

TIPS FOR NEWBIE VOLUNTEERS

While speaking at a recent training event, I met a lovely woman in her 30s. She hung back until everyone else left, then approached me. My heart sank at her opening line: "I'm really embarrassed to ask you this..." What deep confession would she make? Would it involve counseling? Would I need to re-book my flight home?

She stepped closer, panic-stricken. "I don't know how I got talked into this, but tomorrow's my first night volunteering at youth group. What do I do?" I smiled. This, I could handle.

Here are the tips I shared with her—I'd suggest that you morph them to fit your "voice," then include them in a packet you give volunteers before they start serving:

- **Don't try too hard.** Teenagers can smell a fake a mile away. Be yourself—your nice self.
- **Don't try too little, either.** Kids want to know that adults care enough to talk to them. Don't stand in the back with arms crossed. Sit among the kids and let them get used to you—it's kind of like adding new fish to a tank.

- **Dress age-appropriately.** Don't try too hard here, either. Avoid clothes that are too short or too skimpy—and ones with suggestive slogans or ads for products kids shouldn't consume. Help us reinforce appropriate wardrobe choices.
- **Before you show up, read Scripture and pray.** Teenagers may not be ready to listen to your opinions on life issues. You haven't yet earned the right to be heard, but God's Word is always a treasure.
- **Also study the lesson guidelines the youth leader sends.** What? You didn't receive any? Then ask the leader to please provide them.
- **Make yourself quietly useful.** Help clean up, straighten chairs, take out trash, and so on. Watch out for kids as they exit the building and are picked up. Don't leave until everyone's been accounted for. You've just saved the leader tons of time.

When new volunteers follow these basic tips, they'll do just fine. ●