

YOUTH GROUP SCOOP [youth group evaluation]

THIS WEEK

Teenagers often take their youth group for granted. When they're having fun and it's going great, they enjoy it. But when there is heavy discussion or less exciting activities, they complain. This session gives you and your group the opportunity to assess the status of the group in a positive way. You can also use this TalkSheet with the leaders of the group as a planning tool.

OPEN

There are a few different ways to approach this topic with your youth group. No matter what, try to stay positive about the group—don't let this turn into a gripe session. Encourage and let your kids talk about other groups they've visited or been part of. Have them share the pros and cons of the activities, leaders, Bible studies, and so on. Jumpstart them with questions like—what did you like about the last group you were a part of? What did you like about the activities? Were you able to talk with the leaders? What made you frustrated? What made you want to go back?

Another intro would be to have your kids list characteristics and features of a perfect youth group. Write the comments down on a poster board or whiteboard so that you can look at them later. Then communicate that no group can be perfect because its members are so different! Each person in the group likes to do different things, which is why it's hard for leaders to please everyone.

Begin by setting the tone and stating that you want to keep the discussion positive. Be sure to note any negative comments that come out, but mediate the discussion.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. This is your chance to gauge what your kids like about youth group. You may want to ask more specific questions to get a better feeling for their preferences or activities, bible studies and so on. You may find that your kids have a variety of things they like. Make a note of these for your own reference later.
2. Ask the kids to share the words they chose, and write them on a poster board or whiteboard, in two separate columns marked negative and positive. Why did they choose these words?
3. Let your kids share their criticisms in a constructive way. Remind them the purpose of this TalkSheet is to improve the group, not to bring it down.
4. What would they do differently if they were the leaders? Keep this exercise as positive as possible.

Ask for volunteers to share their responses to the questions one at a time, or to make comments. You may want to ask them to let you collect the sheets at the end of the discussion. Review those later.

5. Ask for volunteers to share what the verse says to them and offer suggestions as how to change the structure of your youth group.

THE CLOSE

If you'd like to do a closing activity, try the affirmation circle. Most teenagers don't hear enough good things about themselves, especially from their peers. It works like this—have everyone sit in a circle with one person in the middle. Those sitting in the circle give compliments to the person in the middle. Don't force them, though—you may have to start them up with a few questions beforehand like—

- What has this person meant to you?
- What does he or she add to the group?
- What are you thankful for about this person?
- Does he or she have personality characteristics that you admire? If so, what?
- Has this person taught you anything about God?

This can be a humbling or possibly embarrassing experience, especially for those who aren't used to hearing compliments. Be sure to include your adult leaders and all your group members.

Finally, let the group know that they are important to the group and that their comments and concerns will be taken seriously. You may want to invite them to get involved in the group activities—possibly help with planning and organizing meetings and events. Then close with a prayer for the youth group and its leaders.

MORE

- Invite your kids who are interested to a planning session to help brainstorm ideas for activities and programs for the coming year. This can be a fun time of reflection and listening to suggestions. Maybe host a special breakfast or dessert night to do this. Encourage them to continue to let you know what they'd like to see happen in the group.
- Have some one-on-one time with your kids who are leaving the group and moving up to senior high. Ask him or her specific questions about what they liked about the year's activities. What new things did they learn? What was their favorite activity? Their favorite discussion? What wouldn't they want to do again? This is a great way to touch base with individual kids and hear their opinions in private.