

Counseling Must knows- What every youth minister needs to know when a teenager comes to you with a problem

KIDS' EMOTIONAL NEEDS:

"My parents don't trust me."

"No one understands me."

"My girlfriend dumped me."

"What's God's will for my life?" "My friends keep pressuring me."

"I feel like I don't fit in."

1. FIRST, ACT LIKE A DETECTIVE.

Begin the counseling process by gathering information about the problem. When the young person is sitting in front of you, your first priority is listening. You'll unlock a lot more information if you show the teenager you're fully engaged in his story. You do that by maintaining steady eye contact, nodding often, and responding with "uh huhs" as the story unfolds. In addition:

*Use reflection to communicate you understand. Simply repeat the gist of the message back to the young person by saying something like, "So you're having trouble communicating with your parents about your curfew."

*Ask clarifying questions. Start your questions with "are you saying...?" or "Do you mean to say...?" This will help you check your understanding of the problem. Up to 90 percent of our communication is nonverbal. Our gestures, tone of voice, and body language overshadow what we're saying. So make sure you're not flipping through your notes or daydreaming. Stay focused. And, in turn, notice your counselee's gestures, tone of voice, and body language. "That was fun" could mean almost anything, depending on these other nonverbal factors.

*Use summaries to put the problem in context. A summary is similar to a reflection, but differs in that you're drawing on additional facts from your conversation. For example, "Your curfew, desire to drop out of band, and frustration with school Help teens come to their own realizations & help teenagers wrestle through their own problems. Help your kids take responsibility for their own issues and discover how they can change their situation for the better. Help kids break their problems into bite-size chunks. Help teenagers identify the roots of their problems, then discover how they're contributing to them. For example, ask what events are bothering them, what thoughts or beliefs those events produce, and what emotions they produce. Once you've helped them open this door, you can partner with them to explore more effective ways to deal with their problems. Here's how:

*Give examples from your own life. One of the most effective ways to teach young people is through storytelling. When you offer personal examples that are similar to a young person's problem, you can expose them to alternative solutions.

*Use metaphors. When you form word pictures that mirror the teenager's problem, you promote creative problem-solving. For example, if a teenager is struggling to fend off friends who are pressuring her to experiment with drugs, ask her what movie she's seen that depicts the kind of friendships she longs for. After she answers, ask something like: "Do you think the characters in that film would treat their friends the way your friends are treating you? Why or why not?"

*Use open-ended questions-no "yes" or "no" answers allowed & it's impossible to answer it with one word. This will fuel the kind of thinking-out-loud process that can lead teenagers to find their own solutions to problems.

*Promote perspective-shifting. For example, ask the teenager to imagine a close friend or loved one experiencing the same problem he or she is going through. Then ask what advice the young person would offer to that person.

SHOW KIDS HOW TO CREATE A BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE.

You've already helped the teenager identify the problem and gain insight into what needs to be changed. Now it's time to come up with a plan for change. Remember, your role is to Help the teenager draft a solution to the problem, then emphasize it's his job to carry out the plan. To start, ask questions such as: "What do you think you need to do differently?" and "What do you believe the solution is?" Unless that solution is clearly destructive, embrace what he comes up with. The consequences of wrong decisions can lead to right decisions.

Though it's important to give teenagers space to own their own solutions, sometimes you must step in to direct them more forcefully. For example, a favorite question of teenagers is, "How far is too far?" I've heard teenagers say they're not really having sex, yet they're engaged in risky sexual behavior. Here it's up to us to point out the potential dangers of this behavior and to look for answers to this question in Scripture.

After a teenager has embraced a problem-solving plan, your job is to give her the vital encouragement she needs to carry it out. Even the smallest steps toward change should be praised and rewarded.

And don't forget to be flexible. Just because you've developed a plan together doesn't mean it's in concrete. Even God is flexible with his plans. So you may need to help your kids revise their plans or scrap them altogether and help them draft new blueprints. This means you might have to start over as a detective and go through the discovery stage again. That's okay. Just stick with the process, and keep using these skills. Change takes time. And helping others overcome problems in life and find healing is always a tailor-made solution-just look at the many ways Jesus chose to heal people.