

Transitioning Teens

Enjoyable and Meaningful Transitions from Children to Youth Ministry

Life transitions require adaptation, and may be the source of various emotions from nervousness to excitement, and confusion to readiness. The transition from childhood to adolescence is no different. During that phase of life, tweens experience changes physically, emotionally, socially, psychologically, and cognitively. Often schools implement helpful ways to transition tweens with new school visitation days, orientation, meet the teachers, and a sampling of new classes. There is much that can be learned from the school model that may be beneficial in the church setting during the transition from children's ministry participant to youth group participant. The ideas included below are intended to serve as guides as your congregation intentionally makes every effort to ensure the transition from child to adolescent is enjoyable and meaningful for tweens.

Children's Ministry Activities

Let's Go! Plan outings for upper elementary tweens throughout the year. Outings may include a service project or a fun activity to strengthen friendships within the group. Outings, in addition to regularly scheduled church programs, assist tweens in building a cohesive group of friends as they make life and church transitions

What's Next? Discuss what youth group will be like in terms of schedule and activities. Invite current youth and youth leaders talk with the upper elementary school tweens about what awaits them in youth group. Note the youth group's presence in worship and in the life of the church for tweens as a means of instilling excitement about upcoming leadership roles in the congregation.

Overnight Adventure! Provide an opportunity for upper elementary tweens to participate in an overnight(s). In youth ministry there are often opportunities for weekend and weeklong mission trips, retreats, camps and conferences, thus it is helpful to introduce upper elementary tweens to this concept. Be mindful that many tweens may not have slept away from home for more than a night, so it is best to keep the overnights shorter than youth overnights for their comfort level. Potential overnight ideas include attending a church summer camp as a group, having sleepover at the church, or participating in a weekend mission trip.

What's Happening? Talk with parents/caregivers of upper elementary tweens about the logistics and the mission of youth group and how it differs from children's ministry. Discuss why youth group is important for the continued faith formation of young people. Share the goals and mission the youth ministry has and how it relates to the overall mission of the church. Invite them to ask questions regarding the difference between programs. Ensure they have dates, time, locations, and a sample calendar of youth group events.

Pray and Celebrate! Encourage your congregation pray for your tweens during their transition. Openly acknowledge to tweens, their families, and the congregation that a lot is changing: their schools, their teachers, peer group, and their identifying group at church. Celebrate tweens in worship and the life of the church in order to mark this transition as a positive life-changing event. Ensure tweens know they are beloved children of God and their congregation.

Youth Ministry Activities

Swag! Give entering youth a tangible gift of as they are welcomed to their new youth group: T-shirt, Water bottle, Pin, or Key Chain. This token with the church name or youth group name on it will allow the new youth to feel a sense of ownership and belonging to their new group.

First Time for Everything! Host an event for only the new grade entering youth group (whether that is 6th or 7th grade) at the end of the elementary school year, during the summer, or at the beginning of their middle school year. Plan a fun event like a pool party, game night, or pizza party. Facilitate ways for the new youth meet the youth leaders in an informal and casual way. If your congregation is small with a couple of youth transitioning, invite the youth to bring a friend to this event.

Locked In or Locked Out? In the summer or in the fall of the school year, host an overnight for the junior high or middle school youth group. This event will provide the informal time needed to build community within the youth group with its newest members. Host a Lock-In or Lock-Out at the church and plan activities like late night movies, late night shopping for health kit supplies, and assembling bag lunches for a shelter or assembling health kits at 4am. Plan fun meals together during the Lock In/Out to encourage fellowship among the newly formed group.

Personal Space! At the end of each school year, take down all the art, posters, decorations, and projects so the youth space may be re-created each year. This is an important hospitality gesture to ensure all feel welcome. At one of the first youth events of the school year, invite the group to create a banner or other art project to hang in their meeting space. Lead the group in writing a covenant of how they will treat each other and what is important to them as a group for the year, and display their covenant in the youth space as well.

Do You Love Me? Designate a group of people to be the Care Team for the new youth. This team will keep up communication with the new youth their first year—those attending programs and church and those that are not. Team members may include youth peers, church staff, youth group volunteers, and other church members. Encourage Care Team to check in with youth about what is happening in their lives and remind them they are loved and prayed for by their congregation. Instruct the Care Team to respect confidentiality when personal concerns are shared that the young person does not wish to share publicly.

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