

101 relational discussion starters



by tony akers

A heaping helping of questions that will get your kids talking, connecting, and growing

When group asked youth leaders across North America to list the “typical elements” of their regular weekly meeting with kids, “discussion starters” was #2 on the list (just behind “prayer”). Question-asking gets at the core of youth ministry—building authentic relationships with teenagers. So use these little fire-starters to engage and fuel great conversations with your young people.

1. Do you have a hero? Describe him or her.
2. Imagine a “best day ever.” What kinds of things would you do?
3. If you could choose a vacation spot anywhere in the world, where would it be, and why?
4. What’s your favorite TV show? What do you like best about it?
5. What’s your favorite movie? What do you like best about it?
6. Who’s your favorite music artist or group? What makes you gravitate to him/her/them?
7. What’s your favorite time of year—winter, spring, summer, or fall? Why?
8. What’s your favorite food? Where’s your favorite place to eat it?
9. Do you have a pet? If so, describe one of your most memorable experiences with that pet. If not, what kind of pet would you like to have, and why?
10. Who’s your favorite author? Describe the last book you read by that author.
11. What’s your dream job? What might be your dream job 10 years from now?
12. What’s your best subject in school? Why are you so good at it?
13. Have you ever been stung by a bee, wasp, or hornet? Tell me about it.
14. If you had to be allergic to something, what would it be?
15. What’s your favorite sport to watch? to play?
16. What’s your favorite hobby? How does that hobby reflect your personality and passions?
17. If you sat down next to Jesus on a bus, what would you talk about?
18. Do you recycle? Why or why not?
19. Tell me about the best teacher you ever had.
20. What’s your favorite time of day? Why?
21. What’s your favorite dessert? Describe a time when you had that dessert as a child.
22. What makes you happy? Why?
23. What makes you sad? Why?
24. If money and time were no object, what would you be doing right now?
25. What do you like best: rivers, lakes, ponds, or streams? Why?
26. Have you ever caught a fish? If so, tell me about it. If not, would you like to? Why or why not?
27. Do you like to cook? If so, what do you like to make? If not, what do you wish you could make for yourself?
28. What’s the strangest thing you ever ate?
29. What chores or responsibilities do you have at home?
30. Do you get an allowance? If so, how much, and what are you supposed to use it for?
31. When and how have you volunteered to help others? How did it make you feel?
32. What would you do with \$1,000? Why? \$1 million? Why?
33. What’s something you’ve seen or done you wish you could get out of your mind?
34. If you had one day to live over again, what day would you pick? Why?
35. What adult, other than your parent(s), would you turn to if you needed help? Why?
36. Do you have any musical ability? If so, what do you enjoy about it? If not, what skill would you love to learn?
37. What’s your favorite Web site? Why?
38. Have you ever built anything? What was it? How did you feel when you finished?
39. When and what have you collected during your life?
40. If your house was on fire and you could choose only one thing to save (besides family members), what would it be? Why?
41. Have you ever seen a falling star? Did you make a wish? What was it?
42. Have you ever seen a sunrise? What were you doing, and how did it feel?
43. Which do you like better—sunrise or sunset? Why?
44. What’s your favorite ride at an amusement park? Why?
45. Do you have a bike? If so, what do you like about it?
46. What’s your favorite part of a newspaper? Why?
47. Have you ever received an award for anything? If so, what was it, and how did it feel to get it?
48. Do you belong to any clubs? Why or why not?
49. Are your grandparents still living? If so, what do you like best about them? If not, what’s your favorite memory of them?

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50. Let's say you were sent to live on a space station for three months and you were allowed to bring only three personal items with you—what would they be?
 51. Do you have brothers or sisters? If so, what do you like most and least about them? If not, what do you imagine would be the best thing about having siblings? the worst thing?
 52. Do you have extended family? If so, do they live close to you or far away? How often do you see them? What's the best time you ever spent with them?
 53. What's the best and worst thing about your school?
 54. What's your school mascot? If you could change your mascot, what would you change it to?
 55. What's your favorite thing to wear? Why?
 56. Do you have family rules? What are they?
 57. When your family eats a meal together, what do you typically talk about?
 58. If you could buy a car right now, what would you buy? Why?
 59. Do you have a job? If so, what do you like and dislike about it?
 60. What's your favorite day of the week? Why?
 61. Have you ever grown anything? If so, what?
 62. Describe your favorite toy as a child.
 63. What's your favorite fast food restaurant? Why? What's the most memorable thing that ever happened to you at that restaurant?
 64. What's the best gift you've ever received? Explain.
 65. What's the best gift you've ever given? Explain.
 66. How does your family celebrate birthdays?
 67. What's your favorite holiday? Why?
 68. Describe a time you felt special.
 69. What makes you laugh? Why?
 70. What's the worst injury you ever sustained?
 71. Would you rather go to the dentist or the doctor? Explain.
 72. What's your favorite piece of jewelry? Why?
 73. Have you ever been in a play? What part did you play?
 74. Can you swim? If so, describe what it was like to learn how to swim. If not, have you ever been scared of the water? Why or why not?
 75. Have you ever ridden in a boat? What was it like?
 76. If you've ever flown in an airplane, describe what it was like the first time you took off and landed.
 77. What's the best and worst thing about church?

78. When you're alone, what's a song you like to sing or hum, and why?
79. If you could be any actor in the world, who would you be, and why?
80. What's your greatest achievement?

81. Do you like cats or dogs better? Explain.

82. What's your favorite city? Why?
83. Have you had a pet that's died? If so, what was the experience like?
84. What's been the highlight of your day or week?
85. What's been the low point of your day or week?
86. What's your favorite candy? Why?
87. Have you ever been to a concert? What did you like and dislike about it?
88. Have you ever been "cut" from a team? How did you cope with that?
89. What's your favorite thing to do on an unexpected day off from school?
90. Who's your "faith hero"? Explain.
91. Would you rather cut grass or rake leaves? Why?
92. Would you tell someone the truth even if it hurt that person's feelings? Why or why not?
93. Has someone close to you ever died? How did you handle that?
94. What surprises you most about adults?
95. What disappoints you most about adults?
96. Describe the scariest experience of your life.
97. Would you rather have many friends or one good friend? Explain.
98. During your free time would you rather be alone or with a group?
99. Do you make decisions slowly or quickly? Why?
100. Would you rather lead or follow? Why?
101. If you were hiking down a path and it came to a "Y," would you take the well-traveled path or the overgrown path? ■



Tony Akers is a youth minister in Kentucky. He's used these discussion starter questions in conjunction with a mentoring program that emphasizes Search Institute's 40 developmental assets.

1. Did you ever stick up for someone?
2. Describe your neighborhood bully.
3. Did you ever hitchhike?
4. Did you have a paper route?
5. Write about a baby-sitting experience.
6. Describe a great fort you built or a great game you played as a child.
7. Write about an enemy who eventually became your friend.
8. Did you ever fall through the ice?
9. Write about a time you cheated and were caught.
10. Write about a privilege you earned.
11. How did you get along with your cousins?
12. Write about the stray animals you brought home.
13. Describe an event that made you realize you were growing up.
14. Did you ever send away for something that turned out to be a disappointment?

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88. Have you ever had a broken bone?
89. Write about being in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, or some other organization.
90. Did you ever turn someone in or tell on someone and feel bad about it later?
91. Write about going back to school after summer vacation.
92. Describe your playground or vacant lot.
93. Write about a time your parents embarrassed you.
94. Write about a time you embarrassed your parents.
95. Describe learning something from a friend.
96. Describe teaching something to a friend.
97. Have you ever taken a long trip alone?
98. Write about a movie or book that had a very strong impression on you.
99. Write about a time when you gave someone good advice.
100. Describe the best time you ever had in your life.
101. Write about the funniest thing that ever happened to you.

15. Did you ever prove yourself to someone older?
16. What was it like to go shopping with your grandma? mom? dad? friends?
17. Write about a time you performed in front of an audience.
18. Write about a difficult decision you had to make.
19. Write about a time you found out something about yourself.
20. What did you do last summer? What did you do the summer you were ten?
21. Write about learning to skate, to ride a bike, to climb a tree, or to turn a cartwheel.
22. Describe learning to drive.
23. Did you ever get lost in a strange town?
24. Were you ever locked in or out?
25. Did you ever witness a birth?
26. Write about getting fired or quitting.
27. What was it like to spend your first night away from home?
28. What was it like to come back home after a long vacation?
29. Write about a disappointment.
30. Write about something minor that turned into a big deal.
31. Write about something that flopped.
32. Write about a time you had to communicate with someone you couldn't understand.
33. Did you ever win or lose a contest?
34. Write about something you desperately wanted when you were a kid.
35. Did you ever see a ghost?
36. Did you ever run away from home? How far did you get?
37. Write about the best attic or basement you've ever been in.
38. Did you ever know someone who had "everything"?
39. Write about a time as a child when you played in one of the following: a treehouse, a cornfield, a construction site, a junkyard, an abandoned house or barn, a stream, a cemetery, a swamp, a pasture, railroad tracks?
40. What did you do to amuse yourself as a child when you had to wait for a long time? (for instance, at the doctor's or dentist's office)
41. Did your mom or dad ever make you wear something you hated?
42. What was the earliest you ever got up in the morning? the latest you ever stayed up?
43. Write about a time you were talked into something and regretted it.
44. Were you ever in a helicopter, limousine, race car, hot-air balloon, submarine, or horse-drawn carriage?
45. Did you ever forget something really important?
46. Write about an experience in a hospital.
47. Were you ever accused of something you didn't do?
48. Write about a disastrous trip or vacation.
49. Were you ever given a responsibility you couldn't handle?
50. Were you ever in a fire, flood, tornado, or hurricane?
51. Did you ever have a secret language?
52. Write about becoming disillusioned with someone you admired or respected.
53. Describe the best concert you ever attended.
54. What was the best nickname you ever made up for a friend?
55. Did you ever become friends with someone much older or much younger than you?
56. Did you ever make friends with a wild animal?
57. Write about a window you broke or something valuable you lost.
58. Did you ever climb on the roof when your parents weren't home?
59. Did you ever save someone from getting hurt?
60. Did anyone ever save you from getting hurt?
61. Did you ever catch fireflies? crickets? frogs? snakes?
62. Write about a time when you tried to help and ended up making things worse.
63. Did you ever break an important promise?
64. Write about moving to another city.
65. Describe an outdoor game you used to play in the summertime.
66. Write about picking apples or berries.
67. Write about building sand castles or mud pies.
68. Did you ever meet a famous person?
69. Describe the club you organized as a kid.
70. Write about mowing the lawn, burning leaves, or weeding the garden.
71. Describe a car or bicycle accident you were in.
72. Write about being a misfit.
73. Write about a day spent in another country.
74. Write about a terrifying nightmare.
75. Have you ever brushed shoulders with death?
76. Was there a haunted house in your neighborhood?
77. Write about a time you outsmarted someone.
78. Write about a time you had to wait for something you wanted.
79. What was it like to get glasses or braces?
80. Write about being friends with your brother or sister.
81. Write about going shopping for new clothes.
82. Did you ever try to be something you really weren't?
83. What kind of adventures did you have in the bathtub?
84. Write about job hunting.
85. Write about wearing high heels or a necktie for the first time.
86. How did you find out the truth about Santa Claus?
87. Write about seeing the ocean or the mountains for the first time.