anger



First show the clip when the football players react to the news of a riot in which a black teen is shot.

0:00:00 Opening scene

0:04:29 “To learn from the best.”

After this clip ask a few questions—

- > Why do the football players immediately run to the scene of the action?
- > What do you suppose they intended to do?
- > Describe their coach's reaction to the events.
- > How might Coach Boon have been able to control his anger in the face of all those negative and derogatory comments from the other coach?

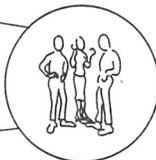
0:18:35 Julius is hanging the poster in his room

0:20:33 “Let's go to work.”

Let the coach's words sink in and speak for themselves as you turn off the VCR and turn to the next activity.

Choose one or more of the following options.

option [group activity]
Five Faces of Anger



You'll need—

- Copies of **Five Faces of Anger** (page 93), one for each group
- Pens

Divide your students into groups of three or four. Distribute **Five Faces of Anger** (page 93) and pens to the groups. Review the brief descriptions of each different kind of anger on the handout. Have your teens give an example or two of each kind of anger listed—hypothetical, from the Bible, or from their own experience.

Give them about 10 minutes to work on this. Then gather together and ask for a few examples from each of the different categories. After that, discuss the following—

- > In your experience, what kinds of anger are the most common?
- > God never said, “Thou shalt not be angry.” When might human anger be acceptable in God's eyes?
- > How does a person who tends to carry pent up anger change into a person who works out his anger in a godly way?
- > Identify the different kinds of anger in your own life.
- > How might knowing the kinds of anger you're prone to help you deal with anger?

quote

“We continue to speak about ‘teen violence,’ ‘youth violence,’ and ‘school violence’ without ever noticing the fact that the vast majority of the ‘teens’ and ‘youth’ we're talking about are boys.”

—Michael Kimmel editorial in the Minneapolis StarTribune (March 18, 2001)

Here are some guidelines—

- Affirmations should be specific. No all-purpose, one-size-fits-all affirmations allowed. (“Your sense of humor helps me look at the bright side of hard situations,” not, “You’re such a great kid.”)
- Affirmations should be accurate. (Research by calling a parent, relative, or friend if necessary.)
- Affirmations should be written down so the guys can keep them. (They’ll read them many times!)

TIP

If your group is large, divide this responsibility among all the leaders, letting each one be in charge of affirming the guys he knows best.

Here are ideas about what to do—

Toasting

Bring up the guys individually and toast them in front of everyone. Depending on the size of your group, toasts can be as short as two or three sentences or as long as two or three minutes (but about the same for everyone).

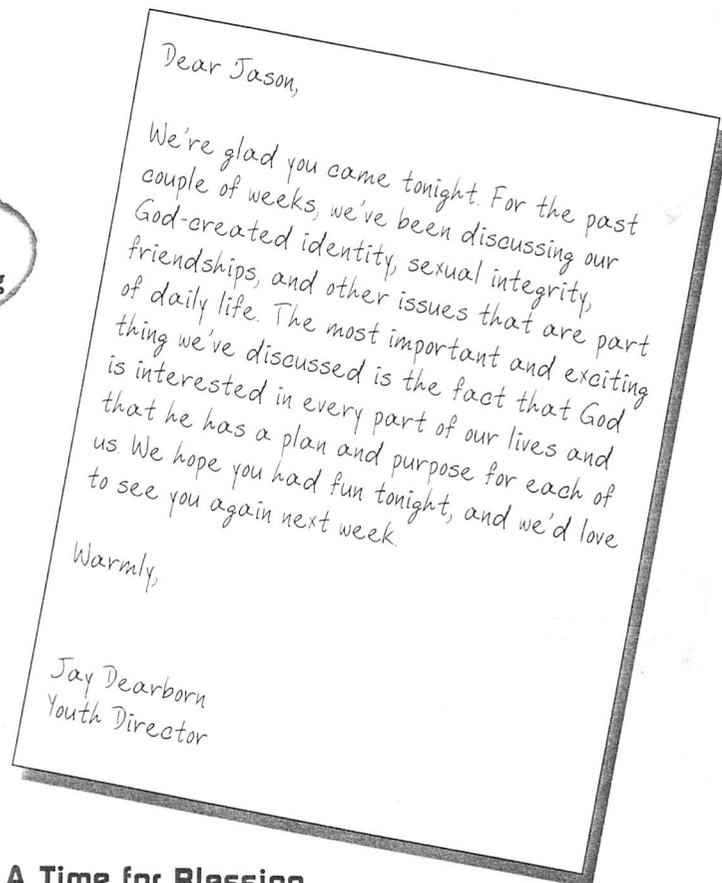
Toasts should be accurate, specific, and relevant to the previous sessions. You are affirming, not complimenting. In other words, “Scott, tonight I want to toast you because you’re such a wonderful long-distance runner,” is a loser. “Scott, I want to toast you because of the way you greet new people who come to youth group. Your easy-going manner really makes them feel welcome,” is a winner.

Prepare beforehand. Do not make these toasts on the spur of the moment. Have each toast written on an index card that you give to the student when the toast is finished. This says to each teen, “You are so important to me that I thought about you this week and planned what I want to say to you.”

Notes

Write a personal note of affirmation to each of your students during the week. Seal each letter in an envelope. During the evening, distribute the letters to the guys personally.

If there’s any possibility of visitors, have a few extra letters available. Since it may be nearly impossible to pull together a personal letter for visitors, see the sample below for appropriate general wording, but make every effort to personalize the letters for your guests.



A Time for Blessing

Words of blessing

Throughout the Old Testament, the idea of passing a blessing down from one generation to another was a common part of helping boys transition to manhood. In 1 Kings 2:2-4 King David passes on a blessing to his son Solomon. He shares his dreams and hopes for Solomon as well as some cautions and admonitions.

You'll need—

- Gifts, one for each guy (optional)
- Pastor or other adult (see directions for details, optional)