

Fueling Life changes in STUDENTS

Creating ministry environments that set the stage for life change-healthy relational zones that others can *literally feel* when they're in them. Remember the one house in the neighborhood that drew all the kids like a magnet that had a healthy relational zone. Have you re-created that environment in your ministry?

You youth ministry is actually God's arena. We have little ability (and responsibility) to *produce* life change, but we're well-equipped (and responsible) to *create ministry environments* that set the stage for God to move in deep impact.

We can't do things that change lives, but we can do things that pave the way for God to move in deeply impactful ways. Our words impact how we think about our role in ministry. It's not what they're *doing* for Christ. That can create a mindset that our job is to change people. Just as farmers create favorable conditions for harvesting, but can't *guarantee* a harvest, we can create environments that encourage growth in others. Instead of agonizing over what we can't control, let's concentrate on what we can. Let's focus on *our role* in God's desire to change lives. Imagine what God might do if we channeled our energies into creating healthier environments.

ministry to students

Partnering with Christ in his great mission to redeem his people. Effective youth workers want to see Christ transform kids' lives Christ! **What a healthy relational atmosphere looks like in hands-on ministry to students.**

1. Holistic human development-God is passionate about infiltrating every area of our human life, not just our so-called spiritual life. Long gone are the days of blind reliance on pizza, pretzels, soft drinks, and prepackaged worksheets. We're called to address every aspect of our kids' human development-physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual.

What you can do: **First**, physically touch your teenagers in appropriate, caring ways every time you see them. **Second**, when students share genuine emotions, never minimize them. Feelings that seem silly to adults are all too raw to preteens and teenagers. **Third**, don't act like a kid to fit in. Don't try to find your place in teenage culture, just be a trustworthy adult and students won't have any problem socially connecting with you.

2. Acceptance and accessibility-Your kids are at vastly different mile-markers along their spiritual journey. No matter where they are, they're all desperate for unconditional acceptance-that's the "oxygen" that supports life-change. Since God fuels change almost exclusively through relationships, our focus on relationship must be primary in ministry. What you can do: plan fewer, better-done events that free up your time for connecting with students. Your kids will never feel deeply accepted until you know and see them well and that requires a quantity of time spent in a quality way. The typical quality time theory is flawed-it's not something we can plan. Quality time is the icing on the cake of quantity time. It just sort of happens when we spend tons of time with students. The key to quantity time is accessibility. When we return phone calls and e-mails promptly, and often invite teenagers to drop by our house during certain times of the day, we create an accessible, accepting atmosphere.

3. Safety-Do your teenagers feel comfortable asking tough questions in your group? If they do, you've done something to cultivate a safe environment, and that's crucial to preparing the "soil" of their hearts for God's action.

What you can do: Can teenagers tell you confidential information without fearing you'll tell everybody? Sure, we can't always promise confidentiality, but if we want to build a safe environment, we have to keep our mouths shut.

4. Experiencing God- When kids realize *doing* flows from *being*, they're freed to focus first on the centrality of their relationship with God.

What you can do: I Sing, pray, study, eat. Sing, pray, study, eat. The easiest way to pave the way for kids to experience God is simply to mix things up.

5. Expanding God's kingdom-When kids get active in ministry, God gets active in them. Ministry by students, to students, cultivates life change.

What you can do: Don't limit your students' involvement in ministry to tasks (greeting team, setup crew) or ministry to younger kids ministry. Equip them to relationally minister to peers.²

6. Community-Young people long for a group identity-to belong with others who see them well and love them well. True Christian communities are made up of people who seem remarkably ordinary, but have a driving passion and belief in an extraordinary God.

What you can do: During each get-together, intentionally fill the air with opportunities for spiritual community. Students will become so accustomed to breathing God's oxygen when they're around you that when he starts working in their lives, they'll instinctively turn to you for guidance.

7. Faith-Youth ministries that expect God to move in real ways are more likely to see him do just that. If you're pledging allegiance to your plan- putting your faith in those things you can control- you never plunge your kids into the dangerous waters of faith in God.

What you can do: Use everyday experiences to increase your kids' faith. Pray out loud with them, praising God for his past movement and asking him to do it again in current situations. Read faith stretching books together. Take them into environments where trusting God is essential.

8. Prayer-Talking to God, provider of the very oxygen we breathe, is really the best way to create an atmosphere filled with life-changing.

What you can do: Until we've prayed, we can do nothing more than prayer. Once we've prayed, we can do so much more than prayer.

Use this checklist to discover areas of life changes you want to help fuel for the teens in your group:

Thinks positively of self.
Has good family relations.
Sees meaning and value of Prayer.
Has respect for life.
Has solid friendships.
Makes new friends.
communicates well.
Handles conflict well.
Self-Disciplined.
Has ability to give of self to others.
Participates in life of the church
Able to achieve goals set by self.
Adaptable.
Love of life, self, others, God.