

# GrowCon19 –Notes

## January 27, 2019

### Notes

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#### OVERVIEW GROWCON19

This was a 1½-hour webinar on working with youth. Its goal was *to train; to celebrate; and to promote community*. While it had fun elements and was a way for leaders to network a bit, there wasn't much actual usable content during the webinar. Useful information was downloadable, however.

Following are some of the main tips.

#### HOW TO GET YOUTH TO OPEN UP?

Youth who are extroverts may be vocal in groups in some areas but **introverts and shy people** likely keep quiet. The challenge for youth leaders is getting them comfortable enough to start speaking in the group.

Another issue that often emerges is that youth tend not to offer opinions even when answering questions. Realize that schools tend to discourage free thinking. There are right answers – wrong answers – and **students are too often expected to regurgitate** what they have been told, not what they actually think.

**Remember too, schools are hierarchical** with youth at the very bottom. They are not allowed to talk back to teachers. **Cultural norms** may also come into play where, in some cultures, youth are not allowed to voice their own opinions.

This tendency is something youth leaders need to help youth overcome. But how can we ask questions that show youth we're not out to get them or trap them – and that we are really interested in getting their thoughts?

Another issue that youth leaders may discover with their youth is that youth actually have something to say and want to say something, but **don't have the words or tools to really express** themselves yet. Perhaps, there may be a disconnect between concrete and abstract thoughts.

A simple tip is to ask questions that are fairly basic, and then suggest possible answers so youth don't really have to think. New questions follow up on previous answers. For example:

1. **How was your day?** ... *Was it the worst day you ever had or was it a pretty great day?*
2. **(Answer – one of the worst)...** *I'm so sorry to hear that. Why was it so bad? ... Problems with your friends? Teachers? ...*
3. **(Answer – friends) ... What happened?** ... *Did they bully you, ignore you, unfriended you?...*

By asking such questions, you are also **giving them tools and vocabulary** to carry on conversations, **and showing that you care** and want to know what's happening to them!

By giving them time to answer questions ("*...*" *and then offer suggested answers*) and other quiet times, we are giving them **space to quietly process** whatever is going on.

You are also creating a **safe space** where youth can interact with adults in a non-hierarchical environment.

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## **INCLUDING YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES**

Congregations may want to be inclusive and yet may not be able to handle youth with certain types of disabilities.

One youth leader spoke about the decision his church had made in trying to include youth with disabilities in worship. It didn't work out at first. Youth with behavioural challenges were extra noisy or disruptive making it difficult for others to focus on worship. People began complaining.

What they did was decide to forget about including them in normal worship and to create a worship space specifically for them. They took the lead and created their own worship service.

The result – the original plan was a failure but the end result was youth with behavioural challenges developed confidence in their own leadership skills which, I assume (but didn't jot this down in my notes) allowed them to interact with adults almost as equals.

## **AVOIDING BURNOUT**

A major challenge for youth leaders – how not to burn out! The temptation is to do everything – or try to do everything. This is particularly true when some congregations expect the youth leader to do everything on their own. While youth leaders may have a lot of energy, they can't keep it up forever. Eventually, they will burn out.

Matthew 11:28-30 is a good passage to start with:

*Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me...*

This passage says it all:

1. Remember to take time for your own spiritual growth. Remember to rest, relaxing in God's arms.
2. Remember (if you prefer a different passage) – Jesus often withdrew from the crowds so he could pray. That was his way to reconnect with God, and be restored. *Then* he returned to work. Copy Jesus.
3. Experience what God has in mind for you.
4. Write down whatever God has revealed to you – either by journaling, talking with God, meditating, creating art, playing music, singing ... whatever works for you.
5. Thank God for what he has done.

Remember too – you are **not alone**. You are not responsible for anyone's faith but your own. You may be a shepherd, out to educate and protect, but you have been placed in a body of Christ – the *entire body is there to help you* ... but may not realize it! Teach them.

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#### **HELPING YOUTH GROW SPIRITUALLY**

First, a few common-sense observations:

- Realize there is **nothing we can do to guarantee someone will grow spiritually.**
- Realize we cannot help youth grow spiritually **unless we are growing spiritually too.**
- The most we can do is create experiences and rhythms that make spiritual growth more likely.

#### **Four Spiritual Habits**

1. Spend time with God – i.e., quiet time, devotions, etc.
2. Spend time with others – engaging in a healthy community.
3. Use the gifts God has given you.
4. Share your story. Kids and youth need to learn how to share their story. This helps them develop the habit of making faith a regular, everyday topic of conversation.

The intriguing this is that those four spiritual habits are both *outcomes* (products) of our faith and *catalysts* that can trigger faith growth.

The challenge for leaders is helping youth learn how to be more strategic in how they incorporate these spiritual habits in their own lives.

#### **GROW STRATEGY CALENDAR**

A youth program involves several components in any planning:

- Discipleship
- Teaching
- Weekly Programming
- Events
- Parents
- Volunteers

How can you develop your program over the year?

- Each quarter, focus on one of the four habits. For example:
  - o Fall – focus on relationships
  - o Winter – focus on service (using gifts)
  - o Spring – focus on devotions
  - o Summer – focus on sharing stories
- Everything you plan needs to be filtered through the lens of the focus for that period. So, in winter, everything you plan should be geared towards service.
- Every quarter should include one event or experience that reinforces the habit emphasized in that quarter. This is above and beyond normal weekly events.