

Six Ways to Discipline Teens Without Losing Your Cool

Why should you read this? You got into youth ministry to enjoy the company of teens on a shared journey of faith, not to keep them in line and out of trouble. Why should you have to be the *heavy*, just another adult who comes down on them and reminds them of their place?

Because they need it and because you *are* the adult, the one with more experience; and you are, after all, responsible for them. Besides, they'll love you for it. Find that hard to believe? Go and rent the movie, *Lean On Me*, and you'll get a sense of what we're talking about. Or stop and think of the adults in your life that you have admired or looked up to. Did they let you get away with whatever you wanted? Not a chance. They were undoubtedly people who helped you learn about yourself and helped you set and define the limits that allowed you to grow.

This is what your teens need from you. Here are a few tips to keep you from being the tyrant you (and they) fear or the "easy mark" that will keep you from being effective.

- **Set Clear Limits.** Establish what behaviors are and are not acceptable. If you are able to do this in concert with your young people, it gives them ownership and a sense of responsibility for maintaining those limits. Make sure that everyone knows what the limits are, and be consistent in enforcing them.
- **Set Clear Consequences for Exceeding the Limits.** Just as important as the limits you have set are the results for going beyond them. As with the limits, establish the consequences for unacceptable behavior with the teens. Be sure that the consequence is reasonable and relevant.
- **Disapprove of the Action, Not the Person.** It is important that you differentiate between not liking a negative behavior and not liking the young person who did it. Be clear about why the behavior is inappropriate and how it affects you and other people.
- **Use Mistakes as an Opportunity for Learning.** Help them work through the behavior and its consequences and give them the opportunity to explore the alternative options for the next time.

- **Be Patient and Realistic.** Remember they are still kids. It's important to maintain the standards but be sure to do it in a way that allows them the room to breathe and grow. Always remember you are the authority but it is not something you have to prove by coming down hard and heavy. A deft and good-natured touch will have a lasting impact. Keep your sense of humor healthy and don't sweat the small stuff.

- **Always Show Them You Love Them.** Be sure they understand that you set these limits because you care and that maintaining a relationship with them is very important to you.

Guidelines for Leaders and Chaperones

Model for youth the behavior that is expected of them.

- ✓ Be respectful and courteous to youth and to other adults. Never put down or make fun of a youth or another chaperone.
- ✓ No drinking alcoholic beverages. (Kids need to know that you can have fun without liquor.)
- ✓ Even though they can sometimes be exasperating, please do not use profanity (and please discourage kids from using it).
- ✓ So as not to encourage an unhealthy habit, please refrain from smoking when with kids.
- ✓ If you are driving, please model good driving habits.
- ✓ Follow all the schedules, rules, etc. of the program and facility. (Chaperones are not above the rules.)
- ✓ Please participate in the program *with* the youth.

While we all want the youth we are responsible for to like us and to think we're "cool," chaperoning is not a popularity contest.

It is important to remember we are not kids -- we're adults who enjoy being with young people and who care a lot about them.

- ✓ Please don't allow youth to bend the rules (such as curfew, check-in, going off grounds, etc.)
- ✓ Please don't play favorites or give different youth different rules.
- ✓ Have fun and goof around with the kids, but don't hesitate to stop irresponsible or dangerous play. (Don't let young people do things where they could get hurt—even if they say they do it all the time. Don't ask them to do things that could leave us open to liability. If in doubt, ask.)
- ✓ Don't be afraid to discipline—but do it with love. (Never put-down a young person.)

Please mingle with the kids and get to know them.

- ✓ Sit with them at meals, on the bus, in the auditorium, wherever. Please don't make a little clique of chaperones.
- ✓ Learn the names of your kids and call them by name.
- ✓ Enjoy these kids and have fun. Let them see adults as *more* than authority figures.