

Youth Ministry & the Arts

Some simple ways to make your ministry artist-friendly.

Encourage the arts. Affirm your kids' artistic gifts. Continually affirm artistic expression as the highest form of worship and service to God.

Provide opportunities. Ask your kids to create a mural for your meeting room, write poems inspired by your current series of talks, volunteer to edit your summer camp video footage, or even compose an original song for Easter. If you create the projects, they will come. And once you've primed the pump, you'll be amazed at how your teenagers will come up with their own projects.

Be open. Artistic expression is always finding new "wineskins" for old wine. Today, that includes Web design, graphic design, and talents your ministry can use today. What's fringe today is buzz tomorrow. You have young people in your group right now with talents that are considered applicable only outside the church- bring them inside.

Hold special events. Create an art gallery in your church featuring student paintings and sculptures, or line the church halls with kids' artworks. Plan a coffeehouse evening for poetry reading, dramatic monologues, and original music. Make it an outreach event by encouraging your group members to invite their friends from school.

Encourage critique. The world thrives on artistic criticism. Don't proclaim mainstream works "bad" based solely on profanity and violence. Dig into the themes and offer genuine criticism, not quick condemnation. Your goal is to help your kids think critically about the art that surrounds them-both Christian and mainstream.

Open up subject matter. A Christian's art should flow naturally out of his or her world view and should include all of human experience. Even the Bible includes portions that have little to do with God on the surface. Allow your kids latitude in expressing themselves, without contradicting scriptural truth. Make church a safe place for talking about real life.

The arts use emotion and experience to communicate -a perfect tool for reaching postmodern teenagers. Today's kids long to experience God, to taste him. Testimony, meditation, expression, and sensation speak more persuasively than logical arguments. Art reaches past teenagers' defense mechanisms to capture their souls. You'll get the best pop culture commentary on the Web at

www.MinistryAndMedia.com.