

Date Used: _____

Group: _____

AM I NORMAL?

Topic: Growing up

Purpose of this Session:

Growing up produces all kinds of conflicting emotions. Many young people feel they are somehow different from others and not progressing normally. This session has been designed to encourage talking about how it feels to be growing up. It also gives you, the leader, a chance to affirm your students and also to teach them to encourage and support each other.

To Introduce the Session:

Some advanced preparation with this is well worth the effort. Record on tape statements from some respected members of your adult congregation talking about their own experiences when they were junior high students. Word association is a good way to begin. A few key words are: puberty, parents, school, friends, looks, music, feelings, problems, homework, the opposite sex. Play the tape for your youth group and begin your discussion with these same subjects.

The Discussion:

Item #1: This presents a fun way to begin. Have the students vote on their choice of the "perfect age". Ask them to give their reasons for choosing this age. Point out that every age is unique unto itself and offers new and exciting experiences. Old age is not called "The Golden Age" without good reason.

Item #2: Emphasize the fact that everyone grows at a different pace. During early adolescence, it is "normal" for some to mature as much as six years earlier than others. Girls, particularly, will mature physically much younger than boys. Point out that it all evens out in a few years.

Item #3: Ease the tension that may exist with this item by beginning the discussion with changes that happened to you when you were in junior high school. Once the students have shared their own changes, explain that their feelings are normal. Nearly everyone wishes to make changes in themselves.

Item #4: This item opens up the discussion on the students' self-image. The responses will be good indicators of their self-esteem. You may want to share what your own self-image was as a teen and what Christ had done for you. You may also wish to collect their TalkSheets (unsigned) to read how all chose to answer this item.

Item #5: Young people at the junior high age level are particularly sensitive about fitting in, being normal, and going along with whatever their peers think best. Use this item to talk about what is "normal". Today's young person has far too many adult worries and responsibilities. They have literally lost some of their childhood. Ask them to arrange these concerns into two categories: those that need attention now and those that can wait until a later date in their lives. Then give your views about what is normal and healthy for their age. Mention realistic expectations of themselves and others.

Item #6: Each of these scriptures deals with growing up. You may wish to focus attention on Luke 2:51-52 and talk about Christ's childhood.

To Close the Session:

A comprehensive conclusion is to summarize the feelings and thoughts the students shared, showing them they are normal. It is important to stress God's understanding and love. God does know how painful it is to grow up because Jesus was once their age and really cares for them.

Outside Activities:

1. Ask the students to bring a record, a cassette or video to the youth group meeting that best describes how they feel about growing up. After previewing the material, play those you wish to discuss with the group.
2. Ask the students to keep a journal of their feelings and thoughts for a week. Discuss what it was like to write these down.
3. Have the students make a collage that best describes how they feel as young people. Ask them to bring their collages to the youth group and share them. Keep several to share with parents and church members.