



GUIDELINES FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH

This section contains important guidelines for all Host Teams and adult leaders to know when building relationships with youth, including:

- Maintaining Healthy Boundaries
- Youth Unlimited Sexual Misconduct Policy

What the Youth Who Attend Mission Experiences Need:

- Some students desperately need you to listen. Although they place a high value on their friends, many want to know an adult cares enough to listen, reflect and sort out the experiences of life with them. Make yourself available for both light-hearted chats and heart-to-heart talks. When teens sense that they have your full attention, they will also feel God's care for them.
- Some students need leaders and the community of a small group because they feel isolated. We all know what it is like to feel lonely in a crowd. Some students will feel lonely during the mission experience, and your team setting provides a place of belonging and an opportunity to be more than just a face in the crowd. Invest time and energy in getting to know the members of your team. Every person counts! Make each person feel special. Help cure loneliness by giving generously of your time and attention, especially to students who appear lonely. Affirm each person's positive qualities throughout the week.
- A few students need leaders for structure and discipline. Students need the input of adults to stay on schedule and on track. Encourage your team members to participate fully in all activities. In a positive way, highlight the benefits all participants receive as rules are respected and courtesy is shown to others.
- Students need leaders for spiritual guidance. While the schedule includes spiritual input from God's Word during the quiet time and the evening session, you are in a great position to help apply God's Word to their lives and put their faith into action. Draw on your own experiences as a Christian and the insight the Holy Spirit provides.

In his book, *Sharing Groups in Youth Ministry*, Walt Marcom lists personal growth factors that can help adults develop effective relationships with youth:

1. **Active Listening.** This key has two components: listening and responding. Listening to a person helps you to grasp the content of what is being said and the feelings being expressed. Active listening also involves responding to the other person in such a way that you communicate that you heard from him/her.

2. **Warmth and Respect.** It's a general misconception that students like adults who are young with abilities in sports or music. While this may be true of some students, *all* students want to know that you respect their opinions, views, feelings and experiences. In a small group situation, no one should be made to feel stupid for participating. Although some behaviors and beliefs are unacceptable, show young people that you hear and respect them even when you disagree.
3. **Concreteness.** Youth may have trouble communicating what is bothering them. To help identify their feelings and the reasons they might be feeling that way, ask them to give specific, concrete incidences and examples.
4. **Genuineness and Self-Disclosure.** Youth need environments in which they can be spontaneous without fear of censorship, judgment or criticism. When youth are surrounded by loving, accepting friends and adults, they will often have the courage to talk about painful and personal situations. Leaders and team members must regard such personal information as strictly confidential.
5. **Immediacy.** Youth often dwell on past events that cannot be changed. Help them deal with today's reactions to past events. Give them small, measurable goals to help them see the possibility for positive forward movement. If a teen or young adult can see what was learned from a past event, that recognition can also help them move forward.
6. **Confrontation.** Confrontation requires recognizing and wrestling with harmful behaviors, patterns and perceptions. Confrontation means that you care for the person enough to point out discrepancies without attacking a youth as a person.

Any serious situations that require confrontation should be discussed with the Spiritual Life Coordinator or the Host Team Coordinator. Appropriate boundaries must be maintained in these relationships. As an organization, Youth Unlimited makes every effort to provide a safe and Christ-centered experience for teens and adults. In order to do this, we need your help. As an adult, you will be setting an example of what it means to be a servant of Jesus Christ. The youth will watch your actions as you interact with them as well as with the other adults in the ministry. We trust that in everything you do, they will see Jesus in you. As the week progresses you may find yourself in situations where a youth will come to trust you and share things with you that he/she has never talked about before with anyone. We want to share with you some boundaries if you find yourself in this situation.

Healthy Boundaries

Do not counsel a person of the opposite sex; refer the student to an adult of his or her gender. If there is a history of abuse that the student has not told anyone about before, make sure you tell the Spiritual Life Coordinator immediately. They know what official action needs to be taken.

Observe the following appropriate touching guidelines:

While display of affection is often part of conveying support between leaders and young people, it can also distort intentions or cloud perceptions regarding the nature of the relationship. Therefore, displays of affection between leaders and youth ought to be limited to brief side hugs, an arm around another's shoulders, an open hand on one's back, a shake or clasping of hands or a light touch to the forearm. You should always ask beforehand for the student's permission to show physical affection. Please restrict these displays to a building's public areas. Respect everyone's right to refuse displays of affection.

Youth Unlimited Sexual Misconduct Policy:

It is our desire for all participants in Youth Unlimited events to feel comfortable and safe from unwanted sexual advances, real or perceived. All participants are to be sensitive and mindful of the issues at hand. Everyone must take personal responsibility to ensure that no one with whom contact is made, youth or adult, experiences any actions that could cause discomfort. Be aware that something as simple as a friendly hug can be misinterpreted.

What is sexual misconduct or sexual harassment?

It is usually small incidents that can be interpreted as harassment, meaning that someone is uncomfortable with someone else's actions. The following are examples:

- **Verbal:** Terms of endearment carelessly used such as *honey* or *sweetheart*. Jokes or comments with sexual themes. Stories, words or jokes that refer to private body parts.
- **Physical:** Placing an arm around someone's shoulders, giving an unwanted hug, being in a place where close physical contact feels uncomfortable. Touching or kissing without mutual consent.
- **Visual:** Inappropriate pictures. Pin-up style photos or explicit nude pictures.

Procedures to follow when an incident is reported:

Due to the sensitive nature of sexual misconduct and sexual harassment, and out of concern for the safety and privacy interests of all involved, Youth Unlimited requires that when staff, volunteers or participants become aware of, or have reasonable cause to suspect that, another staff, volunteer or participant is engaging in sexual misconduct, the staff or volunteer must report such misconduct.

Report as follows:

First, report to the Host Team Coordinator, or any Youth Unlimited staff present. If the incident involves anyone in leadership, contact the Youth Unlimited Missions Program Director at: 616.241.5616 or missions@youthunlimited.org

If the Missions Program Directors are not available, contact Youth Unlimited's Executive Director at: 616.241.5616 ext. 3043 or rick@youthunlimited.org

Document all verbal and relevant information immediately. Document all conversations. Complete a Youth Unlimited Incident Report form. Contact the Missions Program Director, and provide a verbal account of the report received from the staff or volunteer.

When gathering information, everything must be kept strictly confidential. Always question involved parties separately. Never interview an individual alone, always bring a second person with you. One of the two doing the interview must be the same gender as the one being interviewed. Determine if there were any witnesses; interview them, assuring them that their identity and conversations will be kept confidential to the best of our ability. If reasonable evidence is present of sexual

misconduct, the local police will be contacted. This step is done in consultation with the Youth Unlimited Mission Director.

Make arrangements to separate the parties involved from the rest of the event participants. This may include lodging “off site” from the event. Make necessary arrangements for participants to travel home. Arrangements can be made by staff or delegated to someone else. It is understood that such arrangements are the expense of the parties involved—not of Youth Unlimited.

Complete the Incident Report, including all documented information, and give information to the Missions Program Director of Youth Unlimited.