

FEELING THE HEAT

1. What are the three most common sources for information on sex?

- | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ The Bible | ☐ Magazines or books | ☐ The Internet |
| ☐ Friends | ☐ Teachers | ☐ Other— |
| ☐ Sex ed classes | ☐ Parents or guardians | |
| ☐ Doctors | ☐ Family planning clinics | |
| ☐ Pastors and youth leaders | ☐ Radio talk shows | |
| | ☐ Movies and television | |

2. What do these sources emphasize most about sex?

- Parents—
- Internet—
- Church—
- Friends—
- Television and Movies—
- Magazines—



3. Lara's school counselor told her she should take birth control if she's been dating a guy regularly, just in case. The counselor gave her the name of a clinic where she could get the Pill.

- a. What do you think of the counselor's advice?
- b. What should Lara do?
- c. Is it wrong for Lara to be taking birth control?
- d. Does taking the Pill give her an excuse to have sex?
- e. What advice would you give Lara?

4. What "lines" do people use in order to pressure someone into having premarital sex? (For example, "Don't worry, I've got condoms.") Are these lines effective? Why or why not?

5. Check out one of the following Bible passages and write your response in one sentence.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Ephesians 5:1-3

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

FEELING THE HEAT [premarital sex]

THIS WEEK

Sex is everywhere. Advertisements, TV shows, magazines, and movies all tell teenagers that premarital sex is accepted—and normal. Your kids need to hear the other side of the story in a positive, nonjudgmental way. This TalkSheet allows you to address premarital sex and sexuality in a Christian context—without lecturing or preaching at your kids.

Try to be extra careful that you, and your adult volunteers, keep a neutral stance and don't come off as judgmental during this discussion. Your goal is to discuss the meaning of sex in a healthy way, not to condemn any kids who may be sexually active.

OPEN

Whatever you do for your intro, communicate that sex is a normal, healthy part of a loving, committed relationship. Our society has warped its meaning—that's why you're going to talk about it!

Start by asking them why God created sex. What have your kids been told about sex in the church? Read in the Bible? Then ask the group to list where sex is shown, talked about, referred to, sung about, and so on in the media. Make a master list of these on a poster or whiteboard if you wish. How was sex portrayed? Was it good? Bad? Dirty? Uncomfortable? How has that media warped the meaning of sex?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. What are the three most common sources of information about sex? Most likely, they won't include parents or church. Point out that knowledge on sex is usually based on misleading information from the media. What sources would they like to get more information from? What is the most dependable?
2. Draw up a master list of all the messages. Ask them which are true or false, which are good or bad, and which are consistent with the teachings of the Bible.
3. This tension-getter will most likely get a lot of different opinions. The questions assume the couple will have sex, so be prepared. Ask your kids if this assumption is true of their peers. In general terms, do most teenagers deal with these issues? As a Christian how would they handle the situation?
4. Let the group share their responses to these lines. These statements or lines are about using people—pressuring someone into sex for selfish reasons and not for the other person's benefit. What does this say about respecting another

person's body and beliefs? How would a Christian resisting this pressure? Is it easier? Harder?

5. Focusing on what God wants Christians to do sexually, ask them to share their thoughts. Point out the fact God isn't depriving us of sex. It's the opposite—he wants only the best for us physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. God understands their struggles, he knows, and he can keep them strong.

THE CLOSE

Summarize the points that have been covered, but focus on God's forgiveness. Many of your kids have probably already done things they regret and feel guilty about. You may wish to read a few verses about God's forgiveness and compassion—Isaiah 1:18 or 1 John 1:9. It's never too late to get right with God and start over.

Emphasize your willingness to talk to group members about sexual topics they may need to discuss privately and confidentially. If your kids are victims of inappropriate comments, touches, or sexual aggression—or suspect others are—they must get help immediately from a school counselor, parent, pastor, or you. For more information, visit the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org) or National Coalition Against Sexual Assault (<http://ncasa.org>).

MORE

- You may want to take some time to talk about sexual pornography in magazines and on the Internet. Pornography is a drug—a very addictive habit—and it damages relationships. It is crucial that those within your group who struggle with pornography or have friends who do get help immediately.
- Challenge your kids to start praying for their future spouses now! Have them bring their future husbands and wives before God to have him prepare their hearts, minds, and bodies for marriage.

HUGS AND KISSES

1. What does the word **love** mean to you?

2. Circle the words below that you think best describe love.

Romance	Sharing	Adoration	Lust
Sex	Responsibility	Vulnerability	Marriage
Forever	Giving	Admiration	Kissing
Fun	Passion	Devotion	Friendship
Commitment	Infatuation	Idealism	Other—



3. Most girls Chandra's age are trying to find a guy to fall in love with. Chandra, a junior in high school, has a different sort of problem. She's trying to get her old boyfriend, Gabriel, to fall out of love with her. He won't give up, saying he can't get her out of his mind and still loves her.

What advice would you give **Chandra**?

What advice would you have for **Gabriel**?

4. It was just like a movie—Antonio and Erika met while skiing in Colorado. Now, only three months later, Antonio has asked Erika to marry him. She says she wants to marry Antonio—even though he's six years older and has been married before. After all, she's in love with him, and that's all that matters.

What advice would you give **Erika**?

What advice would you give **Antonio**?

What advice would their **parents** give?

5. What do you think—yes or no?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ True love can conquer all. | ☐ True love lasts forever. |
| ☐ True love is something you feel in your heart. | ☐ True love makes premarital sex okay. |
| ☐ True love is blind. | ☐ True love doesn't happen at first sight. |
| ☐ True love happens only once in a lifetime. | ☐ True love only happens in the movies. |

6. Which one of the following Bible stories do you think describes **true love**?

Genesis 29:18-20	2 Samuel 11:2-5
Judges 14:1-3	Esther 2:17

HUGS AND KISSES [romantic love]

THIS WEEK

Your kids may have mixed ideas about what love is. The media portrays romantic love as warm fuzzy moments while kissing and cuddling. A lot of teenagers think love is a feeling. Others think it's physical attraction or sexual intimacy. The purpose of this TalkSheet is to discuss what love really means. Jesus taught that love was more than a feeling—and he lived it! It's an action, a commitment, and a way of life.

OPEN

Send your group on a Love Scavenger Hunt. For example—how many titles of new release movies does Blockbuster (or some other video store) have with *love* in the title? How many magazines have the word *love* on the front cover? How many current radio songs are there with *love* in the title or that talk about love? What CDs do they have that have *love* in the lyrics or title? Have them bring specific examples of titles or lyrics. Use your creativity and use what time you have. Then talk about what they learned from finding these.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Have your kids share what they think love is. Encourage them use the words from item 2 as a springboard. Write these on a master list on a whiteboard or poster board. You'll use this list later on.
2. Have them share their choices and add these to your list from question 1. Be careful not to judge the words they've chosen. Ask why they have chosen the ones they did. Does the rest of the group agree or disagree? Why or why not?
3. & 4. These tension-getters offer an opportunity to discuss true love versus feelings of love. You may want to discuss them from different angles. For example in the first scenario suppose Chandra was not a Christian, or was pregnant, or had fallen in love with another guy. In the second scenario you could suppose Erika is only 16 or that both Antonia and Erika are Christians. As you give each variable to the kids, ask them if it would make any difference in their advice. Why or why not? Another idea is to divide the kids into smaller groups, giving each one of these situations. Let them decide what should be done, then present and discuss their conclusions with the rest of the group.
5. Talk over each statement and let the kids debate them. What are the different opinions? Do they

agree with each other? Why or why not? Point out that girls and guys may have different opinions. Some of the items may bring up the subject of divorce. Remember to be sensitive when discussing this issue—several in the group may have divorced parents.

6. Allow the kids to read and reflect on each of these stories and share their opinions of them. Point out that not all Bible characters were perfect. What does the story say about love?

THE CLOSE

Using your list from items 1 and 2, make another list of what love is according to God. Using 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, make a list of what love is and isn't—what does love mean in everyday life through our actions? Challenge them to give specific examples of how to show love. Then, encourage them to think of one area of love that they need to work on. Who do they need to try harder to love? What actions to they need to change?

Focus on and discuss the three kinds of love the Greeks described: agape, phileo and eros. Agape is God's love for us—a genuine, sacrificial love that is unselfish and giving. Phileo is friendship love. Eros is love on a more physical, sexual level. Concentrate on agape, the love Christ exemplified. Healthy marriages and relationships involve all three types of love. Communicate that love is much more than a feeling of infatuation or romance. It involves responsibility and commitment. It's a decision, an act of will.

MORE

- Divide the kids into groups and have them each find (or you can do this beforehand) and research the lyrics of a popular love song—most can be easily obtained on the Internet. Then examine what it implies about love. What is it saying? How would they evaluate the song based on the discussion of love? What does the song mean to a Christian? How is it different?
- What is sacrificial love? You may ask the group to find examples of sacrificial love in the Bible. What characters showed agape love? What did they do? What did God say or would've said? Point out that agape love means swallowing our pride and sacrificing ourselves! It must have been for Christ to give it up and die for us. If he could do that for us, think of all the smaller things we can do!

LOVING FOR A LIFETIME



1. Check what you think is the **best** age for marriage.

Women

- ☐ 15-18
☐ 19-22
☐ 23-26
☐ 27-30
☐ over 30

Men

- ☐ 15-18
☐ 19-22
☐ 23-26
☐ 27-30
☐ over 30

2. Rank the following issues in marriage from the **most important (1)** to the **least important (12)**.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ Sex | ☐ Religion | ☐ Faithfulness |
| ☐ Children | ☐ Mutual interests | ☐ Romantic love |
| ☐ Communication | ☐ Financial security | ☐ Friendship |
| ☐ Commitment | ☐ Respect | ☐ Loyalty |

3. Which of the following best describes how you feel about couples **living together** before marriage?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ It's totally acceptable. | ☐ It's permissible if you are an adult. |
| ☐ It's a good way to see if a marriage will work. | ☐ It's totally unacceptable. |
| ☐ It's better than getting a divorce later. | ☐ It saves paying oodles in rent. |

4. Choose 10 of the following qualities that you would like your future spouse to have, ranking them from **most important (1)** to **least important (10)**.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ☐ Good looks | ☐ Sense of humor | ☐ Considerate and caring |
| ☐ Money | ☐ Shared interests | ☐ Good sex partner |
| ☐ Fantastic body | ☐ Commitment to Christ | ☐ Communication skills |
| ☐ Intelligence | ☐ Honesty and trustworthiness | ☐ Romantic and loving |
| ☐ Good parenting potential | ☐ Respectful of you | ☐ A good friend |
| ☐ Assertive | ☐ Leadership abilities | ☐ A nice family |
| ☐ Emotionally healthy | ☐ Good income | |
| ☐ Similar values | | |

5. What do these verses say about **marriage** and **love**?

Proverbs 18:22

1 Corinthians 7:1-11

2 Corinthians 6:14-16

LOVING FOR A LIFETIME [marriage]

THIS WEEK

Face it—society's view of marriage is deteriorating. Marriage problems abound. More and more couples are living together without getting married. It's no wonder that teenagers may question the purpose and meaning of marriage. This TalkSheet gives your group the opportunity to discuss the truth about marriage, within a Christian context and from a Christian perspective—and clear up the misconceptions, low expectations, and false ideals that society has given them.

OPEN

Whether you are married or not, start out by presenting this case scenario to role play with your group. You are a 20 year old girl or guy. You've just broken up (for good) with the love of your life who you thought was "the one." Now you're questioning what marriage is all about and why anyone would ever want to get married. Why do you want to keep dating to find someone else? What should your reasons for marriage be?

Have your kids brainstorm their ideas and write down a master list on a whiteboard or poster board of the reasons for marriage. Some will be straight up obvious (companionship, sex) and some won't be ("someone to cook for you"). Have them list everything they think of when they hear the word marriage and why marriage beats living together beforehand.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Ask your kids share their choices and why they chose the age they did. What are the pros and cons of each age group?
2. Discuss the three most popular answers and the three least popular answers. Encourage your group to debate these answers. Why or why not they are important? What reasoning do they have for each? Then rank them again as a group on a poster board or whiteboard.
3. Living together is a popular alternative to marriage today. Many young people have been affected by divorce or their parents live in boyfriends or girlfriends. Many are scared of marriage as a result. Debate the pros and cons of living together, and challenge them to give their honest opinions. Save yours—and biblical beliefs—for the closing statement.
4. Allow the group to debate their preferred traits with each other. You may want to make a master list of the favorites and discuss them further.

Have them rank which ones are the least important to most important.

5. Go through these passages to hear which ones they picked and how they summarized them. What did the passages teach them about love and marriage?

THE CLOSE

Share a brief biblical view of marriage. Communicate that that despite the failures of today's marriages, it is holy and instituted by God—it shouldn't be taken lightly. Marriage is one of life's most important of decisions, and—with God's help—marriage can be successful.

Go back to your list from the intro and compare their list with God's intentions for marriage. Point out that God created marriage for all those good things—all those bonuses that come along with having a forever friend. Have any of them changed their idea of what marriage is?

Challenge your kids to think seriously about what they are looking for in a marriage partner. How can they start today to think about healthy marriages? What can they learn from society's mistakes and portrayal of marriage and divorce?

Finally, encourage those who have experienced the pain of divorce to forgive their parents and give their hurt to Christ. Point out that Christ can heal broken and hurting relationships—he's there for them with open arms. And, be sure your kids know that you are available to talk more one-on-one.

MORE

- Have a group that's more visual? Show clips of or have each of your kids watch a TV show with a married couple in it. How is marriage portrayed? Is it good and bad? What problems or arguments did they have? Have them discuss their conclusions and how media portrays marriage as opposed to reality.
- Or have a Q & A session with a married couple or a divorced person to openly discuss their marriage experiences and have your kids ask questions about how to handle dating, communication, and life as a couple. Try to keep your kids on track with the larger issues (not just sex questions). Finally, challenge your kids to ask their parents about being married, and encourage them to support their parents who may be going through marriage struggles.

THE DATING GAME

1. If you could go on the ideal date, what would it be? Where would you go?



2. Which three of the following characteristics would you choose to describe your ideal guy or girl?
- ☐ They can be open and honest with me.
 - ☐ They treat me with respect, as if I'm special.
 - ☐ They will listen when I need to talk.
 - ☐ They're popular.
 - ☐ They won't date anyone else but me.
 - ☐ They're very good-looking.
 - ☐ They like to try new and different things.
 - ☐ They're very intelligent and get good grades.
 - ☐ They're involved in church activities.
 - ☐ They want to get physical right away.
 - ☐ They have a lot of money.
 - ☐ They're a strong Christian.
 - ☐ They have a sense of humor.

3. What do you think? **D** (definitely), **M** (maybe), or **N** (never)
- ___ A person should date as many people as he or she can.
 - ___ Christians should pray together on a date.
 - ___ The best age to begin dating is 16.
 - ___ Heavy petting is okay as long as the couple doesn't go all the way.
 - ___ Christians should date only other Christians.
 - ___ It's okay for a girl to ask a guy for a date.
 - ___ The purpose of dating is to prepare for marriage.
 - ___ You should only date people your parents or guardians approve of.
 - ___ Couples should share expenses on a date.
 - ___ It is wrong for homosexuals to date.

4. What do each of these passages say about dating?
- 1 Kings 11:1-4
 - 1 Corinthians 5:9-11
 - Galatians 5:16

THE DATING GAME [d a t i n g]

THIS WEEK

Society and the media pressures teenagers to date at a young age—and to experiment with physical intimacy. These pressures are making an impact on Christian youth today—when they date, who they date, and how to handle social and sexual issues. This TalkSheet provides a forum to discuss dating and how to handle it from God's perspective.

OPEN

To quickly break the ice with your kids, you may want to share a humorous anecdote from your own dating history or ask several of your leaders to share stories of their own (changing names to protect the innocent!) Then have the group vote and give an award for the worst date story.

Or you can also find funny dating stories from magazines (almost every teenage magazine has them) and compare these. You kids may be able to find some of their own examples in magazines or from personal experience. Have them write out their experiences on paper and read them out loud (anonymously, of course!).

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Your kids will have different ideas on this! List them on a whiteboard, in case you want to refer to them later.
2. This forces your kids to assess their priorities and their values, because they're limited to three choices. You may want to tally up the votes for each trait to find out what the group thinks is most important. Ask your adult leaders to give some input as well.
3. Use this activity to let the group argue and debate the issue. You may want to divide them into groups, give them time to formulate a case for their position, and then let the teams state their case. Encourage them to use the Bible for support and to share any verses they found relating to the issue.
4. Dating isn't mentioned specifically in the Bible, so your kids will practice applying the Bible to modern life. Have them share their interpretations of each verse, then give your own comments to a passage or two along with a practical application.

THE CLOSE

Dating is a huge part of the teenage life. There's so much pressure to date—but it's okay (and healthy!) to not date. Communicate that dating is about building healthy relationships with others—it's not about who dates the most or gets the most "action" on dates. Dating doesn't have to be romantic—it can simply be having fun with others and building relationships. Ask your group why some people feel that they're a loser if they don't date. Why or why not? Why is there so much emphasis on dating?

You may also want to talk about the pressures of physical intimacy that come with dating. What is good or bad about dating someone for a long time? How do teenagers in general handle sexual relationships in general? How is this different among Christian kids?

Finally, you may want to close in prayer with your group. Challenge them to ask God for wisdom and self-control in their dating. Point out that God is in control of their relationships and expects them to be respectful towards the other person who they are with. Challenge them to start praying now for their future husbands and wives, asking God to prepare the other person for them and their relationship.

MORE

- Cases of date rape and physical abuse are on the rise. You may want to discuss safe ways to date without getting in a bad situation. Point out that date rape is a crime—no one, under no circumstances, can force another person into sex. What are ways to protect themselves from becoming a victim? Encourage them to meet the person if they don't feel comfortable riding in the same car and to date in social places where there are other people. Finally, communicate that if they are ever hit, pressured into sex, or raped, they must find a trusted adult to talk to—you, a pastor, teacher, counselor or parent. For more information, visit the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org) or National Coalition Against Sexual Assault (<http://ncasa.org>).
- What does our society say about dating? There are articles on the Internet and in several teenage magazines (such as *Seventeen*, *YM*, and *Mademoiselle*) on dating. Ask your kids to find some statistics, questions and answers, or articles on dating and the risks involved. Then discuss the articles and what happened. How can Christians handle situations like this? How can your kids encourage their friends and peers to date in healthy ways?

DRINK, DRANK, DRUNK

1. Place an X on the line indicating your opinion of alcohol.

◆		◆
Drinking alcohol is a sin and it's wrong.	Sometimes it's good, sometimes not.	Drink up! There's nothing wrong with it.

2. When do you think it's okay to drink alcohol? Circle your top three opinions.

Never	When you're with friends
When you're at parties	When you're of legal age
When you need to unwind	When your parents give you permission
When you're having a nice dinner	Whenever you want—in moderation
When you're taking communion at church	When you're at home
When you're thirsty	When you're depressed

3. What do you think—Y (yes), N (no), or M (maybe)?

- ☐ Alcohol is a drug—like marijuana, cocaine, and heroin.
- ☐ There's nothing wrong with drinking, if you don't get drunk.
- ☐ If you don't drink, people will think you're unsociable or not cool.
- ☐ It should be legal for teenagers to drink beer and wine.
- ☐ The church is behind the times in its views on alcohol usage.
- ☐ Teenagers should try alcohol at least once to see what it's like.

4. Jasmine's life seemed to be falling apart. She and her mother have never gotten along well, her father died several years ago, and her stepfather moved out last weekend. Tonight her mom said she had to work late, but Jasmine knows that isn't true—her mom has a new boyfriend. Jasmine is home alone, feeling depressed, and she goes to the cupboard and pulls out a few bottles. A few drinks won't hurt.



- a. Have you ever had a time when you felt this way? When?
- b. What would you do if you were Jasmine?
- c. What could she do besides drinking?

5. Check out one of these passages, and write a paraphrase in your own words.

Isaiah 5:11-12

Ephesians 5:18

1 Corinthians 6:12-13

DRINK, DRANK, DRUNK [a l c o h o l]

THIS WEEK

The influence of alcohol is everywhere. Teenagers see it used, talked about, and glamorized on TV, on the radio, and on the Internet. Kids of all ages are consuming alcohol of all kinds, from wine coolers to hard liquor. This TalkSheet gives you a forum to discuss drinking and what a Christian young person should do about alcohol.

OPEN

Start by asking the group to think of all the beer and liquor slogans that they can remember from TV, the radio, movies, the Internet or wherever. You may want to videotape some of these commercials and play them for the group. Discuss whether or not they pay attention to the commercials and how these commercials portray alcohol. How is it selling the liquor? Are these commercials good, bad, truthful, and so on? You will be amazed at the number of alcoholic beverage commercials that your kids will know. Keep a list on newsprint or whiteboard to refer to later on.

During this discussion, be sure to set the tone for the discussion by listening carefully to the opinions of each of the group members. Although you'll be tempted to state your opinions, wait until later—they'll be more likely listen to you later and respect your thoughts. And remember to encourage them to respect each other's thoughts. This can be a touchy subject, depending on your group, so try extra hard to keep the discussion moving in a positive, yet challenging direction.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Draw the scale shown and record the kids' answers. You will hear several opinions. Allow them to debate the issues.
2. Ask for a show of hands as the group votes on when they think it's permissible to drink alcohol. Allow them time to defend their opinions, then when most people their age drink alcohol. Read the list again and note their answers.
3. You may want to separate the kids into groups based on their answers to the questions and then let them debate the statements. This is a good opportunity for you to listen effectively and find out what your kids believe. Focus attention on the consequences of drinking—what it does to families, friends, parents and individuals both physically and emotionally. You may want to use examples of people you know (without identifying names) and ask the group for anonymous examples, too.

4. This tension-getter explores some of the reasons people drink, such as escapism and stress relief. Can your kids relate to this situation? Why or why not?

5. After sharing these passages, share what the Bible has to say about drinking alcohol. In all probability, your group may wonder if Christ drank wine, why he turned water into wine, and if the verses apply to alcohol.

THE CLOSE

Young people today associate fun with drinking or doing drugs. Partying, among most teenagers, is synonymous with getting wasted. It's important to communicate to your group the dangers of drinking—not just the moral implications. Drinking ruins lives, destroys families, and causes thousands of deaths each year. High school kids are especially vulnerable to the addiction of alcohol and drugs. Some experts say it takes an adult six months to become addicted, but it takes a teenager only six days. And, drinking is extremely dangerous during these growing years. Alcohol can affect brain growth and may cause permanent brain damage.

Saying no to drinking—and any peer pressure—requires self-control. It takes a strong person to stand up for their bodies and minds. Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit—your kids aren't standing alone. Encourage them to ask God for strength and wisdom to say no. Nothing is too hard for God to help them with.

MORE

- Ask your kids bring in examples of how media portrays drinking. Have them bring in clips of TV shows, advertisements, media clips, songs or other examples of how drinking is shown. Discuss with them how they are being bombarded with pressures to drink and the idea that drinking is okay. How does the media portray drinking? Does it ever deal with the consequences or dangers of it?
- You may want to take some time to talk about alcoholism. This is a commonly occurring disease among families—even Christian families—today. Talk about the dangers of alcoholism and how one can tell if someone is an alcoholic. Point out that someone who is drunk has no right to hit or abuse anyone of any age. If any of your kids are facing abusive situations, encourage them to talk with a trusted adult. For more information on alcoholism and other links, visit NIAAA (www.niaaa.nih.gov).

GOT FAITH?

1. If you took a test that showed how seriously you lived out your faith in Jesus Christ, what grade do you think you'd receive (A, B, C, D, F)?
2. If your friends at school graded the test, what grade would they give you?
3. What do you think?
Faith is believing in something—
 - ☐ that you know isn't true.
 - ☐ that you can't prove.
 - ☐ that you can't see.
 - ☐ that you trust in.
4. Why don't some Christians your age take their faith seriously? Choose **three reasons** from the list below.
 - ☐ Christianity isn't fun.
 - ☐ Christianity may not be true.
 - ☐ Christianity doesn't work in everyday life.
 - ☐ Christianity is too hard.
 - ☐ Christianity is irrelevant to everyday life.
 - ☐ Christianity doesn't make you popular.
 - ☐ Christianity gets lost in busy lives.
 - ☐ Christianity doesn't make much sense.
 - ☐ Christianity is boring.
 - ☐ Christianity is too confusing.
 - ☐ Christianity is for old people who are about to die.
 - ☐ Other—
5. How do you think your faith will change as you get older?
6. Check out Hebrews 11—what **three things** does it say about faith?



GOT FAITH? [faith]

THIS WEEK

Even if they aren't aware of it, everyone has faith. Some have faith in themselves, some in science, and some in money. Others put their faith in cults or false religions. Take time to talk about what kind of faith your students have through a TalkSheet discussion.

OPENER

What is the importance of faith? What does faith mean to your kids? Start out by asking your kids a few questions to get them rolling. Why do people—both non-Christians and Christians—have faith in something? What purpose or direction does faith give people? Point out to your kids that people find hope in what they have faith in. For some people, faith is empty and numb. It doesn't mean anything to them. What faiths have your kids noticed in others at school? In their families? On the job? What do people today put their faith in and why? You may want to make a master list of these suggestions. What does it mean to have faith in a person? How does this relate to having faith in God?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Did the grades they chose reflect how seriously they live out their faith? Why or why not? You may want to ask a few of them to share their grades and why they gave themselves that grade.
2. Have students compare the grades they gave themselves with the grades they feel their friends might give them. Is there a difference between the two grades? Why or why not?
3. What do your kids think about this statement? What are your students are putting their faith into—the church, a set of beliefs found in a book, a quest for the meaning of life, or a historical Jesus who is who he says he is?
4. Examine the reasons your kids believe some young people don't take their faith seriously. What distracts teenagers from their faith? Also examine why some young people do take their faith seriously. Is it easier for young people to live with or without faith in Christ? Is the Christian life worth it?
5. Explore how someone's faith may change throughout life, especially during the next stage of life—the college-career years. Talk about whether or not the students' faith will be strengthened or weakened by questioning their beliefs and faith. Will it become more or less important?
6. Create a master list of everyone's responses. Take one or two of the Bible characters mentioned in Hebrews 11 and review their relationships to faith.

THE CLOSE

Explain that many people talk about faith in terms of belief. They believe that there is a God or they believe that you should go to church. But is simple believing that faith the kind of faith God wants? There isn't anything wrong with a belief that focuses on information. The Bible says that even the demons believe (James 2:19). But there is another kind of faith—a faith that believes in something. It is based on facts, but runs deeper than mere knowledge. It focuses on a relationship with God. Your kids should understand that God didn't expect them to walk around lost and in the dark—the Bible provides them with the facts for their faith. But they still must believe in those facts to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

MORE

- Hold a faith Q&A time with your group. Have the group write down any questions they have about the Christian faith on 3x5 cards (anonymously). Then collect the cards and have your kids take turns picking out questions. If they feel comfortable, have them try to answer it or pass it on. Discuss the questions as a group and encourage them to use the Bible for back up to their questions and answers. To liven things up, invite your senior pastor to a meeting and put him in the hot seat for a question-and-answer session!
- Challenge your kids to e-mail or talk with one adult this week about their belief in God, life after death, the Bible, miracles, prayer, and so on. Or, challenge them to go into an on-line chat room to get some responses on these questions. This is a great way to challenge others to think about and defend their beliefs. Especially if they enter chat-rooms under non-Christian Web pages! Later have them share their experiences, what was discussed and what the kids learned from doing this.

HOOKED ON DRUGS

1. Circle from the list below the **five drugs** most frequently used by teenagers.

Caffeine

Heroin

Alcohol

LSD

Speed

Downers

Tobacco

Inhalants

Other—

Marijuana

Cocaine

2. Why do you think the five drugs you circled are used the most by teenagers?

3. Rank the following from the **best reason (1)** to the **worst reason (8)** for you to avoid alcohol and other drugs.

☐ To avoid addiction

☐ To avoid getting into trouble

☐ To remain close to God

☐ To reduce problems in the future

☐ To not lose good friends

☐ To avoid violation of personal values

☐ To keep from disappointing parents

☐ To prevent physical harm

4. Is this statement true for you? Why or why not?

Alcohol and other drugs have become easier for me to avoid as I have gotten older.

5. Write a one-sentence summary of how each of the following Bible verses applies to the issues of drinking and doing drugs.

Proverbs 21:16, 17

Romans 14:13-18

1 Corinthians 3:16, 17

1 Corinthians 10:23, 24



HOOKED ON DRUGS [substance abuse]

THIS WEEK

Alcohol and other drug use is an issue that remains problematic in society. Make no mistake, alcohol is a drug. This isn't to suggest that adults shouldn't drink in moderation. But those adults, as well as young people, need to understand that when they drink they are consuming a legal drug. Take the opportunity to talk with your young people about drugs and how they can avoid them.

Be sensitive to those in your group who may have been using drugs already. According to statistics, there most likely are a few in your group who have experimented. Be careful not to come off sounding judgmental—keep an open mind during the discussion.

OPENER

Ask the students to name all the celebrities they know of (athletes, actors, musicians, politicians, and so on) who have had problems with alcohol or drugs. You will be able to create a long list of names. Ask the group if they know why any of these supposedly successful individuals became involved in substance abuse. Then discuss the consequences of that involvement. Did it affect their careers? Who went to jail? Who divorced or lost their children as a result of their dependency? Who lost their lives? Finally, ask the students if these individuals make substance abuse glamorous to teens. This will lead directly into your first TalkSheet question.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Generally speaking, the three most frequently used drugs are caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol. Point out that these three are addictive drugs even though they are legal.
2. Create a master list of reasons why these drugs are used by teenagers. What makes them want to use? What are the rewards of doing drugs? How do they initially get hooked?
3. Here the group can focus on good reasons to avoid use. Reach a group consensus on the best reasons to avoid use. What makes it hard to resist using drugs in today's society?
4. Has it gotten easier for your kids to resist drugs and alcohol? Most likely not. Spend some time talking about peers and media influences. Why is it harder to resist than before? What can your kids do to stay clean, despite the pressures?
5. Let students share their various perspectives on the passages. Focus on one or two passages of interest to the group.

THE CLOSE

The temptations to use drugs are everywhere. As you close, don't lecture your kids—affirm them. It takes will power and determination to stay clean. Encourage them to find others to support them—to keep them accountable for saying no. And point out that God gives power to those who ask for help in resisting temptation—check out 1 Corinthians 10:13 or James 1:12-15. Challenge your kids to make a commitment to stay clean and to find someone who can encourage them.

MORE

- How can your kids deal with addiction? What if they have a friend who is hooked? What can they do to help themselves and others? You may want to talk more about how to handle drug abuse and the importance of breaking the addiction. For information and discussion ideas, check out the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (<http://ncadd.org>) or the Addiction Research Foundation (www.arf.org/isd/info.html). You may want to talk about the effects of alcohol and drug abuse on families—some of your kids may face abusive homes or alcoholic family members. These are real issues that need attention. What are the signs of an addicted parent or sibling? Where can your kids go to find help and encouragement?
- Or you may want to ask someone to talk about drug addiction—possibly someone who works with users, treats those who are addicted, or has recovered from drug abuse. Some of your kids may have stories of people that they know who have been hooked. Take some time to talk about these stories and what happened—but be sure to mediate the conversation. What did your kids learn from these stories? How real are the dangers of drugs and alcohol?

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

1. List three big **life-changing** decisions that you must make in the future. When will you need to make these decisions?

2. Rank the following decisions from **easiest to make (1)** to **most difficult (15)**.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Doing homework or going to the mall | ☐ What to do on Friday and Saturday nights |
| ☐ What video or movie to watch | ☐ Who to go out with |
| ☐ How to spend your free time | ☐ What to spend money on |
| ☐ What kind of music to listen to | ☐ What Internet sites you visit |
| ☐ How to treat your parents when you're in trouble | ☐ Where to draw the line with physical intimacy |
| ☐ What statement you make with your clothes | ☐ What to do after high school and in the future |
| ☐ How often you do your personal devotions | ☐ Who to hang out with |
| | ☐ How to treat others |

3. How would you answer these? **Y (yes)**, **N (no)**, or **S (sometimes)**?

- ☐ Do you have difficulty making up your mind?
- ☐ Do you feel you have too many choices in your life?
- ☐ Do you consider the consequences of your decisions before making them?
- ☐ Do you often change your mind after you have made a decision?

4. What do you do—or who do you go to—when you need help making a big decision?

5. What do each of the following Bible verses say about **making decisions**?
Proverbs 3:5-6

Matthew 6:33

1 Peter 5:8



THE CHOICE IS YOURS [decision making]

THIS WEEK

Young people are faced with making a multitude of decisions, but have very little decision-making experience. They need practice in making good decisions. This TalkSheet will give them an opportunity to learn about making decisions from a Christian point of view.

OPEN

Start by gift-wrapping some items in different paper. Include a variety of different items, such as something valuable (gift certificate or \$5 bill), invaluable (a rock or plastic cup), ugly or strange (like a white elephant gift), and so on. Announce that one package contains something that they'd like, another contains something worthless, and another has nothing in it at all. Divide them into groups to decide which they would like to have. They cannot touch the gifts before deciding. Once they've made up their minds, decide (by drawing straws, picking numbers, or flipping a coin) which group gets to choose first, second, third, and so on.

There will probably be disagreements within each group, but they have to make a decision. After the gifts have been taken, tell the group something like, "Since it was hard to pick the gift you wanted, this is a good time to talk about decision-making!"

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Ask what big decisions they anticipate making in the future and discuss them. What ones do they have in common?
2. Invite them to share their hardest decisions as well as their easiest ones. Ask why some were more difficult than others and encourage them to share the others they listed.
3. Oftentimes young people don't think about the consequences of their decisions. In a situation such as whether or not to accept drugs from a friend at a party, ask them to brainstorm the consequences as well as the benefits. Are the potential consequences worth it? Impulsive decisions that could be harmful can often be checked by remembering to ask yourself, "And then what?"
4. Who do your kids go to for help with decision making? Make a list of their suggestions, and discuss the practical how-tos of making decisions: (1) gather all the facts, (2) consider all the alternatives, (3) get some good advice, (4) pray, and (5) choose the best alternative.
5. Lead them into relating these Bible verses to practical situations. Encourage them to seek God's perspective when making decisions.

THE CLOSE

Big decisions are really a combination of little decisions. The choices they make today will set the foundation for their future. Encourage your group to start making wise decisions about little things—they'll be more confident when it is time to make important ones.

It's wise to seek good advice and think about the consequences of their decisions. How will this decision affect others around them? How will it affect their own lives? Point out that everyone makes wrong choices. That's normal and okay—the key is to learn from those mistakes. Sometimes there's no right or wrong decision. God may not have an answer for them—he'll force them to make the choice. Encourage your kids to bring their decisions before God and to ask for his wisdom. Then make a decision and move on, leaving poor decisions behind and becoming better decision makers.

Point out that God forgives—and forgets—bad choices and mistakes. That's the awesome part about God's grace and mercy. Encourage your kids to bring their past failures to God ask him to take care of their guilt and struggles in the future.

MORE

- Sometimes kids don't want to hear what adults have to say. They don't realize that parents and other adults have faced the same decisions that they do. You may want to include some other adults in this discussion, including some college, or post-college, or early adults. Present decisions (from the list above) to each one and have them share how they would decide. Give your kids the chance to ask questions about why they made the decision. Use this time to build respect for others ideas and opinions.
- How do others—non-Christian teens or adults—make decisions? Some go to horoscopes, some to Internet chat rooms, advice columns and talk shows. What other ways are there to make decisions? How would God want us to make our decisions? How can your kids rely on God for decisions—even when they can't hear his voice?

DIVINE DESERT

1. How would you finish this statement?
When I feel distant from God, it's usually because—
2. Check out Psalm 143. How was the author (David) feeling as he wrote it? Why?
3. Which response below would you chose to finish this statement?
A Christian who is feeling down spiritually—
 - ☐ is probably committing a sin that causes guilt.
 - ☐ should read the Bible, pray, and go to church more.
 - ☐ can be a solid, committed Christian without major sins.
 - ☐ needs to get some extra sleep.
4. Here's a list of things that might help a person get back on track with spirituality. Which **two** would be the most helpful for you and why?
 - ☐ Moving to a new place to start over
 - ☐ Making new friends
 - ☐ Volunteering or doing good deeds
 - ☐ Going to a Bible study
 - ☐ Breaking some habits, such as drugs or alcohol abuse
 - ☐ Spending more time with God
 - ☐ Going to a Christian school
 - ☐ Taking a break from going to church
 - ☐ Other—
5. Now read John 13:14-17. What lesson was Jesus trying to teach his followers?



What result did he promise to those who lived according to this lesson?

DIVINE DESERT [spiritual dry spells—Psalm 143]

THIS WEEK

All Christians have ups and downs in their relationship with God. But this isn't a sign that God has abandoned them. God doesn't move! It's people that move away from God in different ways. This TalkSheet discusses emotional and spiritual ups and downs—and how do deal with those as Christians.

OPENER

Start off by asking your kids to make a map or chart of their relationship with God. Provide paper and pens for them to do this. Let them create their own chart—pinpointing specific times when they felt up or down in their relationship with God. Ask them to write down what times those were and what was going on in their lives at the time. Be sure to have them mark the beginning of their relationship with God and where they are today. They won't have to share these maps or charts with anyone else, so encourage them to be honest about the challenges they've faced. Afterwards, ask the group to summarize what causes someone to lose touch with God. Why do they think people go through highs and lows? How do they think God responds when he sees them going through really good times and rough times, too?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Without forcing your kids to share their individual answers, ask them to make a list of the things that tend to make them feel distant from God. You may want to hang a large sheet of white paper for them to write their answers on. Make it clear that there's a big difference between feeling that God is far off and him really being far off.
2. In these verses David felt hopeless and depressed. He felt faint and dismayed. His trials were severe (verse 3) and it had been a long time since he felt good (verse 5). And it seems that he hadn't gotten any answers to his prayers (verse 7). But despite all this, he didn't feel that God was far away. He still turned to God in prayer, recognizing that God was near.
3. How did your kids respond to these items? Ask them to explain why they answered yes or no. Then relate these items to David in Psalm 143. Was he committing a sin or not praying? Was he committed to God?
4. So when the down times come, how will your kids respond? What answers did they chose from these items? Ask for a few volunteers to share their responses and why they chose the ones they did. Take a poll among your group members

to see how they answered. How easy or difficult is it to follow through with these suggestions? Why or why not?

5. What did Jesus say to his followers in these verses? If your group had to paraphrase the verses in their own words, what would they say? How do these verses apply directly to the lives of your kids today?

THE CLOSE

Your kids have control over their emotions—and over how they respond to the down times in Christianity. To illustrate this, ask your kids to describe the possible emotional responses a girl might have to being asked out by a guy. She could be happy (if she liked him), mad (if he was going steady with someone else), disgusted (if he was a creep), and so forth. The emotional response is up to her. The same thing applies to down times with God. If you're going through a hard time, how will your kids respond to God? Will they walk away? Or will they lean harder on him? The choice is up to them. God never moves.

MORE

- Have your kids take a look at the charts or maps from the introduction. Looking at the down times, how could they have handled these situations differently? What would have made a difference at the time? During these times, did they move toward God or away from him? Would it have helped to talk with someone, like a youth pastor or teacher? Were their prayers answered? If so, how? Did God prove himself to be faithful through these times? If your group is comfortable with each other, you may want to let them share a few struggles—and the results—with each other.
- Maybe you have some group members who need some encouragement in their relationship with God. You may want to form a small prayer group or a daily e-mail verse and encouragement. Or make a goal to have lunch with one student every week to see how they're doing in their walk with God. Some of your kids may be dealing with some pretty heavy issues, such as depression, abuse, social struggles, problems at home and more. They may be asking the question why? and may need to find professional help or someone to help them deal with these issues.

FEAR NOT!

1. What's the difference between **worry** and **concern**?
2. Below are some possible teenage worries. Put a **C** next to the ones a person would have some sort of **control over** and an **NC** for those one would have **little or no control over**.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Dying | ☐ Breaking up |
| ☐ Getting acne | ☐ Enduring parental abuse |
| ☐ Having parents divorce | ☐ Living through a war |
| ☐ Living with alcoholic parents | ☐ Not making a sports team |
| ☐ Flunking a test | ☐ Being pressured to succeed |
| ☐ Having stress | ☐ Getting in trouble with the police |
| ☐ Being unpopular | ☐ Dating |
| ☐ Being a victim of school violence | ☐ Abusing drugs and alcohol |
| ☐ Being in a car accident | ☐ Becoming pregnant |

If problems can be prevented or dealt with in some way, why do teenagers still worry about them?

3. If you had absolute control over the troubles above, would you still worry? Why or why not?

4. Check out **Psalm 112:7-8**.
What does it say about a godly person?
 - ☐ A godly person never has problems
 - ☐ God will solve all my problems before any real damage is done
 - ☐ I don't have to fear problems even when they come
 - ☐ Problems will come, since it talks about triumph coming at the end



5. You're talking to a friend who is worried about a situation. Using **Romans 8:28**; **Philippians 4:6-7**; and **1 Peter 5:7**, what advice would you have for him or her? Would your advice change if this person was a Christian? Why or why not?

FEAR NOT! | f e a r — P s a l m 1 1 2 |

THIS WEEK

Trusting in God helps teenagers free themselves from the things that cause them anxiety—the fears of embarrassment, of being unpopular, not being attractive, bad grades, and a myriad of other things. This TalkSheet allows your class members to discuss their fears without fear and shows them how trust in God can cancel worry.

OPENER

What scares your teenagers today? What would they be most hesitant to talk about with you, their peers, or their parents? What subjects would make them the most nervous and scared? Or are your kids just so bold that they're not scared of anything (not likely!)? Start off with a simple question to trigger their thoughts. What in the media or society makes them afraid or scared? Why are they fearful of these things? Are some fears more prevalent or important than others? What fears to their parents or siblings have? Are these fears different than their own? You may get a variety of reactions. Pay attention to your group's answers and allow everyone to express an opinion. You may want to make a list of their suggestions and then pick the three most common fears among themselves or their peers. Then launch into this discussion on fear.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. You may want to have your kids check out the answers to these in a dictionary. To be worried speaks of negative emotions such as anxiety and fretfulness. To be concerned can also mean that, but it has a more positive meaning—to be responsible for or interested in something.
2. How much control do your kids have over these situations? Are they being realistic about their control—or lack of—a situation? You may want to ask for individual responses to these issues. Which ones do they have more control over? Why or why not? Remind them the problems are inevitable, but worrying about them is a choice.
3. Would your kids still worry about these situations? Why or why not? Would they worry if they knew that God has complete control over all problem? And while your kids may question why things happen in their lives, God has his reasons, some of which are beyond them knowing.
4. What does this verse say to your kids? What does a godly person have? How does this affect their beliefs or how they handle situations in their lives?
5. The truths in these verses are powerful—they

give anyone the power to overcome worry. Read each passage over with your group and paraphrase them. How do your kids feel after reading these verses? How will these verses help them in the future? You may want to have them write down these verses on a 3x5 card for reference when they're feeling the itch to worry.

THE CLOSE

God wants to drive fear from the lives of your kids. Challenge them to be people who trust in God and obey his commands. Encourage your kids to bring their stresses, doubt, and worries to God. He's there with open ears 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And they can be guaranteed that he's listening. Spend some time in prayer with your kids.

Finally, encourage them to seek out a trusted adult to talk with about issues that are really affecting them. Situations of abuse, sexual assault, depression, and family problems may need professional help. For more information, visit the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org) the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (<http://ncadd.org>), Suicide Voices Awareness of Education (www.save.org), the National Foundation For Depressive Illness, Inc. (www.depression.org), or the Youth Specialties Web page (www.YouthSpecialties.com).

MORE

- Worry is a heavy burden. It zaps energy and robs a person of spiritual closeness with God. You may want to read Matthew 11:30, which says "for my yolk is easy, and my burden is light." To illustrate this, gather some large stones or a few other heavy items. Label each of these items with a sin or worry, such as cheating, not getting along with parents, or problems with friends. Then ask for a volunteer to come up and help out. Put all these stones (or other items) into a backpack on the volunteer's back. Point out that sin and worry is like the backpack—and unnecessary burden that they don't have to carry. What removes this burden? Prayer. Point out that praying to God and giving him their worries, doubts, troubles, and sins will remove the burden. Then remove the backpack. God doesn't want Christians do carry around extra weight—he says he'll do it for them. For a more full explanation of this illustration, see Coming Clean on page 105.
- Encourage your kids to support and encourage each other. You may want to create a weekly prayer list for your group, or set up an e-mail list for them to share their prayer requests, worries, and thoughts with each other.

GOT SPIRIT?



1. What is the first thing you think of when you hear someone talk about the **Holy Spirit**?

2. How would you explain the **Holy Spirit** to a friend?

3. Check the things below you think the **Holy Spirit** can do for you.

☐ Give you power to live a successful Christian life	☐ Help you make the right decisions
☐ Help you study	☐ Take away your problems
☐ Teach you and help you mature as a Christian	☐ Keep bad things from happening to you
☐ Give you spiritual gifts	☐ Be your conscience
☐ Make you better than others	☐ Give you love for people you don't like
☐ Convict you of sin	☐ Give you hope
☐ Live inside of you	☐ Make you feel good inside
☐ Give you peace and comfort	☐ Other—

4. In the second chapter of the book of Acts, the **Holy Spirit** came to the disciples at Pentecost in a dramatic way. How do you think the **Holy Spirit** comes to people today?

5. Check out these verses, and then answer the questions.

Galatians 5:22-26	Which fruit of the Spirit you need most in your life right now?
John 14:17	How can you know what the Holy Spirit is?
Romans 8:26	How does the Holy Spirit help you in prayer?
Acts 2:2	Where does the Holy Spirit come from?

GOT SPIRIT? [Holy Spirit]

THIS WEEK

Some of your kids can relate to God the Father and God the Son—but what about God the Holy Spirit? It's hard to understand why or how God can be three different people at the same time. This TalkSheet gives you the chance to discuss the role the Holy Spirit plays in the life of a Christian.

OPEN

The Holy Spirit is a storehouse of power who can enable your kids to live the Christian life. To illustrate this point and introduce this session, empty a small pressurized can of shaving cream onto a table in front of the group. Look at how much a small container can hold! Point out something similar is true for the Holy Spirit living in us. As Christians, we have the power of God's Holy Spirit inside us—waiting to be released.

To get a bit deeper, ask the group how they can know the Spirit. How does God use the Spirit in their lives from day to day? Can they feel him? See him? What makes the Spirit different from Jesus? Or different from God?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. On a whiteboard or poster board, list all the words or phrases that the group listed. Why did they choose the ones they did?
2. How would your kids explain the concept of the Holy Spirit? Try to arrive at a definition of the Holy Spirit with your group. This definition should include the fact that God the Holy Spirit is as real and as important as God the Father or God the Son. You may want to consult your church's statement of faith or look up some of the following Scripture passages: John 14:15-31, Romans 8:1-17, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.
3. Invite your group to share their choices. While all of the items on the list are things that the Holy Spirit can do, you may want to emphasize the things that are mentioned specifically in Scripture: comforts (John 14:16-17); convicts of sin, (John 16:8-11); teaches and guides (John 16:13); prays for us (Romans 8:26); gives spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7); leads (Galatians 5:18). If possible, take this opportunity to share specific examples of how you have experienced or witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Ask some of the young people to do the same.
4. Read Acts 2:1-4, then have the group discuss their opinions. Other references in Scripture you may want to consider are Acts 4:8; 6:3-5; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9, 52; 1 Corinthians 12:13; or Ephesians 5:18.

5. What do these verses say about the Holy Spirit? Do they think differently of the Holy Spirit? Why or why not? You may want to ask for volunteers to share their sentences.

THE CLOSE

The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the life of Christians. The Holy Spirit encourages us, strengthens us, and fills us with all the fruits—love, patience, kindness, self-control, and so on. What are your kids missing in their lives?

Challenge your kids to ask God to take more control of their lives and to fill them with his Spirit. The closer they are to God, the more his Spirit works in them. What can they do today to get closer to God and get filled with the Spirit?

MORE

- What are the top three questions that your group has about the Holy Spirit? You may want to discuss these questions with the group and invite your senior pastor to help, too. Or have groups of your kids find one piece of information on the Holy Spirit. Encourage them to ask a parent, teacher, pastor, sibling, look through their Bible, or look on the Internet, and bring in the info next meeting.
- Or dig into the Bible to find some info! Break your group up into three groups and have each group find verses that describe each part of the Trinity—God, Jesus, and the Spirit. Compare these verses and descriptions of each part. How does the Bible describe each one? Is each part the same? What are the differences between them? Is one more powerful than another?

OH, GOD



1. What is the first word that comes to mind when you think about God?
2. If you could ask God one question, what would it be?
3. If God wrote you an e-mail about anything, what do you think he'd say to you?
4. Shamir has always felt there was a God, but he's never really felt close to him or felt God really cared about him. Now he's questioning God's existence and has asked you for your opinion. What insight would you share with Shamir for how he can get to know God better?
5. Check one or more of the following statements that **best describes** your relationship with God.
 - ☐ I have a solid relationship with God.
 - ☐ I feel very far away from God.
 - ☐ I want to become closer to God.
 - ☐ God is a mystery to me.
 - ☐ I think that God is pleased with the way I live my life.
 - ☐ I don't have God in my life.
 - ☐ I still have a lot of doubts about God.
 - ☐ A relationship with God scares me. I'm not interested.
6. Check out **Romans 11:33-36**. What do these verses have to say about God?

OH, GOD [G o d]

THIS WEEK

How familiar are you with your kids' beliefs? Do you know about their reasons for believing in God? This discussion will allow you to talk about what your student believe—what they think God is like and how their belief in God makes a difference in their lives. You'll want to make sure that your group members are comfortable with each other before you tackle this discussion. Sometimes it's not easy for them to open up about their beliefs, so be sure to provide a warm environment where they feel supported.

OPEN

You can introduce this in many different ways, depending on the size and maturity of your group. You may want to split them into two groups—one group believing there is a God and one that doesn't. What proof or thoughts do they have that God does or does not exist? How do they defend their answers? What characteristics of God come through during this debate? Keep a master list of their main points for discussion later on.

Or share a story with them about God. Have your kids act out the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-27) while you read the story, either from the Bible or another version of the story. How does the parable describe God? What characteristics does God have from the parable? How about the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7)?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. On the whiteboard or poster board, list all the words suggested. Some people have the wrong picture and may think of him as a cosmic cop, an old bearded man, or a heavenly Santa Claus.
2. Let the kids share their questions and try to answer them as a group. Some simply won't have answers—that's okay. Help them understand that God has answers to our questions, even though they don't always know what they are.
3. Ask several kids to share their e-mails. Did this help them understand God better? What did they learn about God? Emphasize that God has already written us a letter—the Bible. In it, he tells us stories and gives us advice on all kinds of stuff. Challenge your kids to dig in and start getting to know God better.
4. Use this scenario to discuss practical ways to have a better relationship with God. Make a master list of all the suggestions they come up with. You may want to add some of your own. Tell the kids to choose the three they think are the best and to select one of those to do this week.

5. Some maybe will share and some won't—that's okay. What do some teenagers in general think? What questions do your kids have about a relationship with God?

6. These verses list several attributes of God. Make a master list of these qualities. Are there more that aren't in these verses?

THE CLOSE

God thinks so much of all his children. You may want to read a verse or two to the group that describes how much God loves them. Point out that they each are the jewel of God's eye. If he had a computer, their picture would be on the screensaver. He hangs out with them all the time—how often do they hang out with him? If they could chat with God on the phone, what would they say?

Close with a time of prayer. If your group isn't comfortable with praying aloud, then give them some time for silent prayer.

MORE

- It's important to set goals for getting to know God better. Challenge them to do more than just pray and read the Bible—to set specific goals, like praying for ten minutes everyday, reading a chapter from the Bible every other day, or meeting with you and a small group every couple weeks. Encourage them set these realistic goals and write them on a 3x5 card to keep. Remind them that they can come to you with struggles or questions that they may have—everyone needs to be encouraged spiritually.
- Set up an e-mail or snail mail resource for encouraging prayer and scripture. Have your kids e-mail each other or you their favorite verses, new things they've learned, or prayer requests they have. Challenge them to encourage each other to learn more about God. Collect and distribute the e-mails or letters once (or more) a week.

COMING CLEAN

1. Do you think it's easy to cover up something wrong that you've done? Why?

2. What are the top five reasons people cover up the things they do wrong?

- ☐ They're afraid that others will think they are weird.
- ☐ They're ashamed of what they did.
- ☐ They're afraid of what their friends will say.
- ☐ They think others will see them as hypocrites.
- ☐ They're afraid of punishment.
- ☐ They don't want to be humiliated in public.
- ☐ They're afraid they will get a police record.
- ☐ They're afraid they will get a bad reputation.
- ☐ They'll have to stop doing what they're doing.
- ☐ They think it's more fun if no one knows about it.



3. Jesse was caught with drugs in his locker during a check at school. As part of his punishment, he'll face time in juvenile home, a huge fine, and the wrath of his parents.

What do you think the punishment should be?

Why?

4. Check out **Proverbs 28:13**, **Isaiah 29:15**, and **1 John 1:8-9** and complete the following sentences.

It's a bad idea to try to hide _____. It's futile anyhow because God always _____. Better to _____ their sins because then people will find _____.

5. Should people ever confess their wrongdoings to someone else? Why or why not?

If yes, who should people confess to?

If you wanted to confess your wrongdoing, who would you go to now?

COMING CLEAN [confessing our sins—Proverbs 28]

THIS WEEK

Teenagers—like most human beings—find it hard to confess when they've done wrong. Sins can stay to haunt and make people feel guilty. That's one reason that the Bible urges confession. It's a healthy cleansing process—the beginning of mercy and forgiveness. There's no reality check like admitting their failures. This TalkSheet session will encourage your students to be honest about their spiritual failures. Your kids will be challenged to quickly admit their sins to God.

OPENER

You may want to use this illustration (or one like it) to start things off. Before your meeting, fill a backpack with some large rocks. On each rock, write a sin (either on the rock or a piece of tape on the rock)—examples include lying, cheating, stealing, swearing, etc. Zip up the backpack or bag. During your intro, ask for some volunteers to come up to the front of the room. Have them put the backpack on and describe how it feels to have the pack on. Make a master list of the words that they use to describe the weight or how it feels to have the pack on. Then open up the backpack and pull out the stones. Point out that each stone has something written on it—a sin that needs confessing. Point out that just like the backpack, unconfessed sin wears people down—it's a burden that they carry around. Use this activity to jumpstart your discussion on confessing sins, getting forgiveness, and letting God carry the load.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Have your students talk about which is easier and more brave—to hide or to conceal wrongdoing. What does God think about confessions sins? How can this bring you closer to God?
2. Why do people tend to cover up wrongdoing? What are the most common rankings among your group members? What are the dangers of covering up sins?
3. How do your kids think Jesse should be punished? Is having drugs in his locker a sin? Or is it just against the law? You may want to talk about other situations like this such as drinking alcohol or driving over the speed limit. Are these things sins, in God's eyes? Why or why not? Check out Romans 13:1-5.
4. Explore the teaching of the Bible on confession of sin and the uselessness of concealment. Discuss the all-knowing power of God and his desire to forgive and have mercy.

5. Talk about when and if people should confess their sins to another person and even ask for forgiveness. Who would your kids go to and why? How many of them would go to God first? If your kids want to talk with someone, what qualities do they look for in a confidant?

THE CLOSE

To follow up from the intro, pull out the rocks from the backpack. Remind your group that God takes their sins, like the rocks, and thrown them into the deepest part of the sea—they're gone forever. God lovingly offers forgiveness and mercy to those who learn the habit of confessing. And he's waiting for your kids to bring their distresses, concerns, and wrong doings to him. He knows about them anyway—and he's willing to listen. Encourage your kids to ask God for forgiveness—and if they need someone else to talk with, to find an adult (let them know that you're available, too). God forgives and forgets. Period. What's holding your kids back today?

MORE

- You may want to talk more about how holding sin in can affect trust and respect in relationships. How can unconfessed sin hurt a friendship, a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or relationships with parents? What happens when someone is caught in a sin? What happens when someone hurts someone else and doesn't ask that person for forgiveness? Challenge your kids to get right with the people that they've hurt and to get the burden of that sin off their back.
- If your group has a high level of trust, you may want to ask your kids to share one sin or cover-up of a sin (or lie) that they wish they could erase and why. Or have them write their responses on a paper anonymously and have a youth leader read all the response aloud. Remind your kids of the TalkSheet ground rule about confidentiality and group trust. Discuss the choices that your kids face. How do specific choices about sin affect a person's life?

HONESTY COUNTS!



1. Would you go to a doctor who cheated his or her way through medical school?

Why or why not?

2. Check the following that you would consider dishonest.

- ☐ Telling someone that your mom isn't home when she just doesn't want to come to the phone.
- ☐ Lying about yourself on an Internet chat room.
- ☐ Saying a friend's haircut is cool when you really think it's not.
- ☐ Keeping the extra money that you've accidentally been given in change after making a purchase.
- ☐ Bootlegging or copying a CD or video for your own use.
- ☐ Passing on something that is supposed to be a secret.
- ☐ Taking the blame for something you didn't do in order to help another person save face.
- ☐ Taking the credit for a report you copied from another source.
- ☐ Telling your parents you're going to the mall when you plan to meet someone there and then leave.

3. When you're dishonest, what do you worry about most?

4. Read **Proverbs 10:9**. Do you agree with the statement? Why or why not?

Explain in your own words what you think the writer means.

5. Check out each of the Bible verses below. Then make a list of God's standards for integrity and honesty (use the back of this paper for more room).

Exodus 23:1

Psalm 37:21

Leviticus 19:11

Proverbs 14:5

HONESTY COUNTS! | integrity — Proverbs 10 |

THIS WEEK

For many teens, integrity is a foreign concept with few role models. It's a lost value in their culture, where doing the right thing is dwarfed by the need to do whatever it takes to get ahead. The integrity of young teens is challenged—and compromised—daily. Will they be true to their word? Will they cheat at sports, games, or schoolwork? Will they deceive others to get out of trouble? Will they embellish events to increase their social stature? The battle to live a life of integrity never ends. Naturally, God sets high standards for integrity. But as high as they are, they are achievable and rewarding—especially when living with integrity becomes a habit.

OPENER

Play a few rounds of Balderdash! In this adapted version of the board game, Beyond Balderdash, make a list of nonsense, very obscure words—but real words nonetheless. (Just look in a dictionary, you'll find some!) A few examples from Dictionary.com (www.dictionary.com) might be—

- Coquette—a woman who flirts with a man
- Defenestration—an act of throwing someone or something out of a window.
- Doppelgänger—a ghostly double.
- Fop—a man who is much concerned with his appearance.
- Restate—to move like a reptile; slither.
- Triskaidekaphobia—fear of the number 13.

You can either play as a large group or split your group up into small groups of four or five people per group. A player in each group begins by choosing a word from the categories, including words, people, objects, or any other one you want to include. All of the other players then write down a bluff, false answer to the word in the hopes of fooling each other. Shuffle the real answer in with all of the other players' phony answers and read each one aloud. A group scores points for guessing the real answer—and for also duping their peers into believing their answer is correct. Each person's task is to create a false definition for the word. Encourage your kids to try to make it sound realistic—and to be creative.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Let your group point out the obvious—why they wouldn't trust a doctor who cheated through medical school. Throw in a few more examples, such as a president who lied to get into office, an athlete who set a world record while using illegal drugs, or a police officer who took bribes from rich crooks.
2. Allow your group to explain why some of the actions listed are dishonest or not. Be prepared to discuss what could be said that would be

gentle (but still honest!) in some of these situations. Allow for some disagreement here—every situation noted doesn't necessarily have a black-and-white answer.

3. What is the downside of dishonesty? Most liars, cheaters, promise breakers, and thieves live in fear that they will be caught or discovered. Fear and guilt are not fun feelings. What do dishonest people worry about, if anything?
4. Talk about the value of a mind and heart at peace. Is there safety or security in being honest? Why or why not? What do your kids think the author means in this passage?
5. God has definite ideas and standards for integrity—but he's set a high standard because he values honesty. He does forgive human shortcomings, but he also expects that people will live lives of integrity.

THE CLOSE

Your high schoolers know that honesty really is the best policy—even when it's painful. Take some time to talk about the pros and cons of honesty—why do some people think it's easier to lie? Why is it sometimes more hurtful or harder to tell the truth? Why is dishonesty promoted in culture sometime? And why do dishonest people get away with so much? Take some time to talk about these and some other issues with your group. They may have some other moral issues and questions that they'd like to mull through with the group. Challenge them to think through their actions and words—and to see how truthful their actions are compared with their words.

MORE

- Where do your kids see dishonesty in the media? You may want to bring in a few clips of a few movies or TV shows. What do these clips deal with? What are the causes and consequences of lying? Are these examples of big lies or little ones—and is there a difference in these? Talk with your group about honesty on the Internet and in the movies. How is dishonesty glorified or promoted? How do commercials play into dishonesty? Challenge your kids to think about these questions as they watch and listen to the media through out the week.
- Ask your kids to look at some of the following verses from Proverbs on honesty—11:1, 11:3, 11:8, 12:5, 12:13, 12:19, 12:22, 14:5, 14:25, 16:13, 20:7, 20:10, 20:17, 20:21, 21:3, 21:6, 28:18, and 28:23. What do these proverbs say about the virtue of honesty? And how can your kids apply these verses in their lives today?

JUST TRUST ME



1. How would you complete this statement?
Never trust anyone who—

2. Who is someone that you completely trust? What makes this person trustworthy?

Who is someone that you don't trust? Why not?

3. If you had a friend who lied about you behind your back, what would you do?

4. Check the most honest answer for you.

My parents can trust me—

- ☐ all of the time.
☐ some of the time.
☐ never.

My teachers can trust me—

- ☐ all of the time.
☐ some of the time.
☐ never.

My friends can trust me—

- ☐ all of the time.
☐ some of the time.
☐ never.

5. Do you **A** (agree) or **D** (disagree)?

- ___ Overall, the average person can be trusted.
___ It's easier to trust Christians than non-Christians.
___ I have difficulty trusting people.
___ Once a person betrays your trust, it's impossible to trust them completely again.
___ It's safer not to trust anyone.

6. Pick one of the following verses—what does God say about trust?

Leviticus 6:2-5

Psalms 52:8-9

Proverbs 3:5-6

JUST TRUST ME [t r u s t]

THIS WEEK

Trust is a big issue in the lives of kids today. Some don't trust their parents. Some have been hurt and abused. Others don't have many friends and don't trust other people with their feelings and emotions. It's important to teach them what trust is and what it means for Christians. This TalkSheet will direct your discussion on believing in others and how God fits into this picture.

OPEN

Start by holding an envelope in your hand—with a small prize—either a dollar bill (or more), a gift certificate, or a coupon for a free dessert. Ask your group who would like an envelope. Remind them that they don't know what's in the envelope and that there's a consequence with taking the envelope. Are they willing to risk taking the envelope without knowing what's in it? What makes them trust you or not trust you? Are they going to take the envelope without knowing what the consequences are?

Finally, if someone does take the envelope, ask them in front of the others why they want the envelope and why they trust you. Then hand over the envelope and let them open it. Of course, they won't have to do anything but take the prize!

If no one dares take the envelope, challenge them once more. Then, open the envelope and show them what was inside—a prize. They wouldn't have had to do anything but accept the prize!

This illustrates how trust works. Some people either trust too easily or not enough. Either one of your kids trusted without knowing the risks, or no one trusted at all. Remind them that when they trust a person or something, there are risks involved and consequences that await. Being a Christian involves a risk, too—it means giving your heart and life to God. What are the consequences? Having others look down at you? But what's the prize? They don't have to earn anything. They only have to accept the gift of God's love and eternal life with him in heaven. Not too bad of a free reward, huh?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Let the group share their responses. Some will be humorous and some more serious. You may want to make a list of their responses.
2. Who did your kids choose as trustworthy and not? Why or why not?
3. Most of the kids will have a friend who has betrayed a confidence in some way. Let them share their experiences as long as they don't use names. What have they learned from the experience?

4. This brings the trust issue closer to home. Some kids won't want to reveal their answers, so don't force them. Instead, ask them to think about why others may or may not trust them. What do they need to work on to be trustworthy? Point out that trust is important for all good, healthy relationships.

5. Ask for a show of hands indicating their opinions on these questions. Ask some to share any strong feelings they might have. Discuss how a person can earn trust and how much trust you should extend to a person you don't know very well.

6. Relate these verses to trusting in relationships today. Focus particularly on the fact that we can trust God all the time—he never changes and never will.

THE CLOSE

Communicate that some people simply can't be trusted. Other people seem like they can be trusted, when really they can't. Trust takes time and patience. No one deserves to be instantly trusted. If someone breaks trust, it can take a long time—sometimes years—to be rebuilt.

It's not easy to trust others and for others to trust us—they need to guard our hearts.

They can ask God to heal us when we've been hurt. God forgives us even if people don't. He knows our hearts and can help us become more trustworthy people.

MORE

- On a whiteboard or poster board, write the word TRUST vertically. Split your group up into five smaller groups and give each group one letter of the word trust. Have each group list at least two words or phrases that describe trust and that start with the letter that they've been given. For example, if a group had T, they could list "telling the truth" or "trying to rely on another person". Encourage them to help each other think of descriptions. Then, go over these with the group and discuss what the different phrases or words mean.
- You may want to take some time and talk about what breaks trust. If you sense that some of your kids are struggling with trusting others, they may be dealing with some larger issues, such as sexual abuse, problems at home, or having a hard time at school. Make note of what you see. You may want to have a one-on-one later on with that person. And if you sense an abusive situation, encourage the person to find help—and report it to the authorities in your area.

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

1. What percentage of truth would you give of each of these items—all, none, or 1/2?
- ___ Money makes everything in life easier.
 - ___ There's no right or wrong to controversial issues.
 - ___ Angels are real in the lives of humans.
 - ___ Earthquakes and wars prove that God is coming back soon.
 - ___ Truth is what you perceive it to be.
 - ___ Friends are the biggest influence in the lives of teens.
 - ___ Study time equals what kind of grades you get.
 - ___ Choices you make today will affect your future.
 - ___ People are better Christians today than they were in the past.
 - ___ Satan really isn't that powerful.
 - ___ Some sins don't have direct consequences.



2. Some people think that truths are relative—that they're based on what's right at a certain time, for certain people. What are two truths that you consider to be permanent and infallible?
3. If you didn't believe in God, what would you put your faith in?
4. Check out Proverbs 14:15. What is the definition of a simple person and a prudent person?
5. Kayla has been struggling with the beliefs of Christianity. She has some serious questions about the truth of it. She's brought up some of these doubts to a few of her friends, who've told her to quit questioning and just have faith. Now she's feeling lost.
- Is it okay for Kayla to be questioning her beliefs? Why or why not?
- How would you respond to her doubts if you were her friend?
- Does doubting your faith make you less of a Christians? Why or why not?

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES [Intelligent Christianity—Proverbs 14]

THIS WEEK

In an era of relativism, teenagers struggle to find truth in their lives. Some of your kids may be dealing with some serious doubts and questioning their lives and beliefs. And they're flooded with different answers from different sources. How can they know and find the truth? This TalkSheet will encourage kids to become thinkers, to check facts, and to seek truth.

OPENER

You may want to start off this discussion by—

- Asking your kids to bring in a piece of information that they found on the TV, Internet, or in a magazine or newspaper. Challenge them to bring in a fact or two that no one else in the group would know. It can either be a true or false piece of information. Let the group share their bits of info and let the rest of the group vote and debate to decide which one is true or false. Was it easy to tell which ones were true or false? Why or why not? Which pieces of information surprised your kids?

- Play a version of the previous game, but with information from your kids' own lives or experiences. For this game (known as Two Truths and a Lie), ask each person in the group to think of two truths about themselves—and one lie. Then let the group members share the three facts about themselves (not giving away which one is the lie). See if the rest of the group can see which one is the false one. How hard was it to figure out the lies? Why or why not? Did they make their assumptions based on the person—or what they knew about the person?

- Or if you don't have time to play either of these, bring in some information yourself. You can easily find information anywhere on the Internet. Check out some of the news Web pages, such as USA Today (www.usatoday.com), Newsweek (www.newsweek.com), People (www.people.com)—or some tabloids (for the false facts?) the National Enquirer (www.nationalenquirer.com), or Star Magazine (www.starmagazine.com).

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. What percentage of truth did your kids give each of these statements? Take a poll of your group to get their responses. Which students doubt most of the statements? Which believe most?
2. What truths do your kids consider to be permanent and infallible? Ask them for examples of why they gave these choices? How can they decide which truths are relative and which aren't? How does being a Christian influence the truth in a person's life?
3. Where would your kids turn if they didn't know God? What about their friends or family members

who don't know God? Talk about these with your kids and ask them why people look to some of these sources for the truth. What makes them dependable or trustworthy?

4. How did your kids interpret these verses? Discuss what it means to be simple and what it means to be prudent in God's economy. How do simple—and prudent people—determine the truth? Which do your kids perceive themselves to be—simple or prudent?
5. It's not uncommon for people to struggle with their beliefs—and question Christianity. How would they respond to Kayla? Is it okay to question or doubt God or their faith? Why or why not? How does questioning or doubting weaken or strengthen one's faith? Take some time to answer questions that your kids may have about their faith or any doubts that they're dealing with.

THE CLOSE

Remind your kids that their minds are gifts from God. Wise people investigate truths and information that come their way—and the ultimate truth can stand up to investigation. How does faith influence or affect one's perception of the truth? Point out that believing in God and loving him means trusting him alone. Finally, let your students know that being prudent (rather than simple) involves mental and spiritual effort. How easy or difficult is it for your kids to be prudent? What challenges them in this area? You may want to spend some time talking through some doubts or issues that your kids may have.

MORE

- Many biblical characters questioned the truth about God. You may want to have your kids check out the following verses (or look for more) and discuss them with the group—Genesis 3:1-6; Genesis 17:15-22; Genesis 18:10-15; Judges 6:14-23; Luke 1:5-20; John 18:33-39; and John 20:24-29. What was the character doubting or questioning? Did this relate to their faith in God and how? What were the consequences (either good or bad) of their doubting? What does this say to your kids about doubts and God's will?
- You may want to talk more about how to address the situation in item 5. How would your kids explain the truths of the Bible? Which truths are hard to explain or prove? What aspects of Christianity do your kids struggle with? You may want to have a Q&A session to discuss these with your group—and encourage them to find Bible verses to back up their answers or ideas.

FEAR NOT!

1. What's the difference between **worry** and **concern**?
2. Below are some possible teenage worries. Put a **C** next to the ones a person would have some sort of **control over** and an **NC** for those one would have **little or no control over**.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Dying | ☐ Breaking up |
| ☐ Getting acne | ☐ Enduring parental abuse |
| ☐ Having parents divorce | ☐ Living through a war |
| ☐ Living with alcoholic parents | ☐ Not making a sports team |
| ☐ Flunking a test | ☐ Being pressured to succeed |
| ☐ Having stress | ☐ Getting in trouble with the police |
| ☐ Being unpopular | ☐ Dating |
| ☐ Being a victim of school violence | ☐ Abusing drugs and alcohol |
| ☐ Being in a car accident | ☐ Becoming pregnant |

If problems can be prevented or dealt with in some way, why do teenagers still worry about them?

3. If you had absolute control over the troubles above, would you still worry? Why or why not?

4. Check out **Psalm 112:7-8**.

What does it say about a godly person?

- ☐ A godly person never has problems
- ☐ God will solve all my problems before any real damage is done
- ☐ I don't have to fear problems even when they come
- ☐ Problems will come, since it talks about triumph coming at the end



5. You're talking to a friend who is worried about a situation. Using **Romans 8:28**; **Philippians 4:6-7**; and **1 Peter 5:7**, what advice would you have for him or her? Would your advice change if this person was a Christian? Why or why not?

FEAR NOT! | f e a r — P s a l m 1 1 2 |

THIS WEEK

Trusting in God helps teenagers free themselves from the things that cause them anxiety—the fears of embarrassment, of being unpopular, not being attractive, bad grades, and a myriad of other things. This TalkSheet allows your class members to discuss their fears without fear and shows them how trust in God can cancel worry.

OPENER

What scares your teenagers today? What would they be most hesitant to talk about with you, their peers, or their parents? What subjects would make them the most nervous and scared? Or are your kids just so bold that they're not scared of anything (not likely)? Start off with a simple question to trigger their thoughts. What in the media or society makes them afraid or scared? Why are they fearful of these things? Are some fears more prevalent or important than others? What fears to their parents or siblings have? Are these fears different than their own? You may get a variety of reactions. Pay attention to your group's answers and allow everyone to express an opinion. You may want to make a list of their suggestions and then pick the three most common fears among themselves or their peers. Then launch into this discussion on fear.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. You may want to have your kids check out the answers to these in a dictionary. To be worried speaks of negative emotions such as anxiety and fretfulness. To be concerned can also mean that, but it has a more positive meaning—to be responsible for or interested in something.
2. How much control do your kids have over these situations? Are they being realistic about their control—or lack of—a situation? You may want to ask for individual responses to these issues. Which ones do they have more control over? Why or why not? Remind them the problems are inevitable, but worrying about them is a choice.
3. Would your kids still worry about these situations? Why or why not? Would they worry if they knew that God has complete control over all problems? And while your kids may question why things happen in their lives, God has his reasons, some of which are beyond them knowing.
4. What does this verse say to your kids? What does a godly person have? How does this affect their beliefs or how they handle situations in their lives?
5. The truths in these verses are powerful—they

give anyone the power to overcome worry. Read each passage over with your group and paraphrase them. How do your kids feel after reading these verses? How will these verses help them in the future? You may want to have them write down these verses on a 3x5 card for reference when they're feeling the itch to worry.

THE CLOSE

God wants to drive fear from the lives of your kids. Challenge them to be people who trust in God and obey his commands. Encourage your kids to bring their stresses, doubt, and worries to God. He's there with open ears 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And they can be guaranteed that he's listening. Spend some time in prayer with your kids.

Finally, encourage them to seek out a trusted adult to talk with about issues that are really affecting them. Situations of abuse, sexual assault, depression, and family problems may need professional help. For more information, visit the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org) the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (<http://ncadd.org>), Suicide Voices Awareness of Education (www.save.org), the National Foundation For Depressive Illness, Inc. (www.depression.org), or the Youth Specialties Web page (www.YouthSpecialties.com).

MORE

- Worry is a heavy burden. It zaps energy and robs a person of spiritual closeness with God. You may want to read Matthew 11:30, which says "for my yolk is easy, and my burden is light." To illustrate this, gather some large stones or a few other heavy items. Label each of these items with a sin or worry, such as cheating, not getting along with parents, or problems with friends. Then ask for a volunteer to come up and help out. Put all these stones (or other items) into a backpack on the volunteer's back. Point out that sin and worry is like the backpack—and unnecessary burden that they don't have to carry. What removes this burden? Prayer. Point out that praying to God and giving him their worries, doubts, troubles, and sins will remove the burden. Then remove the backpack. God doesn't want Christians to carry around extra weight—he says he'll do it for them. For a more full explanation of this illustration, see Coming Clean on page 105.
- Encourage your kids to support and encourage each other. You may want to create a weekly prayer list for your group, or set up an e-mail list for them to share their prayer requests, worries, and thoughts with each other.

THE AFTERLIFE

1. When you hear about the **afterlife**, what is the first thing you think about?
2. What do you think about these statements—do you **A** (agree) or **D** (disagree)?

- ☐ People who live good lives will go to heaven.
- ☐ Reincarnation makes as much sense as heaven.
- ☐ There's no good reason to believe there is a hell.
- ☐ Christians talk more about hell than they do about heaven.
- ☐ There is no hell.
- ☐ Hell won't be as bad a place as the Bible or pastors say it is.
- ☐ The average young person believes in a heaven more than a hell.
- ☐ Talking about hell will scare people into wanting to know more about how to get to heaven.
- ☐ Christians should be more worried about the here and now than about the afterlife.
- ☐ If there is a heaven, there must be a hell.
- ☐ The belief in heaven keeps people from seeking happiness on earth.



3. Do you think that life in heaven will be more like or less like life on earth?
Why?
4. How can a person's views about heaven and hell affect the way they live their life?
5. Check out these verses and write what each passage has to say about heaven or hell.

Matthew 25:46 Luke 16:24-26 1 Corinthians 1:18	Philippians 1:23, 24 2 Peter 2:4-9
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THE AFTERLIFE [heaven and hell]

THIS WEEK

The Bible provides only glimpses of what heaven and hell will be like. But it clearly teaches that both exist. Even people who don't hold to religious beliefs express interest in the afterlife. Talk shows have guests who claim to have died and seen the afterlife, magazines write about people who claim they have lived before and will do so again, and opinion polls report people's views regarding the afterlife. This TalkSheet encourages a group examination of both heaven and hell.

OPENER

To start, have your kids split into groups and find more information on heaven and hell throughout the Bible. Give each group one of these verses—

Revelation 4:1-6	Revelation 21:15-21
Revelation 4:6-11	Revelation 21:22-27
Revelation 5:1-5	Revelation 22:1-5
Revelation 5:6-14	Matthew 8:12
Revelation 6:8	Luke 16:19-31
Revelation 7:16-17	Matthew 25:41
Revelation 19:1-10	2 Peter 2:4
Revelation 20:10-15	Jude 1:6
Revelation 21:1-8	2 Thessalonians 1:9
Revelation 21:9-14	Mark 12:25-27

Have your groups read these verses and then write down or summarize what each set of verses says about either heaven or hell. You may want to have volunteers read different verses out loud and then talk about the verses with your group. What new understanding of heaven or hell do they have? What realities of both heaven and hell are given here?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Allow students to share their thoughts about the afterlife. Pay particular attention to how your group has been influenced by secular views: there is no hell, the afterlife will be boring, reincarnation really happens, and so on.
2. Take a poll on each of the statements. If there is a difference of opinion, encourage a debate on their ideas. Does believing in heaven and hell keep Christians from serving God and others on earth?
3. People often think of heaven as blissful nothingness where we sit on clouds and talk about God. Yet the Bible speaks of real streets and actual work for God. Heaven is a very real place. Paul spoke of seeing things as a poor reflection in a mirror, but in heaven we shall see things as they really are (1 Corinthians 13:12).

4. What do your students think about earthly life versus heavenly life? In what ways do they think heaven may be like earth or not like earth? As the students share their answers, you may want to use 2 Peter 3:11-13 as a reference.
5. The Bible doesn't tell us everything we'd like to know about heaven and hell, but it does give us glimpses of both. Have the students share what they learned about heaven and hell and their attitudes toward them.

THE CLOSE

Heaven and hell are a reality—the Bible tells us that both are real. God has given every person a choice—to love him and serve him, or not to. Your kids might ask why a loving God would condemn anyone to hell. But the real question is why would anyone want to reject God's love? God wants everyone to experience eternal life with him (John 5:24; 2 Peter 3:9). And each person is bound for one or the other (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14). Point out that this lesson is not meant to scare them into believing in Jesus—but it is information that they should know. Let them know that you are willing to talk with them one-on-one if any of them have questions or other concerns.

MORE

- You may want to show some clips of a movie that portrays heaven or hell. Or ask your kids to brainstorm a list of movies and TV shows that have dealt with the afterlife. Need some suggestions? Try "What Dreams May Come" (PolyGram Films) and "Ghost" (Paramount Pictures). Also check out more movie reviews and summaries at www.hollywoodjesus.com.

After you watch part of the movie or talk with your kids about movies (or TV shows) they've seen, ask them a few questions. How did the characters deal with heaven or hell? What happened in the movie? Do your kids think these are accurate representations of heaven or hell? Why or why not? What have your kids heard differently in church or in school? What is different and why?

- You might want to have your senior pastor and a few other adults come into the meeting to help answer the questions that your kids may have about heaven and hell. No one knows all the answers, but your group might like to hear outside ideas and ask questions, too.

WHAT, ME WORRY?

1. Put an X next to the things that worry you.

What others think of me
 What grades I get
 How I look
 Who to date
 What job I'll have someday
 How popular I am
 When there'll be another war
 When I'll die
 When my family will have another fight
 How long my parents will stay together
 What I'll do beyond high school
 What to do about my problems with the police

When I'll be abused again
 When my parents will get help with their addiction
 How I'm doing in my walk with Christ
 How my parents will pay the bills this month
 What my drug or alcohol problem is doing to my life
 What the world will be like when I'm older
 Who I'll marry
 Who my friends are

2. Which answer is true for you?

The more I worry about something—

- ☐ the worse things get.
- ☐ the better things get.
- ☐ I realize it doesn't change a thing.
- ☐ the less it affects me.
- ☐ it gets worse in my mind.

3. How can someone get rid of worry?

4. On the list in question 1, write an O next to those items that are out of your control. Then write C next to the ones that you can control.

5. Check out one of these passages, and rewrite in your own words.

Romans 8:28

Philippians 4:6-7

1 Peter 5:7



WHAT, ME WORRY? [worry]

THIS WEEK

Teenagers have way too much to worry about—their looks, relationships, grades, their future, and more. Today's teenager deals with more stress and tension than ever before. This TalkSheet will help your group talk about their worries and insecurities and how their faith can help them through.

OPEN

Start with a worry-version of the game Pictionary. Have your kids write down some random, funny worries that they deal with or think about. Some possibilities include—having body odor, getting a pimple on the nose, flunking a math test, not knowing how to kiss, not knowing your fly is open, not being able to get to sleep, going to the dentist, or passing gas. Collect them and have volunteers from each team take turns drawing these worries. The rest of the group tries to guess what kind of worry is being drawn and the team with the most points wins.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Some of your kids maybe won't want to open up right away, so start them off by talking about some of the things that worried you as a teenager. Use a whiteboard or poster board to write down worries and insecurities that they face at school, home, church, work, etc.
2. Point out that worrying really doesn't help make a situation better. But sometimes worry is okay—it can motivate them to do things that are good. For example, a student who worries about gaining weight starts a workout program. What do your kids think?
3. Brainstorm some different solutions to worrying. List them on a whiteboard for everyone to see. Define the difference between worry—that doesn't change things—and concern—that motivates change. Communicate that worry is a waste of emotional energy that can be better spent solving a problem or finding a solution.
4. Which of these are out of their control? Which ones aren't worth worrying about? How easy is it to give God control over these situations? What steps can they take to make changes or handle worry?
5. After reading these verses, talk about what God thinks about worrying. Explain that worrying is actually taking situations into our own hands and trying to control our lives. Instead of worrying, encourage your kids to give the situations over to God and ask for his peace and guidance.

THE CLOSE

The English word worry comes from a German word, *wurgen*, meaning "to choke." Worry, in a sense, is mental agony and can weaken the soul.

It's normal and healthy to have worries, but it can be destructive and self-defeating. It's useless to worry about things that they can't control.

Help your kids realize Christians don't have to worry about the past or the future—both are in God's hands. Jesus says repeatedly in Matthew 6:25-34 that they have nothing to worry about. Whether they know it or not, God is taking care of us.

Brainstorm ways that your youth can deal with their worries. Encourage them to talk about their worries with someone else—a friend, a parent, and another respected adult—someone who is willing to listen. Let them know you are available to listen and help.

MORE

- What happens when people get wrapped up in worry? Have your kids list and talk about what worry does to us physically and the outcomes of worry. Address issues like physical stress, anxiety, depression, and what happens when people can't deal with their worries—like suicide and abusing alcohol or drugs. Communicate that worry is more than just a spiritual battle—it's a mental battle, too. What can they do to help themselves deal with their worries?
- Have your youth find examples of things that people their age worry about. They can find examples all over—in teenage magazines, on the Internet, radio, song lyrics, and more. Help them understand that everyone has worries—even famous athletes and celebrities.
- Time for a little Q & A! Ask your group member to write down (anonymously) thing that they worry about. Pick them out and read them aloud. What advice or encouragement do they have for each other? What suggestions to you or other adults have? Where can they go to get more information?

YOUR LAST BREATH



1. Who is one person you've lost who was special to you?
2. Put an arrow by the five most common responses you think teenagers have when a loved one dies.

Shock
Denial
Hurt
Confusion
Fear
Numbness

Relief
Depression
Anger
Acceptance
Guilt
Sadness

Regret
Helplessness
Loneliness
Emptiness

3. What do you think—T (true) or F (false)?
 - ☐ Teenagers don't have to worry much about death.
 - ☐ Teenagers distance themselves from the elderly because old people are so close to death.
 - ☐ Most people aren't prepared to die.
 - ☐ People who have a purpose in life have less fear of death.
 - ☐ Teenagers have difficulty talking about death.
 - ☐ Death is a natural part of the life cycle.
 - ☐ God lets some people die for no reason.
 - ☐ Young people shouldn't die before older people.
 - ☐ Death sometimes freaks me out.
 - ☐ The media makes too big a deal about dying.
 - ☐ Dying naturally is the same as committing suicide.

4. If you could ask God one question about dying, what would it be?

5. Read the following Bible verses to find out God's perspective on death.

Psalms 16:10

Isaiah 57:1, 2

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Psalms 49:10-19

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

Hebrews 2:14, 15

YOUR LAST BREATH [death]

THIS WEEK

Death is a topic that more and more must be talked about with kids. An increasing number of young people are preoccupied with death—in their music, through the suicide of a classmate, in their contemplation of the meaning and purpose of life, and especially in the shocking wake of school violence and killings. This TalkSheet faces death in a straightforward manner. By talking about death, you're provided with the opportunity to talk about eternal salvation.

OPENER

This is a sensitive topic—especially for those who have lost someone they've loved. Introduce this topic however you think is best for your group.

You may want to have your kids think about this—if they were to die, what would people say about them? What would they hear their friends saying at their funeral? What does this say about how they live today? Why is it so important to make the most of each day?

You may want to read a story dealing with death or show a movie clip that deals with death. How does the media portray death? How is death talked about in the media? Why do news programs report stories of death, murder, and suicide? Why is the media so caught up in death? How do Christians view death differently than non-Christians?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Many kids will share the experiences they have had with death, such as the death of a grandparent or a pet. Or perhaps they will talk about the suicide of a classmate or the death and destruction themes of some secular music. Be sensitive to young people who are mourning the loss of a friend or family member. Allow kids to share their stories and express their emotions.
2. What are the most common words dealing with death? Take some time to talk about these words. But be particularly sensitive to the issue of suicide.
3. These statements should generate some good healthy debate. Have the kids share their opinions on each one, and give reasons why they feel the way they do.
4. What would your kids ask God about death? You may get a lot of different questions, ranging from cremation to reincarnation and more. Spend some time talking about these questions with your group.

5. What are God's views of death? Take some time to talk about these verses with your group. Do these verses help them understand or deal with death differently? Why or why not? What comfort to they get knowing that there is an afterlife?

THE CLOSE

Use this closing time to point out that the life of each individual involved in this TalkSheet discussion has meaning. It is God who gives life meaning. Because of Christ's work on the cross of Calvary, people can be saved from the despair of a meaningless life and ultimate death.

MORE

- Suicide is a reality in the lives of teenagers—one of the top five causes of death among teenagers and young adults. You may want to spend some time talking about suicide, what causes teen suicide, how to recognize someone who is in danger of taking his or her own life. Visit a few on-line organizations for more information—Suicide Voices Awareness of Education (www.save.org) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org). If there is a suicide hotline in your area, post the number for the kids to write down. You might also suggest the names of adult counselors in your area who are qualified to provide help to potential suicide victims.
- School violence has also been a cause of teenage death in schools nationwide. You may want to talk about this as well, if you think it's appropriate for your group in your town. Ask your kids what causes teenagers to lash out in violence. Have they seen or experienced situations of school violence? What can your kids do to put an end to school violence and make their own schools safer? For more information, check out the Youth Specialties Web page (www.YouthSpecialties.com) for links and information, including www.disciples.org/violence.htm and Bulletproof? A Student Violence Prevention Program by Neighbors Who Care (www.neighborswhocare.org).

EVEN MY ENEMY?



1. Who would you consider to be your worst enemy, if you have one?
2. Check the top three ways that you think people deal with their enemies.

☐ Put them down whenever possible. ☐ Help them out if they are in need. ☐ Physically hurt them. ☐ Think about ways to hurt them. ☐ Cuss the person out. ☐ Talk to them on the phone. ☐ Try to get them into trouble. ☐ Threaten their friends. ☐ Sabotage their locker.	☐ Send them anonymous, harsh e-mails. ☐ Pull a gun on them. ☐ Spread rumors about them. ☐ Dislike their friends and family, too. ☐ Look for ways to bless them. ☐ Talk to them kindly. ☐ Ignore them. ☐ Pray for them. ☐ Hope they die a slow and painful death.
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3. Check out **Proverbs 25:21-22**; **Matthew 5:43-48**; and **Romans 12:14**. What specific instructions do these passages give about how people should treat their enemies?
4. What would your enemy do or say if you treated him or her like Christ commanded?
5. If treating their enemies the way Jesus commanded is the goal for Christians, how successful are you in reaching that goal? Mark your position on the line below.



EVEN MY ENEMY? [loving your enemies—Proverbs 25]

THIS WEEK

Through movies, TV shows, and violence in society, teenagers have learned to deal with enemies in a manner far different than that required by Jesus. Most students will struggle with the plan God lays out for dealing with enemies—they can't imagine how it would help them. This TalkSheet session provides a great opportunity to challenge students to see if they really trust God enough to follow his commands, even when they seem bizarre.

OPENER

What is the most common way that enemies relate to each other? How does the media glorify enemies—and how to deal with them? You may want to ask your kids to list examples of how people in society deal with their enemies (from the least to most extreme), including enemies of state (world leaders versus world leaders or country versus country) to personal enemies (friends, relatives, and so on). What is the general message that society gives to those who hate an enemy? If you feel it's appropriate, you may want to share a few different examples of how someone dealt with an enemy. Possibly show a movie or TV show clip or read an article from a magazine or from the Internet. Ask for your kids' reactions to these situations. Were they surprised or shocked? Why or why not? What are the consequences to the actions taken against the enemy? How will these affect others?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. What makes a person become an enemy? With a show of hands, how many of your group members have people in their lives who they would consider to be a real enemy?
2. Talk about the way people treat those who they think of as enemies. You may want to ask which of the ways seem crazy and why. How does society in general treat their enemies?
3. How would your students describe the treatment the Bible says people must give to their enemies? Discuss how this conflicts with the way people usually treat those they dislike.
4. Have a few willing students share their answers. Some might say that their enemy think they were weird or strange. Then ask them this—how would you react if your enemy treated you as Christ commanded?
5. Why is loving our enemies a hard order for most people? Where are your students in their ability to practice what the Bible teaches on this subject?

THE CLOSE

Explain to your group that it's difficult—but not impossible—to care for those who hate people. Let them know that this process is done one step at a time, starting with something simple such as refusing to say bad things about the person. Once they've succeeded at little things, they can go on to other gestures of peacemaking. Encourage them to ask God for help in dealing with their enemies and to ask him for the strength to love the enemy back. Challenge them to pray for one enemy during the week and to see what happens—does the relationship improve? Why or why not? What is God teaching them about love, patience, and perseverance?

MORE

- Ask your students to rewrite Matthew 5:43-48 by substituting the name of a person who they would consider their enemy for the word enemy. What does this verse say to them? Is this verse an encouragement to them or not? How do these verses relate with being a Christian?
- How did some biblical characters handle their enemies? You may want to take a look at some of these stories and examples. Check out the relationship between Jesus and Satan (Matthew 4:1-10), Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27:41), Esther and Mordecai (Esther 9), David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17:1-54), or Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37). How did God work in these relationships and what happened? Note how God used the bad for the good—the same thing he can do with enemies today.

FRIENDS

1. What does it mean to be called a friend?

2. Why do some teenagers change their group of friends?

- ☐ They simply need a change.
- ☐ They have an alcohol or drug problem.
- ☐ They broke up with a girlfriend or boyfriend.
- ☐ They're changing their values.
- ☐ They've joined a sports team or club.
- ☐ They're trying to change their image.
- ☐ They've changed religious beliefs.
- ☐ They have a parent who wants them to make a change.
- ☐ They aren't in the same crowd as the people they really like.
- ☐ They were forced to change friends because of a move.
- ☐ Other—



3. How many Christian friends should a Christian teenager have?

- ☐ None. It's really not that important.
- ☐ They should have a few Christian friends.
- ☐ Most of their friends should be Christians.
- ☐ Their closest friends should be Christians.
- ☐ All their friends should be Christians.

4. Do you think this statement is **true** or **false**?

Teenagers are more likely to reveal stuff to their friends than to their parents.
Why, do you think?

5. Read each of the following verses from Proverbs. What characteristic of **friendship** is described in each one?

Proverbs 13:20

Proverbs 17:17

Proverbs 18:24

Proverbs 27:17

FRIENDS [friends]

THIS WEEK

Friends are the lifeblood of adolescence. And yet what teenager hasn't had problems with friends? Kids learn valuable lifelong lessons from friendships, grow in Christ through friends, get into trouble because of friends, and fall in love with friends. Obviously friends are important, so it is vital that you and your teens discuss their questions and concerns.

OPENER

The media teaches teenagers a lot about friendships. Ask your group to think of all the TV shows or movies where they've seen friendships—there will be a ton of these, since almost every TV show and movie revolves around friendships and relationships. Make a list of these shows and how friendship is portrayed. What have your kids learned about friendship from these shows? What makes these shows successful? What is the difference between opposite and same sex friendships? Why do the characters value each other as friends? How have these friendships been abused or damaged?

It might be helpful to brainstorm and write down all the words that would apply to friendship—love, respect, sense of humor, honesty, trust, and so on. Encourage the group to think about what is most important in their friendships and what they look for in their friends. Then share these with the group—what were the most important attributes of friends? What do your kids look for in friendships? Why are some qualities more valuable than others? What characteristics are important for different sexes?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Make a list of everyone's contributions. Survey the list and ask the group how much commonality there is among the group's responses. What are different among the guys and girls?
2. Teenagers change friends frequently for a variety of reasons—some reasons are good, some aren't. Discuss how kids can know when they are making changes for the worse. Why do they think kids change friends?
3. Answers will vary greatly on this one, but stay away from lecturing kids about the importance of Christian influence. Rather, share your own positive experiences regarding support and direction from Christian friends.
4. Some parents are more understanding and approachable than others. But some kids don't have good relationships with their parents. Encourage them to have friends, but still keep in mind that their parents have good things to say, too.

5. Ask volunteers to read the passages and share the friendship characteristic taught. You may want to make a list of these.

THE CLOSE

Close by reviewing some of the "one another" passages found in God's Word.

- Love one another
John 15:12, 13
Romans 12:10
Ephesians 5:1, 2
Hebrews 13:1
1 Peter 4:8
- Pray for one another
Ephesians 6:18, 19
James 5:16
- Be patient with one another
Ephesians 4:2
- Discipline one another
Matthew 18:15
Galatians 6:12
Thessalonians 3:14, 15
Hebrews 12:15
- Carry one another's burdens
Romans 15:1
James 5:16
- Don't hold grudges toward one another
Matthew 5:22
Galatians 6:2
- Serve one another
Ephesians 5:21
1 Peter 4:9, 10
- Forgive one another
Matthew 18:21, 22
Ephesians 4:31, 32
- Worship with one another
Psalm 95:6

MORE

- You may want to have your group take a look at biblical friendships. A few examples include David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18 and 19), Jesus and Lazarus (John 11), Moses and God (Exodus 33), and Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14). What makes these friendships good? What qualities of friendship were shown? Are these still important today? Why or why not?
- You may want to talk about the important aspects of friendships. Point out that to have friends, you've got to be a friend. And emphasize healthy friendships vs. unhealthy friendships. Do their friends pressure them into doing drugs? Alcohol? Being sexually active? Challenge your kids to choose friends who build them up and encourage them to be their best—friendship is about supporting and caring for each other for who they are, not what they are. Jesus is an example of a loyal, loving friend. What can your kids do to be better friends to others and to be a better friend with God?

I AIN'T GOT NOBODY



1. Who is one of your closest friends? List **three** reasons why this person is a good friend.

2. You've been given the chance to order the perfect best friend from e-friends.com! You can chose from the individual specifications below, so that your new friend arrives in ideal form—plus free shipping and handling! As a first-time buyer, you've been given a \$25 credit, but each spec will cost you so spend it wisely!

Each costs \$6:

- ☐ Money
- ☐ Popularity
- ☐ Intelligence
- ☐ Godliness
- ☐ Compassion

Each costs \$5:

- ☐ Good looks
- ☐ Good conversationalist
- ☐ Outgoing personality
- ☐ Sense of humor
- ☐ High moral standards

Each costs \$4:

- ☐ A cool car
- ☐ The right clothes
- ☐ Lots of free time
- ☐ Loyalty
- ☐ Dependability

Each costs \$3:

- ☐ Common interests
- ☐ Honesty
- ☐ Good listener
- ☐ Generosity

Each costs \$2:

- ☐ Nice house
- ☐ Sex appeal
- ☐ Nice parents
- ☐ Same age as you

Each costs \$1:

- ☐ Athletic ability
- ☐ Lives close to your house
- ☐ No other friends
- ☐ Very talented

3. What do you think—**Y** (yes) or **N** (no)?

- ___ I choose the right kind of friends.
- ___ I don't like the friends I have now.
- ___ I think a best friend should be a Christian.
- ___ I'm influenced by friends in negative ways more than I influence them in positive ways.
- ___ I get along very well with my friends.
- ___ I have a hard time making friends.
- ___ I think my friends talk about me behind my back.
- ___ I wish I had a best friend.
- ___ I have friends my parents don't approve of.
- ___ I would like to find some new friends.

4. Flip to **Colossians 3:12-14**. What are some characteristics of friendship found in these verses?

I AIN'T GOT NOBODY [friendship]

THIS WEEK

Friendships are the heart and soul of the teenage years. There's hardly anything as important to high school kids than having friends. Everyone wants to be accepted, fit in, and have fun with friends. There's no doubt that your kids will want to talk about friends—how to get them, how to keep them, how to get rid of them, and how to be one. This TalkSheet will help your group discuss friendship from a Christian perspective.

OPEN

If your group is large enough, play the famous friends game. Give everyone a slip of paper with one half of a well-known duo written on it. Among celebrity couples and other well-known duos, some examples include the President and First Lady, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy, and so on. They have to find their partners without saying anything or showing anyone their slips of paper. They'll have to act out their characters in order to find their match.

Or you can play that same game, but with pictures from magazines, newspapers or the Internet. Paste the picture on a piece of paper, then cut the picture in half, so that each kid gets one half of the picture. They must find the person who has the other half of their picture without talking.

Another good intro is to make a long list of qualities in a good friend on the whiteboard, which can include such things as having a lot of money, popularity, intelligence, strong Christianity, kindness, considerate, good looks, sense of humor, same age, has no other friends, lives nearby, good personality, and so forth. Then tell the kids they can choose five qualities for a friend of their own. (Or any number you decide.) Which would be the most important to them? Have a few kids share their choices.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Have the kids talk about their friends and why they are good friends. If they don't want to talk about specific people, have them tell what qualities close friends have.
2. Ask several kids to describe the friend they bought for \$25. Concentrate the discussion on which qualities are truly important in a friendship.
3. Discuss these items one by one but don't force anyone to share answers. You may want to focus on friendships that don't meet parental approval. Ask the group why this happens and what they think can be done to remedy such situations. What did they learned from the statements?

4. In this passage, there are eight characteristics of friendship—compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiving, and loving. Emphasize how important it is to think of as qualities that will make them a good friend to others.

THE CLOSE

Read Proverbs 18:24—“A good friend shows himself friendly.” In other words, if they want to have good friends, then they need to be a good friend. What does it take to be a good friend? Friendships, like all relationships are two sided—they need mutual respect, consideration, and effort.

Point out that the Bible is filled with stories of friendship—in fact, Jesus himself had many good friends, a close group of men and women with whom he spent a lot of time. He was the perfect example of true friendship—loving, patient, giving. He showed all of us how to relate to others in positive ways.

Jesus also wants to be our friend—he sticks with us through it all. If we have Christ as our friend, we'll be part of a family—a circle of Christian friends. That's what the church (and this youth group) is all about! Close with a prayer, asking God to bless the friendships of your group members.

MORE

- Friendships take work! They need to be nurtured in order to grow. Challenge your kids to nurture their friendships this week. Have them send each of their close friends a postcard or e-mail telling them how much their friendship means to them. Have them go out of their way to encourage their friends and then thank God for the friends he's given them.
- What do your kids need to work on to be better friends to others? Challenge them throughout the week to think of three things that they'd like to work on in their friendships. Do they need more patience? More kindness? Use 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 to guide them. What would your kids like to change about themselves? Have them write these three things down; then list one thing under each that they can do to improve this. For example, if one wanted to be more patient, he or she could write something like, “not grumble when my friend doesn't call me back right away.”
- Have the group take a look at the biblical friendships of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18 and 19) and Jesus and Lazarus (John 11). What made these friendships good? What qualities of friendship were shown?

PEOPLE PLEASER

1. Place an X on the line below that describes where you see yourself. Are you a follower or a leader?



Follower



Leader

2. When someone is **pressuring** you to do something you don't want to do, what do you do?

- ☐ Lie and make up an excuse
- ☐ Tell them it's wrong and that you won't do it
- ☐ Simply say no
- ☐ Go along with it anyway
- ☐ Suggest another activity
- ☐ Leave the room or situation
- ☐ Other—



3. What advice would you give in each of the following situations?

- a. Tyrel's friends always pressure him to do things he knows are wrong.
- b. Santos has a hard time being himself around his friends.
- c. Julie always waits to hear her friends' opinions before giving hers.
- d. Louisa is really uncomfortable if she isn't dressed just like her friends.

4. How often do you do the following? Rate each on a scale of 1 (always) to 6 (never).

- ☐ I feel pressured to do what others are doing in order to be accepted.
- ☐ I ask my parents for advice more often than I ask my friends.
- ☐ I find it easier to speak up for what I believe, rather than to go along with the crowd.
- ☐ I set my own standards, rather than live by the standards of others.
- ☐ I quickly change my opinion if someone tries to argue with me.
- ☐ I find that it's difficult to live a Christian life around my friends.

5. Check out these verses, and complete the sentences in your own words.

Romans 12:1-2

If I try to conform to other people at school—

1 Corinthians 15:33

I spend my time with people who—

Hebrews 11:24-26

I have chosen to be like—

PEOPLE PLEASER [peer pressure]

THIS WEEK

Here's the reality—peer pressure surrounds our teenagers. They spend less time with their families, attend classes with large groups of peers, work at jobs with people their age, play sports with friends, and talk on the phone with them. Teenagers learn from, grow with, and are influenced by others their age. This TalkSheet will help you to deal with the real issues facing your kids and the discuss the influences of peer pressure.

OPEN

Announce you are going to conduct a taste test, like those they've seen on TV. Have them taste two different brands of soda (like Coke and Pepsi) or ice cream (or whatever else you'd like), to determine which is best, brand A or brand B.

Beforehand, tell some of your kids to choose brand A. Their job is to persuade the others to pick the same brand. Tell them to do whatever they can to get the rest of the group to pick brand A. You'll find that some in the group will give in to this pressure and will choose brand A. Keep a tally of the results and then discuss the results. How were the kids influenced by others? Why did they listen to their peers?

Some kids won't be persuaded—congratulate them for having resisted. What made them stick up for their choice? How did they feel when the others were pressuring them? What other feelings or ideas did they have?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Discuss the difference between being a leader and being a follower. Ask the kids to brainstorm the characteristics of each. Point out there is nothing wrong with being a follower—without followers there would be no leaders—but the trick is to make certain those you are following know where they are going, and are headed in the right direction.
2. Ask the kids to share their choices and discuss other alternatives to negative peer pressure.
3. These true-to-life situations will provide practice in dealing with similar ones in their own lives. Let them share advice and responses with each other.
4. Discuss these statements in a general way, but be careful not to embarrass anyone. Each deals with a specific aspect of peer pressure and will help kids evaluate their own vulnerability. Choose one or two to emphasize, such as the one regarding parents. Try to help them stretch their

minds and think through the consequences of giving in.

5. Allow kids to share their completed sentences and thoughts on these verses. Do they think God understands peer pressure? Why or why not?

THE CLOSE

There's nothing wrong with going along with friends—as long as it isn't illegal, unethical, harmful, or likewise. God has given people beliefs and a conscience. He trusts that they'll respect themselves and him enough to make wise choices. Real friends respect each other's opinions and beliefs.

There's no doubt that the values of the world are going to be in opposition to the values of the kingdom of God. Your kids need to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33) to help them consistently make the right decision.

Point out that Christ also was tempted in all things—just as all people are—and he understands. Christ can help in their struggles and the power of the Holy Spirit will enable them to be self-controlled—a fruit of the Spirit—rather than be crowd-controlled.

MORE

- Ask your group to find examples in the media of how kids influence other kids. They'll find examples of this pressure (anything from stealing to having sex) on nearly every teenage TV show and in magazine advertisements. Have them bring a few examples of this pressure and discuss if the media portrays peer pressure as good or bad.
- Do your kids have a solid list of their personal beliefs and values? Have them make a list of their beliefs and values—then sign the list as a contract for themselves as things they won't compromise on (such as doing drugs or having premarital sex). Encourage them to set personal goals for themselves and to include God in this goal. No temptation is too great to resist with God on their side.

THERE FOR YOU

1. Read the questions and decide what do you think.

Is it **easy** or **hard** to make friends?

Is it **easy** or **hard** to keep friends for a long time?

Is it **easy** or **hard** to break apart a friendship?

2. If you were able to download the perfect friend and select qualities on the Web site that are important to a friendship, which **five** of the following would you pick? Circle them.

Similar interests

Popular

Wealthy

Kind

Loyal

Truthful

Outgoing

Generous

Funny

Spiritual

Christian

Clean

Smart

Trustworthy

Creative

Cheerful

Athletic

Honest

Humble

Courageous

Able to keep

Good-looking

Easygoing

Responsible

secrets

Same age

Witty

Industrious

Musical

Same race

Patient

3. Check out the following Bible passages. What does each passage say about friendship?

Proverbs 17:17

Proverbs 18:24

Proverbs 27:6

Proverbs 27:9-10

4. Read the statements and then whether they're
T (true) or **F (false)**.

- ☐ A friend will never tell you what you don't want to hear.
- ☐ A friend will stick with you no matter what.
- ☐ A friend can be closer to you than a relative.
- ☐ A friend will try to prevent another friend from making a bad choice.
- ☐ Two friends will like the very same things.
- ☐ A friendship can be worn out by too much togetherness.
- ☐ A Christian would be sure to tell his or her friends about Christ.
- ☐ A Christian should only have Christian friends.



5. If you were to write a short sentence in an article about your best friend, what would you say? What would you want to be said about you by your best friends?

THERE FOR YOU [friendship—Proverbs 17, 18, 27]

THIS WEEK

Friendships are the heart and soul of the teenager years. As friendships become more and more important, your high schoolers are learning what creates and sustains valuable and lasting friendships. They'll learn what kind of friendships to cultivate as well as what kind of friendships and friends to avoid—and what kind of friend they need to become. This TalkSheet will help the students to discover that friends can be one of the greatest gifts that God gives them.

OPENER

Your kids have most likely learned about friendship through television shows and movies. You may want to start off by showing a few clips of a TV show or movie that portrays a friendship. Chose a variety of examples, including same sex friendships, group friendships, and mixed gender friendships. Ask your kids to observe the friendship shown. In the opinion of your kids, how healthy are the friendships portrayed? Why or why not? Was there a disagreement or conflict—and if so, was it valid? How did the two (or more) people relate to each other? How did same-sex friendships differ from girl-guy friendships? Talk about the perception of friendship from these examples and how realistically your kids think these situations were handled.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Talk about the process of making and keeping friends. Discuss what might cause friendships to dissolve and what can make friendships last a long time. Why do people shift and change friendships? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? When do friendships change the most in a person's life? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the qualities of a real friend. Which qualities are the most desirable to have and why? What makes a friend a true friend? Do any of your kids have friends that have these qualities?
3. Have a few willing students share their answers (a friend loves at all times, loyalty is important, you can trust a real friend, you don't run out on your friends, and so on). Talk about the ideas the Bible contributes to the area of friendship. Discuss why a friend telling you bad news is better than flattery from an enemy, and why friends are important to have for advice and help.
4. Discuss myths and fallacies about friendship. Some of your kids may have both Christian and non-Christian friends. Talk about the pros and cons of having friends like them. How does this

affect them at school or at church? You may want to talk about their opportunity and responsibility to share Christ with their unsaved friends.

5. Ask your group to share what they would say about a friend as a tribute in an article. What would they say and why? How does this compare with what they'd want said about them? What's hard about doing this activity? Why or why not? How often do your kids let their friends know that they value and appreciate them?

THE CLOSE

Friendships take work, patience, and wisdom if they are going to last. Point out to your kids that everyone is different. Some people are better at making friends than others and some people will have more friends than others. Some people are happy with a few close friends while others like to have lots of friends.

You may want to talk about some of the famous friendships in the Bible like David and Jonathan, Jesus and his disciples, and Paul and Timothy. How are these examples of godly friendships? What characteristics of friendships were shown? How did these friends help each other and support each other?

MORE

- You may want to talk more about friendship in the media—on TV, in movies, song lyrics, magazines, and so on. How do these portray friendship as opposed to what this proverb talks about? You may want to bring in (or have your kids bring in) articles, song lyrics, or clips of a TV show or movie. Talk about society's views of friendship versus God's views of friendship. How do these compare? What is the value of friendship, based on these sources?
- Challenge each of your kids to encourage a friendship or two this week—to send a friend an e-mail or note, hang out with them, or something else. Maybe brainstorm some ways that your kids can work on their friendships. Then have them pay attention to how the friendship changed or grew from these efforts. Was it easy to work on the friendship? Why or why not? How did the other friend react?

"MY PARENTS SPLIT UP"



1. When you think of **divorce**, what usually comes to your mind?

2. Check the **three most common things** you think most teenagers experience when their parents divorce.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ Getting angry at both parents | ☐ Dealing with post-divorce money problems | ☐ Lower grades |
| ☐ Low self-esteem | ☐ Feelings of abandonment | ☐ Problems with drugs |
| ☐ Stress from living with one parent | ☐ Weird holidays | ☐ Health problems |
| ☐ Depression | ☐ Parent visitation problems | ☐ Anger toward God |
| ☐ Resentment toward parent who's dating | | ☐ Listening to one parent gripe about the other |

3. What advice or response would you have for someone in these situations?

- "My dad left my mom and moved in with his girlfriend—now he expects me to treat this lady like she's someone special."
- "I want to live with my dad. When my parents divorced, my mom moved my little sister and me to another state. But we aren't getting along and it has been two years."
- "I feel like my dad has dumped me. Since my parents' divorce, I hardly ever see him. The first year he came around quite often. But not now. I can't figure out what I have done wrong. My mom says he'll never change."
- "My mom and dad expect me to be their messenger. They use me as a go-between for their arguments. I'm tired of being in the middle but I don't know what to do!"
- "I hate it that my mom is dating. She brings home the weirdest guys!"

†. What do you think? Are any of these true for you?

- ☐ I'll probably get divorced someday.
- ☐ I could never forgive my parents for getting divorced.
- ☐ It isn't that big of a deal to handle your parents' divorce.
- ☐ I feel like I could have stopped or could stop my parents from divorcing.
- ☐ I would like my marriage to be like that of my parents.
- ☐ Talking about a parent's divorce to people who care helps ease the pain of divorce.

4. Check out these verses—how do they apply to teenagers' dealing with divorce?

Isaiah 66:13

Psalm 23:1-4

Psalm 119:76

2 Corinthians 1:3

"MY PARENTS SPLIT UP" [divorce]

THIS WEEK

This TalkSheet isn't about the right or wrong of divorce, or to judge those parents who may be split up or divorced. Teens aren't responsible for marital failure but they must live with its consequences. This discussion will help you understand the feelings of kids who are experiencing or have experienced a divorce. And it gives kids whose parents haven't divorced the chance to understand and empathize with the tragedy of a marital failure.

Be sensitive to your group members who may be dealing with divorce or split families. There are many unique family situations today—even within the church. Pay close attention to the dynamics of your group and mediate this discussion. Be careful not to sound accusatory or judgmental—and don't let your kids get away with it either.

OPENER

For this intro, you'll need five photocopies of a marriage certificate, one frame, and some tape. Place one of the certificates into the frame, poke one with holes, tear one in several places, tear one into pieces and tape it back together again, and save one to be torn. Now hold the certificates up before the group. Explain that each of these certificates represents a marriage—

- The framed certificate is the picture-perfect marriage—the husband and wife care for each other and work hard at keeping the marriage together.
- The certificate with holes represents a marriage with some problems—there are a few difficulties eating away at it, but so far it's stayed together.
- The one torn in several places represents a hurting marriage—perhaps with help it will survive, or it may end in divorce.
- The certificate torn into pieces but taped together again represents a marriage that has been torn apart but is healing—there are scars, but it can still last.
- Finally, the last certificate should be held up and torn to pieces. This represents a marriage that has ended in divorce—the certificate of marriage no longer means anything.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Ask the young people to speak up with their thoughts and then write each contribution on the whiteboard or on newsprint.
2. This lets kids who've experienced the pain share some of it with the rest of the group. Ask several of the students whose parents have divorced to share their answers, but be sensitive to those who may not be ready to discuss the issue in front of the group.

3. You may want to role-play these situations so that your students practice their peer counseling and support skills. But what would your kids say to others in these situations? How do teenagers in general deal with these situations?
4. How do your kids respond to these? What legitimate reasons do they have for their answers? Take some time to talk about these and why teenagers hold some of these ideas.
5. What do these verses say about dealing with divorce? Take some time to talk about God's comfort during challenging times with families.

THE CLOSE

For a close, use this activity to illustrate the high divorce rate in today's society. Sit with your group in a circle so they can see you flipping a coin (or you can have your kids take turns flipping the coin). As you (or the kids) flip the coin, have them call heads or tails. If they lose the toss, have them leave the circle. Continue this until everyone in your group has called a coin toss (or some of them, if your group is too big). Explain that this activity is like marriage and divorce—roughly half of all marriages in the U.S. end in divorce. The people outside of the circle represent those whose marriages failed. You may want to mention that—statistically—if they marry again, their chance of another divorce is even higher.

What fears or questions do your kids have about divorce? What does God think about divorce? Remind them that no one is judging those who are divorced—only God knows and understands each situation. Encourage your kids to find an adult to talk with if they are angry with their parents—but point out that their parents need love and support, too. Close with a time of prayer for your kids and their families.

MORE

- You may want to assemble a group of four to five people for a panel discussion on divorce—a divorced person, an adult child of divorce, a Christian counselor or pastor, and a married couple. Have your group members write questions for the panel—in advance if possible. What scares your group about marriage and divorce? How can they prepare themselves today for healthy marriages?
- Has the media influenced the divorce rate? Undoubtedly. You may want to take some time to talk about media influences with your kids. What do TV shows and movies say about divorce? How is separation and divorce portrayed? What affect does pornography have on marriages? What does music today say about divorce and splitting up? Does the media condone cheating on partners? How? Discuss each of these with your group and ask for specific examples that they may have.

PG (PARENTAL GUIDANCE)

1. List three things you like about your parents or guardians. What are three frustrating things about them?

2. Put an X on the line scale to indicate where you're moving in the relationship with your parents.



3. If you were one of your parents or guardians—

What would you do more?

What would you do less?

4. What do you think—T (true) or F (false)?
My parents or guardians—
- ___ are clueless about my personal problems.
 - ___ fight with each other.
 - ___ don't trust me.
 - ___ don't like my friends.
 - ___ won't let me do what my friends do.
 - ___ listen fairly to my opinions.
 - ___ treat me like an adult.
 - ___ try to control too much of my life.
 - ___ give me as much money as I want.
 - ___ always nag me.
 - ___ expect way too much of me.
 - ___ don't care what I do or when.



5. Choose one verse, and summarize what it says about parents.
- Deuteronomy 6:5-7
 - Psalms 78:5
 - Proverbs 1:8-9
 - Ephesians 6:1-4

PG (PARENTAL GUIDANCE) [p a r e n t s]

THIS WEEK

As your youths get older, they'll grow away from their parents and form their own identities. Most of them probably have already! This can cause some stress and rebellion at home. Parents sometimes come off as old-fashioned and too strict. This TalkSheet will help you discuss parent-teen relationships with your kids in a positive way—and hopefully help them see that parents are people, too!

Your kids may come from different types of families, including divorced homes, one-parent families, or foster homes. Be extra sensitive to this as you go through this session. Don't assume that all your kids have traditional two-parent homes.

OPEN

On a large sheet of poster board or on a whiteboard, have your kids write down some things that they'd change about their parents if they could. Jumpstart them if they need ideas—things like "give me more freedom", "don't force me to take piano lessons", and so on. If they don't want to get specific, that's okay.

On a second poster board, have your kids write down some things that their parents would like to change about them—their kids. Keep your kids on track—you might have a kid who writes, "nothing, I'm perfect."

Now compare the two lists. Point out that both parents and kids have faults and make mistakes—they are all humans! And, point out that parent-child relationships are two-sided—parents and kids will see things differently and that's okay. Remind them that respect is the key issue when dealing with parents. After all, they are being fed, clothed, driven, and paid for by their parents!

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Make a master list of positives and negatives of parents or guardians for them to see. What does the group as a whole like the most and least about parents?
2. Where do your kids think the relationships with their parents are going? Some kids don't think it's cool to get along with their parents, others do. Maybe tell them a few things about your relationship with your parents (when you were younger, of course). Once they have shared, brainstorm different ways in which they can improve their relationships with their parents.
3. Let your kids share their opinions, but don't let this turn into a gripe session. No parent is perfect. Why did your kids give the answers they listed?

4. Talk about each of these problem areas and watch for the ones where the most frequent response is true. Stop and ask the kids they could change their situation. For instance, how can they earn their parents trust? What are some steps they can take to communicate better with their parents?

5. Ask the kids to read these passages and discuss ways how these verses can be put into practice in their parent-teen relationships. What advice would God have for them?

THE CLOSE

Emphasize that most parents want the best for their kids. They've invested a lot in their kids' lives and care a great deal about them. Parents may not be perfect, but they're the only parents your kids have. God gave our parents to us and we need to be thankful for them.

Encourage your kids to see their parents as people, not just parents. Remind the group that God commands them in Exodus 20:12 to honor and obey their parents, even when they don't feel like it. This command—one of the Ten Commandments—comes with a promise, too. They won't regret loving and honoring our parents.

Finally close with a prayer for everyone's parents and give thanks for them. Give the kids a few moments to pray silently for their relationships and struggles with their parents.

MORE

- Give your kids a parent quiz to do over the next week. To answer the questions, they'll have to talk with their parents to find out the answers. A few good questions to include are—How old were your parents when they first started dating? Where did they go on their first date? What were their majors in college? How did they feel when you were born? How did they celebrate their first anniversary?
- Or invite the parents to your meeting for a broad discussion-type Q & A session. Split up the room with parents on one side and kids on the other. Present some real-life scenarios and have the parents defend their sides to the kids and vice versa. Some situations may include breaking curfew, regulating TV shows and movies, a parent seeing a kid on a questionable Web site, etc. Your parents and kids will have different views among themselves, but it's a great way for your kids to understand their parents more (and vice versa!).

TALK IT THROUGH

Note: The term parent in the following items refers to all kinds of parenting adults—birth, step, foster, or guardian.



1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "we hardly ever talk" and 5 being "we talk all the time"), how often do you talk about each of the following with one or both of your parents or guardians?

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ☐ School grades | ☐ Family rules | ☐ Problems you have |
| ☐ Internet, TV or movies | ☐ Alcohol or drugs | ☐ How your day went |
| ☐ Chores | ☐ Your free time | ☐ Disobedience |
| ☐ Christian beliefs | ☐ Popular music | ☐ Sex |
| ☐ Clothes and fashion | ☐ Church | |
| ☐ Your friends | ☐ Your responsibilities | |

2. When you talk with one or both of your parents, who usually starts it?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I usually do. | ☐ My dad usually does. |
| ☐ My mom usually does. | ☐ Equal between my dad and me. |
| ☐ Equal between my mom and me. | ☐ We never talk. |

3. Have you shared your feelings about any of the following with your parents? If so, check those that apply.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| ☐ Family rules | ☐ Chores | ☐ Family relationships |
| ☐ Christianity and church | ☐ Friendships | ☐ Sex |
| ☐ Your interests | ☐ Your social activities | ☐ Disobedience |
| ☐ Your future plans | ☐ Schoolwork | ☐ Your problems |
| ☐ Politics | ☐ Fears | ☐ Alcohol or drugs |
| ☐ Sibling problems | ☐ Problems in our society | ☐ Your music |
| ☐ Feelings | | |

4. If you could change **one thing** about the way you and your parents or guardians talk to each other, what would it be?

5. Each of the following passages relates in some way to communicating. Choose one to read and write in your own words what it says about communication.

Job 2:13

Proverbs 15:1

James 1:19

Proverbs 2:3-6

2 Timothy 2:7

James 3:9-12

TALK IT THROUGH [family communication]

THIS WEEK

Communication between parents and teenagers is important, but it often doesn't happen enough. Parents (or guardians) fear they can't talk with their kids like they used to. Kids wonder why their parents need to talk so much. Parents feel like they're running out of time to tell their kids all they will need to know—kids think they know it all. Use this TalkSheet time to examine the vital issue of communication and encourage more parent-teen dialogue.

OPENER

Note: The term parent here and in the following items refers to all kinds of parenting adults—birth, step, foster, or guardian.

For this activity, write some of the following questions (and whatever other ones you want to add) on pieces of paper. Put these slips of paper into a question box for your kids to pull questions from.

- What would say to your parents to get out of being grounded?
- What would you do if one of your parents wants to talk with you about sex?
- Describe the silliest talk you have ever had with a parent.
- How do you get your parents to let you use the car?
- If you could ask your parents any question and they would tell the truth, what question would you ask?
- How do you get money out of your parents when you need it.
- What do you do if your mom or dad asks you about your date last night?
- If you could talk with your parents about anything, and later they'd forget what was said—what would you talk or ask about?

Have your kids take turns drawing the questions and answering them.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. On a poster board or a whiteboard, write down which issues your kids talk with their parents about most often. Do the same for those issues that are rarely or never discussed. Ask the group members to summarize what this says about their overall communication with their parents.
2. Talk about who has the responsibility for communication. Do young people have to wait for their parents? What if their parents don't want to talk or aren't very good at communicating?
3. Are there any issues that your kids should be talking over with their parents but aren't? Summarize the group's sharing of personal views into a statement or two.

4. Is there a common theme among your group's responses? Ask the students how they can bring about change by changing their own behaviors.
5. Discuss the verses and summarize on a whiteboard or overhead what they have to say about family communication.

THE CLOSE

You may have gotten a variety of responses from this discussion—some kids get along well with parents but others can't stand them. Point out that communication with parents is important, and your kids can learn a thing or two. Encourage them to trust their parents—and give their parents a fair chance to communicate with them. After all, communication goes two ways (that's why it's called dialog!). What separates them? Why do some kids have better relationships with their parents than others? What can your kids do to hold up their end of the relationship? And point out that the Big Daddy upstairs is listening to them all the time—he's waiting for them to talk with him, too! Close with a time of prayer for your kids and their parents.

MORE

- Hold a talk show with your kids and some of their parents! Your group members will be the audience, and will ask questions or write down their questions in advance. Have the host introduce the guests and the topic of the show. Provide the host with two to three sample questions to start off the show. Here's a few suggestions—what would you like to see teenagers talk with their parents about? How often should parents and their kids sit down and talk? Why aren't parents more understanding of their kids when they talk with them? If you could tell young people only one thing about parents, what would it be?
- Some of your group members might not have good relationships with their parents, or they may know of other kids who don't. Unfortunately, physical and sexual abuse happens within church families too. Encourage your kids to talk with a trusted adult—including you, if they want. For more information on dealing with abuse, check out the National Exchange Club Foundation (www.preventchildabuse.com) or the American Humane Association (www.americanhumane.org), Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org), The Family Violence Prevention Fund (www.fvpf.org), or Christians In Recovery (www.christians-in-recovery.com).

THE PERFECT PARENT

Note: The term parent here refers to all kinds of parenting adults—birth, step, foster, and guardian.

1. Here's a list of problems teens can have with parents or guardians. Which ones do you think are the **worst**? Rank them in order, with 1 being the **worst**.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Watching parents divorce | ☐ Being told you can't date |
| ☐ Enduring verbal or psychological abuse | ☐ Having parents who don't love each other |
| ☐ Being treated like a child | ☐ Living with alcoholism or drug abuse |
| ☐ Being afraid to talk to parents about personal things | ☐ Enduring physical or sexual abuse |
| ☐ Experiencing the death of a parent | ☐ Getting no respect or trust |

Which three you think are the **most common**? Put a ✓ beside these.

2. What do you think causes **problems** between parents and teens?

- ☐ Teens today have whole new problems to face—and parents can't relate.
- ☐ Parents haven't been taught parenting skills—some parents just don't know how to raise kids.
- ☐ Parents are too independent—they don't invest enough time in their teens.
- ☐ Some parents are just screwed up—they're too deep into sin to be a good parent.
- ☐ Teens want to grow up too fast and can become impatient and rebellious.
- ☐ Teens think they know more than their parents—and don't want to listen to their parents.



Which statements are true for **your family**?

3. Psalm 27:10 says, "My father and mother walked out and left me, but God took me in" (The Message). Based on what this verse says, how would you answer these questions?

How do you think God feels about you?

What do you think he'll do because of his feelings?

Is he likely to change his feelings? Why or why not?

4. Check out each of these verses. In what ways have you done what the verse says (in the last week or so)?

Deuteronomy 5:16

Ephesians 6:1-3

Proverbs 1:8-9

THE PERFECT PARENT [p a r e n t s — P s a l m 2 7]

THIS WEEK

For the first time in America, single-parent families outnumber two-parent families. And whether or not teens have one parent or two, or a foster parent or a guardian, they can still be part of a family in crisis. Kids are hurting in many ways. Where can they turn to? This TalkSheet discusses how God is a parent—how he can fill the void and soothe the pain.

Note: The term parent here and in the following items refers to all kinds of parenting adults—birth, step, foster, or guardian. Be sensitive to the fact that there's a good chance your kids aren't in a traditional family and may be hurting.

OPENER

You may want to start off by showing a few clips of TV shows that portray parents. Videotape some short segments of TV shows or ask your group members to tape a three to four minute clips from their favorite shows. Be sure to preview the clips for appropriateness before you show them. After showing each clip, ask the group to list the characteristics or qualities of the parent(s) who were shown. Make a master list of their ideas on a whiteboard or poster board. In your kids' opinions, was the parent good or bad? Why or why not? What characteristics do they like or dislike about this character?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. How did your kids rate these problems? You may want to rate these as a group and talk about the things that might cause the common problems. How could your kids begin to address or deal with these problems? How about helping a friend with them? Point out that some of the situations listed are very serious (i.e. sexual or verbal abuse)—some of which require professional help. Strongly encourage your kids to find a trusted adult—including you, fellow youth staff, a school counselor, or teacher—to talk with about these situations.
2. The root cause of family problems is sin, which shows itself through all of the problems listed and many more. Talk about these situations with your kids. How does sin have a role in each one? What would be the first step in repairing these situations?
3. This verse promises that God is faithful even when parents aren't. God loves your students—and he can help troubled families. Sometimes he'll change parents or teenage children who need to improve. Sometimes he provides comfort even though parents won't or can't change or improve. Have any of your kids seen God at work in their family situations?

4. What three suggestions does God give to help prevent problems before they start? Students should understand that following God's instructions won't mean they'll see all their problems solved, but they'll be causing fewer problems.

THE CLOSE

You may want to ask your kids to write one or two prayer requests for themselves and their parents on pieces of paper. Their requests should focus on specific problems and can be either anonymous or not. Collect all the slips and pray for them one at a time, or redistribute them for individuals to pray for aloud. Encourage your group to continue praying for each other and their families through the next week.

Be sure to thank your group members for their input on this stressful subject. You might want to remind your students that you're available if they need or want to talk about their family relationships. Pay attention to your group through this discussion—you may need to take the initiative with some students who may not come to you with their problems. For more information on family relationships and abuse, check out the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org), The Family Violence Prevention Fund (www.fvpf.org), or www.YouthSpecialties.com for further links and information.

MORE

- How does the media portray parents? How does this differ from the qualities that your kids listed? Challenge your kids to keep an eye out for how parents are portrayed in movies, TV shows, and in advertisements. You may want to show some other clips of movies—or gather some TV or magazine advertisements—in which there are parent-kid relationships. How is the parent portrayed? Is each situation healthy or not? How to these media parents rank in respect to the qualities that your group listed? For ideas on movies and TV shows check your local newspaper or visit Yahoo TV Coverage (<http://tv.yahoo.com/main>) or The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com).
- You may want to ask your students to brainstorm a list of things the church can do to help families, including parenting seminars, personal counseling, family Bible studies that address the issue of family problems, mother-daughter and father-son activities, special support groups, a mentoring program (like Big Brother or Big Sister) and so on. Then have your group select one idea to put into effect and present the proposal to your minister or planning committee.

BLOCKBUSTERS

1. Check the number of movies you watch in an average month at home and the theater.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Fewer than five | ☐ Between 11 and 20 |
| ☐ Between six and 10 | ☐ More than 20 |

2. What types of movies do you most frequently watch at home or at the theater?

Circle your top three choices.

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Adventure | Sports | Musical |
| Family | Comedy | Western |
| Science fiction | Horror | Documentary |
| Action | Classic black and white | |
| Cartoon | Blood and gore | |
| Romance | Drama | |

3. Re-rate two movies you think may have been inaccurately rated.

Movie Rating Guidelines

- G (General Audience)
 PG (Parental Guidance Suggested)
 PG-13 (Parent Caution)
 R (Restricted)
 NC-17 (No One Under 17 Admitted)



Movie:
 Was rated:
 Should have been rated:

Movie:
 Was rated:
 Should have been rated:

4. List two values that you think today's movies teach (such as "all dating relationships involve sex", or "everything ends up okay in the end", and so on).

5. Would you or have you done any of the following below? Y (yes) or N (no)?

- ___ I walk out of the theater if a movie is inappropriate.
- ___ I turn off a movie at home if it's inappropriate.
- ___ I carefully choose the movies I watch.
- ___ I won't watch a rental video with my friends if it's inappropriate.
- ___ I watch R-rated movies.
- ___ I talk with my parents about the movies I watch.
- ___ I pray about the movies I watch.

6. Read the following four passages from Romans. How does each relate to watching movies.

Romans 6:12-14
 Romans 8:5-8

Romans 12:2
 Romans 14:1-4

BLOCKBUSTERS [movies]

THIS WEEK

Cable, VHS, and DVD movies give high schoolers the chance to watch nearly anything—whatever they want, whenever they want. This TalkSheet provides you with the opportunity to talk about the kinds of movies your group members are viewing and to encourage them to discern what they watch. Since most late high schoolers can legally watch R-rated movies, you won't be able to use that legal rule as a point of persuasion. But you can discuss the pros and cons of healthy and unhealthy movies, and how to make good decisions about them.

OPENER

Start by getting a list of movies showing in your town from a newspaper or off the Internet. Make a list of all the current movies playing on a poster board or whiteboard. Your kids will most likely know all the titles and may even have seen a few of them. Take a poll to see how many of these movies your kids have seen. Then ask if they can say what each movie is rated. How close do they come? Write the rating next to the movie title. Point out that often people don't even look at the ratings before going to the movie. What are the ratings for? How many of their parents enforce the ratings? Why are certain movies rated the same as others, but have less violent or sexual content?

For information on movies and reviews, check out www.HollywoodJesus.com, Preview Family and Movie Review (www.gospelcom.net/preview/), Plugged In Magazine (www.family.org/pplace/pi/), Movie Finder (www.moviefinder.com/), or Film.Com (www.film.com/).

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Get a group average for a month. Then let the students estimate how many movies they will have watched by the time they graduate from high school—they'll be surprised to see how much they watch!
2. Ask several students to share their top three movie choices (this will give you an idea of the kinds of movies your group is viewing!). How many of the movies they have watched would pass their parents' approval? Why or why not?
3. This activity will (1) help kids become more aware of the reason for a rating system; (2) help kids discern good from bad moral content; and (3) help kids create their own Christian rating system. Ask the group to create a list of all the reasons for rating a movie NC-17, R, PG-13, PG, and G. You will get answers like violence, foul language, sex,

nudity, and so on. Now challenge the kids to create their own rating system in light of Christianity. How would they rate the movies differently?

4. Create a group list of all the young people's responses. (You may want to ask them for examples from specific movies.) Then compare the list to see how many good values are taught versus how many bad values are taught. Ask the students to explain how they can watch movies without being affected by the bad values.
5. After getting the students to share their answers, ask them to go back, look at the list, and decide what changes they would like to make in their movie viewing. What changes are they willing to make, if any? Why or why not?
6. Ask them to read their summaries and describe one thing they learned from the book of Romans about movie viewing.

THE CLOSE

Let the kids know that they do have decisions to make when it comes to going to the theater or watching a movie at home. Just because a movie was made doesn't mean that it should be seen! Challenge your kids to find out about movies before they see them (possibly refer them to one of the sites listed above). And even when they can watch an R-rated movie, talk about the content with your kids. How does watching a lot of violence affect a person? What about a highly sexual movie? Encourage them to be discerning with what they see and to take responsibility for their parent's rules and their own beliefs.

MORE

- You can use movies to teach your youth! Check out *Videos That Teach* by Doug Fields and Eddie James (Youth Specialties). This book includes over 75 teachable movie moments from film classics on over a hundred topics. Also, visit the Web site www.teachwithmovies.org for ideas on teaching with movies.
- Consider going to a movie or watching a video with your kids. Make sure that it's a rating that passes the approval of all parents. Afterwards talk about the movie in light of Christianity and their beliefs. What was the movie about? What message did it give about life, love, happiness, and so on? What good or bad influences could this movie have on others? Why or why not?

THIS WEEK

There are an overwhelming number of problems in the world—everything from poverty to social injustice. High school kids are able to give a lot, but many don't get encouraged to get into action. This TalkSheet allows you to discuss how your kids can make a difference in the world by helping others who are less fortunate.

OPEN

Are your kids up-to-date with what's going on in the world? You may want to distribute newspapers and news magazines (such as *Time* and *Newsweek*) and have groups find as many stories as possible about needy people and world problems. Allow five to ten minutes for the search. Then, have them share the stories. It may be helpful to have a world map there for them to see where the problem is going on. You may want to put stickers or marks on the places where the problems are taking place—both international or in the U.S.

What are the needs of others in the world? Role-play and discuss some situations of those in need—having no fresh water, eating only rice once every-other day, battling a disease without funds to get money, not being able to worship freely. How would your kids feel in these situations? How would their priorities be different? Would these situations change their understanding of God?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Some of your kids may have difficulty answering this question. They need to understand that they can effect change in today's world! Discuss what answers they gave and how they would change the world.
2. Compare what each has listed and try to compose a master list of ten. What do they think the church can do about any of the problems? What problems are more important than others?
3. Each of these questions has the potential for further discussion. If there is disagreement on any, stop and discuss it. Point out that they can make a difference in spite of the overwhelming immensity of our world's problems. How can the little things make a difference?
4. This exercise illustrates the difference between what they are doing now and what they would like to be doing. Ask for suggestions about how they would actually go about making the world a better place. List the ideas where everyone can see.
5. Ask for a few to read their summaries and describe one thing they learned from this passage. What would Jesus say about social action?

THE CLOSE

God has given everyone gifts and abilities to help those in need—whether it be big or small. He can use each person in the room to make a difference in the world. Look at Mark 6:39-55 for example—he fed five thousand people from one small lunch! In the same way, God can and will take whatever your kids have to offer him and bless it. Because God sees and knows all things, even their somewhat small efforts will play a big role.

MORE

- Prayer is one way that your kids can help those in need. You may want to make a list of all the problems that were discussed in the introduction. Then pass this list out and ask your kids to pray for one world problem each day. Encourage them to keep an eye out for world news and keep it in their prayers. For the latest world news, check out a news Web site such as www.cnn.com or www.nbc.com.
- As a group, sponsor a needy child through an Christian organization. There are several organizations, including World Vision (www.wvi.org) or Compassion International (www.ci.org). By doing small fundraisers and/or pooling money, your group will be able to help a child in need and experience first-hand how to support someone in need.
- Dare your kids to get out there and do something! With your group, plan a service project or outreach to help those in need. A useful resource for planning is the *Ideas Library: Camps, Retreats, Missions & Service Ideas* (Youth Specialties).

THE HITS

1. What do you think most adults think about secular music?
2. Where do you stand? Check the one that fits you the best.
 - ☐ I listen to secular music because I like how it sounds.
 - ☐ Listening to music puts me in a better mood.
 - ☐ I listen to music to fit in with my peers and friends.
 - ☐ Music is just part of our culture and society.
 - ☐ The lyrics of music don't affect me.
3. What do you think? Do you **A** (agree) or **D** (disagree) with these statements?
 - ___ There's more good than bad in secular music.
 - ___ Secular concerts should be rated like movies.
 - ___ The lyrics of music have less influence on teens than critics believe.
 - ___ Sometimes secular music is inspired by Satan.
 - ___ Popular music continues to get worse morally.
 - ___ Young people identify who they are by the groups they listen to.
 - ___ Adults shouldn't protect kids from secular music.
 - ___ Freedom of speech guarantees artists the right to sing whatever they want to sing.
 - ___ Music has little power to change the world.
 - ___ Music artists are accountable only to themselves.
 - ___ Music is a good source of information about life.
4. At what point should parents become concerned about their kid's involvement in secular music?
5. Name five popular songs that you hear on the radio or on CD. Then rate the lyrics for a Christian, using the following scale: **A** (acceptable), **H** (harmless), **Q** (questionable), **U** (unhealthy/sinful).
6. Check out **John 17:15-19**. How do these Bible verses relate to the world of popular music? Why or why not?



THE HITS [popular music]

THIS WEEK

Whether it is hip-hop, alternative, country, or rap, music is one word that defines youth culture today. It's become a medium targeted specifically at teenagers, who purchase over 125 million CDs a year*. But popular music—and the world it has created—has little or nothing to do with the home or church. Your high schoolers have already established listening habits. This TalkSheet has been designed to create a positive dialogue about popular, secular music between students and adult youth workers.

OPENER

Ask your group how music plays a role in everyday life. It's not just something people listen to. Where do your kids see music videos, hear music, or see music? Some of these include TV advertisements, radio commercials, movies, stores, billboards, and more. Discuss how music has invaded culture and what influences it has. For example, what would a movie be like without a soundtrack? What would commercials be without background music? Why do stores play music while you're shopping?

Have your kids make a list of all their favorite music groups and performers. Write these down on a master list. How have the kids tell you what genre of music these are—Pop? Rock? Alternative? Swing? Jazz? Techno? Country? Christian? Point out to your group that today there isn't as clear of a line as there used to be between popular music and Christian music. Christian artists have crossed over mainstream, while mainstream bands have Christian musicians in them. What groups do your kids know that have Christian members?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. How do kids feel about their parents and music? Are their parents strict? Nosy? Uninterested? How does this affect kids and the music they listen to? What do their parents think is the effect of their attitudes toward their kids' music?
2. Where do your kids stand? Most don't think that their music affects them in negative ways. But it does. Point out how music has had an adverse effect on its listeners. Then make a list of positive things about music as well as negative.
3. You may want to ask your kids to pick five or six statements they would like to discuss. You may also want to question what messages secular music sends.
4. Encourage your kids to let their parents into their world—that includes their CDs and radio stations. Discuss all the objections students might have about talking with their parents about music. What objections might parents have to talking with their kids about music?
5. Encourage your kids to be discerning with the music they listen to. You may want to ask students to bring specific songs to play, so they can discuss as a group how each should be rated.
6. Discuss how music influences the students—how does music influence immorality, sexual behaviors, involvement in drugs and alcohol, abuse, and more? Remind them that Satan is trying to have an impact on them and do anything to get into their lives, even if it's the music they're listening to.

THE CLOSE

Point out that listening to popular music isn't bad. But some of the music is bad—the violent content, sexual themes, and other messages aren't good. Be careful not to slam your kids with Bible verses or bash their favorite music groups. Instead, focus on your kids' responsibility to choose wisely the kinds of music they listen to, and to be discerning. Challenge your kids to choose songs that can keep their faith focused on Jesus and not worldly values.

MORE

- Brainstorm the values that most mainstream songs deal with. What are the themes that most talk about? They include love, drug abuse, violence, romance, suicide, and more. Make a list, then ask your kids to guess what percentage of the music they listen to deals with these topics. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the most applicable), how well does the music they listen to apply to their lives? Do they share the same values and morals that the musicians do? Why or why not? What influence do your kids think this has on them?
- Check out Plugged In magazine at www.family.org/ppplace/pi/ (Focus on the Family) for the latest trends in music, TV, and movies. Also, check out www.YouthSpecialties.com for information and links to finding discussion topics and latest news on teen culture.

* Teen Fact Book 2000, Channel One Network: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago. Used by permission.

WWW.X-RATED.SIN

1. When you see a **warning sign** (something like "contains explicit sexual content") on an Internet site, what do you do?
- ☐ See what kind of Web site it was first.
 - ☐ Check to see if there was an age restriction.
 - ☐ Immediately close the site.
 - ☐ Think it was a joke.
 - ☐ Ignore the warning—I can look at what I want.
 - ☐ Tell my parent or adult who checks the history of the Internet files
 - ☐ Lie when it asks for my age, agree to the conditions, and start surfing.

2. In a few words, what is your definition of **obscene**?

3. What do you think—do you **A (agree)** or **D (disagree)**?

- ___ Popular entertainment—movies, television, music, and the Internet—causes the moral decline of culture.
- ___ There's pretty much nothing anyone can do to restore a higher standard of decency to our society.
- ___ Swearing and foul language is so common today that it's meaningless.
- ___ There should be no censorship whatsoever.
- ___ Popular music is getting worse and worse.
- ___ Obscenity laws should be strictly enforced.
- ___ Ratings for movies are basically useless.
- ___ Christians should be more active in condemning obscenity in the culture around us.
- ___ Obscene Internet sites should be regulated and censored.
- ___ Those reacting negatively to pop entertainment prove that they're old-fashioned.



4. How would you respond in each of the following situations?

- On the way to school, one of your friends listens to a rap CD with sexually graphic and violent lyrics.
- Flipping through TV channels, your friend stops on a show with a stand-up comedian who is saying some pretty disgusting things.
- You find a *Playboy* at your friend's house.
- While surfing the Internet with your pals, your friend keyword-searches sex and nudity to look at some very explicit Web pages.
- A friend starts to forward dirty jokes to your e-mail address.
- You hear your dad swearing a lot.

5. Check out the following Bible verses—what do you think each verse has to say about living in an X-rated world?

Philippians 4:8, 9

James 4:4

1 John 2:15-17

THIS WEEK

Today's pop culture is crude and lewd and growing more profane with TV shows, musical groups, and blockbuster hits at the movies. Kids today aren't sheltered. This TalkSheet gives you the opportunity to talk with your kids about the affect that obscenity has on their lives. For more discussion on pornography, look at Smut World (pg. 103).

OPENER

You may want to ask the group for examples of obscenity in your community, in their lives, at their schools, or from the media. These answers will range from T-shirts with sexually explicit messages to TV programming. From their experiences, how easy is it to access pornographic material? Do they know of a sibling or friend who abuses pornography?

As you open this discussion, do be sensitive to these topics. Some of your kids may be involved with pornography, frequently watch obscenities, or more—you don't want to come off as too judgmental. Challenge the group to handle this discussion honestly and maturely. Be sure to mediate this discussion carefully. Some churches and youth are more open-minded than others.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. If they're honest, some will admit that they've seen objectionable material on the Web. Do they pay attention to the warning signs, if there are any? How would they handle this situation? Do they understand how easy it is to click on the mouse and find these materials?
2. Discuss the different definitions people have of obscenity. Many kids will mention sex in their definition. Make sure you point out that sex and obscenity are not the same. Read a dictionary definition of the word. Webster's New World Dictionary defines it as "offensive to modesty or decency; lewd."
3. Open these statements up to debate, especially if a difference of opinion exists. Several of the questions will promote discussion around the idea of how much society should tolerate. Expect the First Amendment question of freedom to be raised. Does it guarantee total freedom if society has the right to restrict certain things?
4. These tension-getters make great role-play situations as well as discussion starters on how to handle everyday situations involving the obscene. Ask the teens to share their own tension-getters that they have faced. The group can brainstorm Christian responses to these difficult but real dilemmas.

5. Discuss with the students how this verse applies to the pop culture that surrounds them. Why should Christians particularly keep their guard up against pornography?

THE CLOSE

Point out that standards of decency have eroded because society has allowed them to erode. The obscene no longer exists on the fringes of culture but has become the mainstream. But is that what Christians want? Is that what society wants? Culture will continue its decline as long as it's allowed.

Encourage your kids to get grounded in God. The way to avoid temptation is to ask for God's strength—it's the Holy Spirit that provides self-control and discernment. Close with a time of prayer and challenge your kids to ask God for strength and forgiveness.

MORE

- You may want to ask your group to think of an average young teenager—both a guy and a girl. What are some of the attitudes and behaviors of this average high schooler? What do they watch, listen to, or hear? Mention things that your kids have brought up during your discussion (things like viewing R-rated movies, reading dirty jokes, using vulgar language, and so on). How does getting hooked on vulgarity and pornography alter someone's life? Ask the group to predict the kind of life this person may live as they grow older—
 - What kind of relationship with God will they have?
 - What kind of parent will they be?
 - What kind of values will they adopt?
 - How will this person treat others?
 - How will they handle dating relationships?
 - What will they teach their kids about vulgarity and pornography?
- You may want to talk with your group about how to handle pornography. It is an addiction—in a sense, a visual drug. Teenage boys in particular struggle with these temptations. Discuss how easy it is to get hooked and what the dangers are. How does pornography affect their relationships? How they see the opposite sex? What they think of love and intercourse? Challenge your kids to seek out help if they or a friend are caught in a web of pornography. They must find another trusted person to talk with. For more information, check out Caught By the Web (www.caught-bytheweb.com), Focus on the Family's resources (www.pureintimacy.org), or Breaking Free From Pornography (www.porn-free.org). These are Christian links—if you search for pornography in a general search engine, you may land up with some not-so-helpful, unhealthy links!

GET PLUGGED IN

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being "I'm real involved" and 10 being "Church? Involved? What?") How involved in the church are you?

2. How involved can you see yourself in the church when you're an adult?

- ☐ I'll regularly attend church services.
- ☐ I'll make church an important part of my life.
- ☐ I'll be involved in a number of church activities.
- ☐ I'll take a leadership role in church.
- ☐ I think my involvement in church will be a great source of life satisfaction.
- ☐ I plan to marry someone who sees church involvement as important.
- ☐ I'll encourage my future family's involvement in church.
- ☐ I plan to be in a full-time ministry position as a career choice.



3. What do you think of these statements—**T** (true) or **F** (false)?

- ___ Attending church as a child makes living the Christian life easier as a teenager.
- ___ It's normal for teenagers to rebel against the church.
- ___ It's the church's responsibility to motivate a teenager's involvement in church.
- ___ Teenagers should be allowed to attend different churches than their parents.
- ___ Parents and their teenagers need to agree on spiritual matters.
- ___ Most kids would rather go to church by themselves.

4. Place an X on the scale where you see yourself.



Committed to church

Rebelling against church

5. Revelation 2:1-3:22 describes the condition of seven churches. Examine your own life and relationship with God by choosing which condition comes closest to describing your personal spiritual life.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Church in Ephesus—
Read Revelation 2:1-7 | ☐ Church in Sardis—
Read Revelation 3:1-6 |
| ☐ Church in Smyrna—
Read Revelation 2:8-11 | ☐ Church in Philadelphia—
Read Revelation 3:7-13 |
| ☐ Church in Pergamum—
Read Revelation 2:12-17 | ☐ Church in Laodicea—
Read Revelation 3:14-22 |
| ☐ Church in Thyatira—
Read Revelation 2:18-29 | |

GET PLUGGED IN [church involvement]

THIS WEEK

Church—some young people love it, others do everything they can to get out of it! If your kids are like most, they're at different stages of church commitment. Use this activity to talk about church involvement in a non-threatening manner. Give your kids the chance to express their opinions about the church—both good and bad. You might learn a few things as well!

OPENER

Start by asking your kids an honest question—and ask the group for honest answers. Where would they rather be on a Sunday morning instead of going to church? What would they rather be doing? You'll get a variety of answers. Don't look down on any of your kids! Most of them would probably like to get a few extra hours of sleep. You may want to make a list of these excuses for missing church. Now ask them how they feel when they miss church. They may not feel anything different—some may say they feel guilty or empty afterwards. Talk about what is important about going to church. Is it more than just showing up and singing some songs? What else goes on a church that's important?

You may want to ask your kids how effective the church services are for them. What makes the church service and being involved in the church good for them? Or not? What do your kids like to be involved in, if anything? Why do they like being involved? What rewards do they get from being a part of a church family? What would they do if they weren't part of a church?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. How involved are your kids in their church? What are they involved in? What do they like about being involved in what they do? Why are some kids not involved? Is this a good or bad thing?
2. Provide the kids an opportunity to share their predictions about their own church involvement in one, five, and 10 years down the line. Why would their involvement be different then than now? Why do some churches put more emphasis on adult involvement than on student involvement?
3. Vote on each of these statements, debating any controversial issues that come out of the discussion. Some of your kids may have different ideas about some of these statements, depending on their church background and experiences. Spend some time on these if you have time.
4. Where are your kids at on this scale? If you don't want them to share out loud, ask them where the

average teenager their age is. Why are some teenagers on different places on the scale? Why do some see the church as an enemy and rebel?

5. You can also use this activity as a group to examine your church or churches. For every problem that is brought up, ask the group to also suggest a solution as well as how they can be a part of that solution.

THE CLOSE

You may want to close this session with a brainstorming activity. Ask your kids to create a list of all the benefits of being involved in church as a teenager. Focus on worship, service opportunities, fun times, and personal Christian growth activities. This simple activity can help your young people identify all of the positive opportunities available that they have never considered.

Point out that the church is a body of believers, although it always doesn't feel like one. The church is a giant family—and an important one too. You may want to have some of your kids find verses that talk about the church and what it means to be in a church. There are several references in the New Testament to the church. What verses can they find that describe the church?

Take some time to pray for your church, the church leaders, and the youth of your church. Encourage your kids to pray for how they can get involved in the church as well.

MORE

- You may want to invite some of your church leaders to be in on this TalkSheet discussion. This is a convenient opportunity for them to hear what the youth of the church are thinking and feeling. Possibly have a question and answer session after the discussion for the pastor, elders, or committee members to bounce ideas off of your youth and vice versa. Encourage a teamwork approach to the discussion and challenge your kids to continue making suggestions and ideas to the church leaders.
- Consider holding a special service for your kids—or have your kids plan a service for the church. What would they like to see happen in this service? Would they like a sermon on a specific topic? How singing some of their favorite songs? Encourage them to get involved in the planning. Then debrief on how it was for them to be involved and whether or not they enjoyed the service more or less.

LOOKING UP



1. Circle three words that best describe a typical worship service at your church.

Worshipful	Interesting
Dramatic	Formal
Entertaining	Relaxing
Inspiring	Evangelistic
Long	Mysterious
Reflective	Encouraging
Strange	Embarrassing
Friendly	Educational
Boring	Interactive

2. What do you think is the **most important** part of a worship service?

3. If you could change one thing about your church's worship service, what would it be?

4. What do you think—**A (agree)**, **D (disagree)**, or **N (not sure)**?

- ☐ Worship is most valuable at a church service.
- ☐ Worship brings me closer to God.
- ☐ Worship services should be different for teens.
- ☐ Worship services are about praising God.
- ☐ Worship is just as important as praying and reading my Bible all week.
- ☐ Worship services get boring when the pastor starts to preach.
- ☐ Worship services are special, and you should dress up for them.
- ☐ Worship services should be entertaining.
- ☐ Worship music at our service is really good.
- ☐ Worship services give me the boost I need to live for God during the week.

5. Read one of the following passages, and write what you think it says about worshipping God at your church.

2 Kings 21:19-22

1 Chronicles 16:23-33

John 4:20-24

Revelation 4:8-11

LOOKING UP [w o r s h i p]

THIS WEEK

Some high schoolers don't understand the importance and meaning of worship. Some think it's just a boring meeting that their parents force them to attend. Others don't think it applies to them at all. This TalkSheet provides the opportunity to discuss your church worship service and to encourage your youth group to take their worship service more seriously.

OPEN

You may want to start with a role-play situation like this—

Anna keeps hearing some kids at school talk about their church services. Anna isn't a Christian and doesn't understand what they're talking about—or why they're excited about it. So she finally asks one of them what church is all about and why they go to worship services. How would your kids respond to the following questions in this circumstance?

- Why do they go to church?
- What's good (or not) about it?
- Does going to church mean that you are a Christian?
- Will your kids ask Anna to go with them sometime?
- Do they ever face situations like this at their school?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Ask everyone to explain why they chose the words they did. Don't put down or argue any of those that are negative comments—everyone may have a different opinion.
2. Make a list of all the ingredients of a worship service and ask which they think is most important (it might be helpful to provide copies of your church's bulletin for their reference). Discuss the reasons for each different part in the order of worship.
3. What parts of the service does the group not like? Point out that some parts might indeed be boring, but this doesn't necessarily make them unacceptable or without purpose. Encourage them to take their comments or suggestions to the pastor or the church's worship committee.
4. This exercise focuses on the different aspects of worship and the service itself. Let them debate the statements that are controversial. You may want to add that there are many ways to worship God. For example, people can worship God, obey him, and do his will, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't go to church.

5. What insights have they gained from reading these Bible verses?

THE CLOSE

What are your kids' views of worship? Why is worship important? Consider these ideas—

- Worship is a verb, not a noun. It isn't something they attend in order to be entertained. Instead, it is something they do. They worship God. The worship service helps us do that.
- The worship service brings everyone in the church together, both young and old, which is important. The church is people, the community of God, and it is important for the church to have that common experience together. Corporate worship (worship with others) is one way they acknowledge the church is the body of Christ and how much they need each other.
- Worship is for God, not for us. The question to ask after a worship service is not "Did I like it?" but "Did God like it?" and "Did I do my best for him?"

MORE

- Get involved! Plan a worship service with your youth group. Let them choose the theme, pick and lead the songs, or plan and perform a skit. Give them some freedom to be creative and different. Have them meet with the senior pastor or worship leader, who can give them some direction if needed.
- And encourage your kids to get involved in different parts of the morning service, such as scripture reading, ushering, offering, greeting, and so on. They are an invaluable part of the church! You may want or need to work with your planning committee to get your youth involved in the services.
- There are several praise and worship rallies and retreats for youth of all ages. One of includes DCLA—Youth For Christ (www.yfc.org). These mass events give kids a chance to learn and worship with others their age. They often include big name Christian artists and speakers that give a new light to worship and praising the King. You can find more information on these events and links at www.YouthSpecialties.com.

THE SUNDAY SITUATION



1. List **five things** you could do—or want to do—on Sunday instead of going to church.

2. If you attend church, what do you like **best** about it?

3. Listed below are a few programs and concerns of the church. Which five do you think are the **most important**? Number them one to five, in order of importance to you.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Choir and music program | ☐ Youth ministry |
| ☐ Building | ☐ Church revival |
| ☐ Foreign missions | ☐ Spiritual growth |
| ☐ Evangelism | ☐ Community outreach |
| ☐ Children's ministry | ☐ Adult and senior ministries |
| ☐ Worship services | ☐ Fellowship |
| ☐ Offerings and tithes | ☐ Sermons and teaching |
| ☐ Sunday school | ☐ Budget |

4. What do you think—**A (agree)** or **D (disagree)**?

- ☐ You should attend church every week.
- ☐ You can be a Christian without attending church.
- ☐ The church's main concern seems to be taking in money.
- ☐ If there were fewer hypocrites in church, more people would want to attend.
- ☐ The church has little or no impact on today's society.
- ☐ Listening to some Christian music is just as good as going to church
- ☐ Small churches are better than big ones.
- ☐ The minister's job is to show church members how to do the work of the church.
- ☐ There are too many churches.
- ☐ If a church is boring to you, you should change churches.

5. Check out the Bible verses listed below, and complete the sentences in your own words.

Romans 12:4-8

I can **participate** in my church by—

Ephesians 4:16

I can **build others** up in love by—

Hebrews 10:24-25

I can **encourage others** to attend church by—

THE SUNDAY SITUATION [c h u r c h]

THIS WEEK

What is the importance of going to church? Do you feel that some of your kids go just because their parents make them? This TalkSheet is designed to create discussion about the church and will encourage your high schoolers to get involved in it.

OPEN

You may want to start by asking the group to list all the churches that they know of or have been to. This can include different denominations, religions, and styles of worship. There are hundreds of different branches of churches—both Protestant and Catholic. Make a list of these suggestions and ask the group what makes a church. Is it a building? Is church a group of people? Can church be meeting with some friends together on a Sunday night?

Then ask your group what makes a church? Is it worship alone? What does going to church mean to them? Encourage them to be honest with their answers—some kids may not like church much. You may be surprised at the variety of answers.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. How did the group answer this question? Talk about the importance or unimportance of each activity in relationship to church attendance.
2. Ask the kids to list all the things they like about the church, keeping track of them on the whiteboard or poster board. Ask if there is anything they don't like and list them as well, but be careful this doesn't turn into a gripe session.
3. Put them in charge for once! What if they were on the church board to determine priorities for the church. What ministries they would discontinue, which they would keep, and which they would emphasize more?
You might want to try this hypothetical situation—a rich widow dies and leaves \$3 million to the church; how would your mock church board use the money?
4. Have a vote on each of the statements, according to their answers. If everyone agreed on a particular one, go on to the next. If there is a wide difference of opinion, discuss the pros and cons.
5. Read each passage and allow them to share their completed sentences with the group.

THE CLOSE

The following are some suggestions to emphasize as you close—

- The church is the body of Christ and everyone is a part of it. Christ is no longer physically present in the world, but his body, the church, is. When you become a Christian, you become part of that body. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. Christians grow in community with each other.
- The purpose of church isn't entertainment. In a worship service, people aren't the audience—God is. Christians come to worship him and to grow closer to him. That requires expending some effort on their part.
- Young people aren't the church of tomorrow—they are the church of today! Your kids know that they are a vitally important part of the church. Encourage them to get involved.

MORE

- Want to see how much your kids know about their church? Make up a short quiz with questions about the church such as—
 - Name a missionary our church sponsors and the country where he or she serves.
 - What is our pastor's middle name?
 - What is the name of the church's newsletter?
 - Summarize last Sunday's (or this morning's) sermon in 25 words or less.
 - What year was our church founded?
 - Which family in our church has been a member the longest?
- Some of your kids may never have been to a church of a different denomination or religion. If you feel it's appropriate, attend a different worship service with some of your kids. Check out a non-denominational church or a Catholic mass. How do these church services differ from yours? Is it good or bad? What did the group like or not like? What did this experience teach them about the church and how God would view different denominations and styles of worship?

YOUTH GROUP SCOOP

1. What's the **best** thing about your youth group?
2. List **three** words that best describe your youth group.
3. If you could change **two things** about this youth group to make it better, what would you change?



4. For each sentence, please write **Y** (yes) or **N** (no).
 - ☐ I'm influenced a great deal by our youth group discussions and activities.
 - ☐ I think our youth group has weak leadership.
 - ☐ I believe this youth group is Christ-centered.
 - ☐ I don't feel like I'm an important part of the group.
 - ☐ I attend mostly because my parents make me.
 - ☐ I'm doing my part to help make this a better group.
 - ☐ I wouldn't be comfortable inviting friends to visit this group.
 - ☐ I've grown in my relationship to Christ because of youth group.
 - ☐ I give this group high priority in my life.
 - ☐ I have a lot of good friends in this group.
5. Check out **Ephesians 4:1-6**, and summarize it in your own words. How can it improve the youth group?

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.

GIVE OR TAKE



1. Circle the last person you bought a gift for with your own money.

Mom	Friend	Uncle
Dad	Girlfriend or boyfriend	Grandma
Brother	Teacher	Grandpa
Sister	Pastor	Self
Neighbor	Aunt	No one

2. What is **one** gift that you would like to give if you could afford it and who would you give it to and why?

3. Check out **Proverbs 11:24**. What doesn't appear to make sense in this verse?

What could the answer be?

4. Match these passages with what they have to say about being a giver.

Proverbs 22:9	People should give with a cheerful attitude.
Matthew 6:1-4	The person who is generous will be blessed by God.
Acts 20:35	People should give quietly and secretly.
2 Corinthians 9:7	Giving really is better than receiving.

GIVE OR TAKE | generosity — Proverbs 11 |

THIS WEEK

High schoolers sometimes struggle with being takers and being mature, generous givers. Some are making own money and paying for their own cars and clothes. Others are still relying heavily on their parents for financial support. During this time, they'll develop an attitude toward giving that will affect them the rest of their lives. Giving doesn't mean money alone—it includes actions and time! This TalkSheet will discuss generosity and what it means to give even when they are flat broke.

OPENER

What would your group members do in these situations? Challenge them to think honestly and realistically about their responses.

- You're always sharing your stuff with your sister, who is three years younger than you. Because you have a job and make money, you buy more clothes, CDs, and stuff. You were trying to be generous, but now you think your sister is taking advantage of you.
- You leave the theater with some friends and pass a beggar on the street. He asks you for extra change, but all you have is a \$10 bill.
- Your pastor says that you should tithe 10 percent of what you make. But you're only making minimum wage at a burger joint and need the money!
- Your grandpa likes to hand over extra money to you—after all, you're his favorite grandkid (or so you think!). Sometimes he gives you \$50.
- Your school is hosting a food and clothing drive for a nearby mission organization. They ask if you'll volunteer an hour or two to help out.

What does each of these situations say about generosity? How would your group members respond to each of these? Point out that some are healthy examples of generosity and some aren't. Take a few minutes to talk about their responses.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Ask for some willing students to share their answers. When do they buy gifts for others and why? When was the last time they went out of their way to buy someone something? How often do they buy themselves stuff compared to buying others stuff?
2. Invite your students to discuss who they would give the gift of their dreams to and why. How would it make them feel to be able to give such a gift? Why?
3. Discuss God's strange (but functional!) economy—To give is to gain, to die is to live, to be last is to be first. Ask your students to brainstorm how

these principles might apply in modern, real-life situations.

4. Ask the group to sum up what it means to live a life of godly generosity. How do these attributes apply to their own lives? Encourage them to give specific examples or share stories from their experiences.

THE CLOSE

Wrap up by asking what the benefits are of being a giver. How are others affected by their generosity? How does giving change the person who gives? What happens when giving people give too much? Or when the takers take too much? Talk about balancing giving with taking. Then challenge your group to follow up on the ideas they brainstormed in question 6. Finally, is there something that you as a group can do together to show your generosity?

MORE

- You may want to—and if your kids are interested—pick names anonymously for secret supporters. Then for a week, two weeks, a month, or more, these people can secretly support and encourage each other by giving small gifts, a letter, or even just prayer. Maybe do it this for a special event or holiday. Either way, follow up with your group and ask them how it felt to give and to receive. What was easier or harder? And how did they feel when they gave and didn't receive (or vice versa?). Why is it hard to give unconditionally?
- You may want to talk about the paradox of giving within a society like America. With all the advertisements, shopping malls, and Internet shopping, it's no wonder that kids are saturated with the "take all-have all" mentality. How can your kids survive in this culture and maintain or develop a giving nature? What can they do to keep themselves and others from getting caught up in wanting it all? How much do they get from their parents? And are they giving anything back?

JESUS GIVEAWAY

1. True or false? Most of my friends aren't interested in hearing about Jesus Christ.
2. Why do you think most Christian teenagers don't share Christ with their friends?
- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ They feel embarrassed. | ☐ They're afraid. |
| ☐ They don't think it's important. | ☐ They don't want to offend anyone. |
| ☐ They think Christianity isn't fun. | ☐ They think someone might laugh at them. |
| ☐ They don't know how. | ☐ Other— |

3. Choose **three** effective ways to share Christ with others.
- ☐ Hand out gospel tracts.
 - ☐ Carry a Bible to school.
 - ☐ Talk to my date about Jesus.
 - ☐ Invite a friend to church.
 - ☐ Live a moral life through example.
 - ☐ Show love to others.
 - ☐ Wear a T-shirt with a Christian message.
 - ☐ Wait for the right opening before talking about Christ.
 - ☐ Bring a friend to a youth group activity.
 - ☐ Give a speech in class about my faith.
 - ☐ Other—



4. What do you think—Y (yes) or N (no)?
- ☐ A true Christian will want to share Christ with someone else.
 - ☐ A Christian is sharing Christ all the time, even when he or she doesn't realize it.
 - ☐ In order to share Christ, one needs to have a good understanding of the Bible.
 - ☐ It'd be better to keep quiet about your faith, than to offend somebody by expressing your beliefs.
 - ☐ Most people will think you're a freak if you talk about Jesus.

5. Pick one of the following passages to rewrite in your own words.
- Matthew 5:14-16
 - Matthew 28:18-20
 - Mark 1:17
 - Acts 1:8

JESUS GIVEAWAY [sharing Christ with others]

THIS WEEK

Sometimes it's not easy for teenagers to share their faith with others. It's difficult to explain their beliefs when others are questioning them. Both adults and teens struggle with being a witness, without coming off as radicals. This TalkSheet gives you and your group the opportunity to talk about witnessing and to practice sharing the Christian faith.

OPEN

In this activity, create a role-play situation with you and your group. You may want to get some info in advance to use against your group. Find some facts about other religions and their beliefs. Then present a situation like this—you are a foreign exchange student from India. You grew up in the Hindu religion. Now you're living with an American family that goes to church and worships God. You learned at home that Christians believe in Heaven, not reincarnation. You're confused and feel a bit threatened by these beliefs. You want to know more, but you aren't sure what to ask.

Break your kids into groups to brainstorm how they would present the gospel to you, the student. What are they going to say? How are they going to defend their beliefs? Have them write down some points. Then bring the groups together and begin the role-play by confronting them about seeing one of them reading the Bible. Have your kids explain their beliefs to you. Question the kids and get them thinking about their faith and how to defend what they believe.

Afterwards, debrief and encourage them. Explain that it's not easy to explain faith in something that they can't see. If you have suggestions, give them a few things to keep in mind as they witness to others. Then, open the discussion about witnessing.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Many in the group will say the statement is true—their friends aren't interested in hearing about Christ. Ask them to explain their answers.
2. Try to have the group reach a consensus as to which are the top two reasons. What are ways of overcoming each of these obstacles? Are any of these reasons legit? Why or why not?
3. Have the kids share their answers and the reasons why they responded that way. What are the pros and cons of each? Are there other ways that aren't listed? Has anyone ever used one of these ways to reach out? Why are some methods more effective than others?

4. Discuss these statements one at a time. Point out that (1) a true Christian will want to tell others about Christ, (2) we're representing Christ by the way we live, (3) it isn't necessary to know the Bible in order to share Christ, (4) it's a cop-out to think we might be offensive if we share Christ, and (5) we shouldn't be worried about what people think of us when sharing Christ.

5. While talking about these verses, examine the different methods Christ used to talk about himself and how these same methods can be used today to share Christ, such as friendship, helping others, and so on.

THE CLOSE

You don't want to make your kids feel guilty with this session. With their self-esteem on the line, teenagers are reluctant to do or say anything that might embarrass them or cause others to reject them. Be careful not to make witnessing sound like a burden for being a Christian. Emphasize that being a Christian is a gift that each one can give to someone else. How would they feel if they knew a friend could spend eternity in heaven with them? Does this friend know? Brainstorm creative ways they can be witnesses for Christ in non-threatening ways. They don't have to be Bible experts in order to share Christ with others. They can witness in a lot of nonverbal ways through our actions and what they say to others.

Sharing Christ is a privilege—and a command. It's a responsibility that God give us. It's a way to show others that they are loved and that they love others.

MORE

- Missionaries are spreading the gospel worldwide and they need prayer support. Encourage your group to support missionaries, who are witnesses to others worldwide. Challenge them to pray for missionaries, to write them letters, e-mail, and give money. Consider doing a group fundraiser for the missionaries in your church and get the congregation involved, too.
- Brainstorm for a youth group slogan with your group. This could be a logo, statement, or slogan that reflects their faith somehow. Vote on a slogan and a verse. Then—if your kids like the idea—make a kickin' youth group T-shirt. When they wear them, have them keep track of the reactions or questions they get at school. Encourage them to use this as a way to explain their beliefs to others who have questions.

For information on purchasing special order clothing and more, visit the YS links at www.gospelcom.net/ys/central/apparel.html.

RANDOM ACTS OF GOODNESS



1. If you knew a family was hungry and cold, when would it become your responsibility to do something about it? Check all the answers that apply.

- ☐ When they ask me to help
- ☐ When they're on my doorstep
- ☐ When they're on my street
- ☐ When they're near death
- ☐ When they're in my city
- ☐ When they're in my state
- ☐ When they're in my country
- ☐ When I know about it
- ☐ When I have lots of money

- ☐ When I become an adult
- ☐ When it's my family
- ☐ When (and only when!) it isn't their fault
- ☐ When I have everything I need for myself
- ☐ When my family members have everything they need

2. Read **Proverbs 3:27-28**. What does this verse say is the responsibility of a Christian?

3. The following is a list of things that most teenagers have the power to do. What are some practical ways that these things could be lived out?

- The power to say a kind word—
- The power to express gratitude—
- The power to listen—
- The power to help—
- The power to share—
- The power to encourage—
- The power to give—
- The power to care—

4. How can your life be different when you realize that you're accountable for what you fail to do as well as what you do?

RANDOM ACTS OF GOODNESS [good deeds—Proverbs 3]

THIS WEEK

Teenagers often are bombarded with actions or activities that are to be avoided. They are encouraged less frequently to engage in actions and activities that do good to those they have the power to help. It is these acts that spell out the reality of faith to others. This TalkSheet encourages your young people to explore options that can stretch their faith in practical ways.

OPENER

What if each of your kids could be president of the United States for one day—with the power to do all kinds of things? Have your students share what they would do if they had that kind of power at their fingertips. Some may suggest ideas that are self-serving or unrealistic—others may come up with ideas that are very positive. The point is that all of them would use the power available to them for something. Let your group know that they will be discussing how they can use the power they have right now.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Help your young people see that the obligation to help those in need extends universally. Brainstorm ways that a young person could help someone who was hungry and cold in a faraway land. Guide them to specific ideas—such as sponsoring a child through Compassion International (www.ci.org) or World Vision (www.wvi.org), supporting church missionaries working in poor countries, and so on.
2. Discuss the answers with your group. Point out that it is the duty of every Christian to do good when people have the opportunity. But how hard or easy is it to do good? What if your friends are around or you don't have time? You may want to read the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-36) for one example.
3. Give the students a chance to discuss and explore practical ways that they might do good with the power they have at home, at school, at work, and at church. What are some ways that they can influence people around them starting today?
4. How did your kids answer this one? What difference does it make knowing that they have responsibility? Take some time to talk through these answer with your kids.

THE CLOSE

Challenge the students to consider putting their faith into action—in small but powerful ways. They may not have people starving for food near them, but they probably know kids who are starving for acceptance and kindness. They can express thanks and gratitude to parents, teachers, and friends. And they can serve in simple ways, by washing the church van or by helping a brother or sister with stuff around the house. What practical things they can do right here, right now?

MORE

- You may want to plan a reach-out or service event with your group—maybe by cleaning a portion of the church, preparing and delivering a meal for a shut-in, or another viable project. Or look into something more long-term, like supporting a child overseas or becoming a missionary partner. For more information, check out Compassion International, World Vision, or www.YouthSpecialties.com for more links and service-related information and resources.
- Split your group up into small groups and have them check out the Bible for more verses on helping others and showing God's love. If God clearly shows that doing good is a good thing, why have people and society given do-gooders a bad rap? Why has doing good become a negative thing among some people? Point out that those who love God want to do good—out of love and gratitude to God. What attitudes are your kids mirroring to each other and to others around them?

SERVING THE SLUMS



1. Check out Psalm 82:3-4. Then in your own words, define these words from the passage.

Defend—

Maintain—

Rescue—

Deliver—

2. How do you think most people your age would react if they saw someone who was lonely, defenseless, or otherwise hurting? Put an arrow by the reactions that you expect would occur.

Just watch

Pray

Laugh at them

Feel bad

Tell someone

Gossip about them

Say something

Comfort them

Offer friendship

Defend them

Feel nothing

Blame them

Walk away

Talk to them

Help if it wasn't too hard

Help even if it was hard

Now think about the **three** that are your usual reactions to a situation like this. How you think God would respond to your reaction?

3. What are some ways you could help the people below?
- Jasmine has a fairly severe speech impediment. People can't understand her easily, so she's usually ignored—or laughed at.
 - Diante's dad is dying of cancer, and he's afraid of losing him, although he doesn't show it.
 - A drunken man asks you for money for a meal.
 - The gothic kid is being shoved around by gang members again.
4. A strong, single young man who refuses to work (because he can live off food stamps and rent subsidy) wants to borrow some bucks. Would you give him money?

Why or why not?

SERVING THE SLUMS [helping others — Psalm 82]

THIS WEEK

The down and out include the hungry, the homeless, the lonely, the misfits—anyone who doesn't fit in with the crowd. They can be found in cities, suburbs, and (yes!) even high schools. This TalkSheet will guide your students toward their obligation to help in some way those who the world would rather ignore.

OPENER

Start off by lining five or six volunteers against one wall. All they have to do is move to the other side of the room together—except one of the volunteers can't use any body part except one arm! No walking, no crawling—but this person is welcome to drag himself by the arm! Give no other rules or details. Give a go signal and watch what happens. (Call time in 30 seconds or so.)

Most likely everyone made it across but the person with only one good arm. Point out that the best solution would have been for the other people to carry that person to the other side of the room! Did the group think of that? Or were they thinking only of themselves? Introduce the session by explaining that the discussion centers on people in need and ways your students can help them.

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Discuss the words, pointing out that these are the things Christians are called to do. To defend means to protect, guard, and prevent injury or destruction. To maintain means to keep, hold, support, and preserve. To rescue is to free, save, liberate, and deliver. To deliver means the same as rescue and also has the idea of transport, as in taking a weak person away from a bad situation.
2. Which reactions are usual for teenagers? Why are these the common reactions? Are these the same ways that adults would respond? And how about Jesus—how would he respond to these situations?
3. You can have small groups work on one or two situations each. Allow time for each to reach a consensus about what should be done. If a group thinks the drunken man shouldn't be helped with money that he is likely to misuse, encourage your students to think more creatively. How can they offer him food, shelter, or clothing without giving cash?
4. This one may cause some heated debate. Your kids may be interested to know that the Bible says people who refuse to work shouldn't be fed (2 Thessalonians 3:10). What are some ways that your students could help the young man change

his attitude? What other alternative solutions would they have for this situation?

THE CLOSE

Encourage your students to take seriously God's call to help those who are in need. Skid Row isn't the only place where there are needy people—there're people in need everywhere. Challenge your group to not just feel bad for someone who is hurting, but to have the courage to get involved in practical applications of God's love.

MORE

- Put your kids on the other side! You may want to find a safe vacant lot somewhere and provide cardboard, scrap lumber, and plastic tarps out of which your students can make shelters to spend the night in. Allow no food and provide no assistance (but of course make sure they're safe). Afterward debrief with your students about their night of homelessness. Did it change the way they think about the needy? How? What does it make them thankful for?
- You may want to brainstorm a practical way to share God's love with those in need in your community. With your group, come up with a unique service venture—something that your group can do to show God's love to others. Maybe collect and hand out used Bibles, serve free hot chocolate on a cold night, or some other way of reaching out. Your group might find that the most simple ways of serving can impact someone in a big way.