

YOUTH MATTERS

Information for Youth Leaders

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22 v 6 NIV

INTRODUCTION

Many brethren and sisters would agree that our young people face a difficult and challenging world.

This was confirmed by research conducted in 1998 by the Christadelphian Care Group. 100 young people, aged mainly between 14 and 25 years, were asked about the issues that face them today and how they feel brethren and sisters can best help and guide them. Their responses can be summed up in the following statements:

- Promote openness and please don't treat young people's issues as taboo subjects in an ecclesia.
- Let us know that we are not alone.
- Educate us to help ourselves and each other.

THE CHALLENGE TO BRETHREN AND SISTERS

It's alarming to think about the array of moral issues that do affect and concern our young people - not necessarily because they **are** involved, but more because they want to resist temptation yet it's very difficult for them. They live with tremendous pressures.

They need our guidance.

This puts a responsibility on all of us to find out about the things that really concern our young people and to deal with them openly, with understanding and in the spirit of Christ.

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OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

In ecclesial life, and especially with CYC and Sunday School activities, our responsibilities can be considered under three headings.

Legal

Social

Spiritual

The following notes look at issues within these 3 areas. They do not cover everything and they are offered as a starting point or reminder of the responsibilities we have towards all young people in our care.

Legal Responsibilities

In the UK, under the Children Act 1989 we have a duty **to show** that we are committed to the care, guidance and protection of all children and young people in our care.

This involves:

- regular contact with parents
- adequate numbers of male and female leaders
- Insurance for vehicles and activities
- First Aid and catering (Health & Safety) qualifications
- creating a safe environment - on premises/ day and evening trips/ weekend and week camps

For more information please refer to the 'Child Protection Guidelines' issued by the Christadelphian Care Group. (To obtain a copy, see end of document.)

As a community **and** within individual ecclesias, we have a responsibility to keep up to date with new legislation involving the care of children and young people. Some of the changes may directly affect the running of our Sunday Schools, CYCs and other activities.

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Some of the implications of legislation are as follows:

Arranging brethren/Ecclesial Committees are ultimately responsible for appointing youth leaders and for making sure that they are suitable.

- Are records kept of names, addresses, experience, background, training etc of leaders?
(The Government is considering whether or not voluntary organisations should be required to check the Register of Sexual Offenders before allowing a person to work with young people. At present, the debate is still ongoing and no final decision has been made.)

Do youth leaders communicate with parents? For example by

- providing information about CYC, Sunday School etc such as term dates, times, activities.
- Receiving permission from parents to act 'in loco parentis' in the event of a child needing emergency hospital treatment.
- Taking and giving responsibility -is it clear who is in charge?
- Are activities planned and structured to minimise potential hazards?
- If children are collected from Sunday School, CYC etc do the leaders know who they are?

Social Responsibilities

Young people from eleven upwards become aware of themselves as part of a group. They want to be together but often they are bored.

This is our opportunity to provide for them

- a place of welcome
- acceptance
- guidance
- structure

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They may often complain. This is normal. Although they will object, they still need structure and loving discipline to feel safe. They need someone who will listen - not judge - but guide.

There lies the challenge!

Spiritual Responsibilities

In their widest sense, our spiritual responsibilities incorporate both legal and social requirements in providing the basis for a healthy environment, one in which young people are valued for themselves and can feel safe and secure.

Some young people may never have heard of Christ. Many parents today delegate responsibility for Bible based learning to youth leaders and Sunday School teachers.

The spiritual input, in anything that we do, is much more than a Scripture session at the beginning or end, for example, of a CYC evening.

The Gospel is the greatest thing we have to share and we are introducing young impressionable minds to Jesus. So . . .

- Don't apologise for religion!
- Do show the Gospel in action
 - through appropriate teaching;
 - in the way we live our lives;
 - how we deal with each other;
 - in our attitudes and behaviour towards the young people, individuals and as a group.

Scriptural knowledge is vital to our discipleship but the challenge of a life in Christ is much more than head knowledge. It involves

- Holiness, self sacrifice, compassion and loving care.

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Young people will be aware of whether or not our words match our actions - especially in our behaviour towards them! They can be very harsh in their judgements of us if they feel we are being hypocritical.

How do we fulfil our spiritual responsibilities?

Prayer - before, during and after activities

- teach young people about prayer. Help them to understand what it means.
- Encourage them to respect this time together.
- Help them to say/write their own prayers.
- Pray sincerely.
- Use straightforward language - a prayer will have more meaning if **everyone** can understand and identify with what is said.

The Word of God

- Let this be at the centre of our activities
- Try to involve other brothers and sisters occasionally. This helps the young people to build relationships with the ecclesial family.
- Invite young people to other ecclesial activities.

By example

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

Let all that you do be done with love.

1 Cor 16:13-14 (NKJ)

¹ To obtain a copy of the Child Protection Guidelines please contact bro. Andrew Collinge, 12 Rosafield Ave, Halesowen, West Midlands, B62 9 BU. Tel. 0121 - 602 2810
email Andrew@collinge.co.uk

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TALKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE about DIFFICULT AND SENSITIVE ISSUES

Young people will only talk to adults about difficult or confidential problems when

- they feel that they can trust them completely;
- there is mutual respect;
- they are taken seriously and listened to;
- they feel the adult understands their difficulty and is non-judgemental.

Some people are able to connect with young people and to achieve acceptance almost immediately upon meeting them. This is a great blessing and one always to be valued.

For most of us, though, we have to earn this respect and trust. This can take time. It can also be a difficult challenge sometimes!

For example

We cannot shift the responsibility onto a young person by saying

"I'll show him/her some respect when they do the same for me."

It is **our** responsibility to teach **them** the right way to behave. Whether we like it or not, we lead by example.

As youth leaders, there are a number of steps we can take to show young people the right ways to behave and to win their trust and respect.

These can be considered under two headings:

- PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
- DEALING WITH ISSUES

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PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS - What we can do

Create an environment where the young can feel at ease.

- Make the effort to build up a relationship with them
- Encourage them to form friendships with each other
- treat them as individuals not as 'weird teenagers'
- accept them for who they are, even if they try to shock
- Let them know you like them. They see through insincerity.
- Structure the sessions. Plan the programme.
- Be aware of your responsibilities under the Children Act.

Show respect

- Take them seriously
- Treat their views with respect- even if you don't agree with them.
- Teach them and show them what respect is. Help them to respect each other.
- Avoid teasing. It can hurt and can be classed as bullying.
- Let them talk to you. Give them space to voice their own thoughts.
- Listen to them. Don't jump in with solutions.
- Don't take over the conversation, or always 'put them right'.

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The need for structure/discipline

Young people need to know the boundaries. It shows you care about them - as individuals, as a group and about the time you share together.

- Have ground rules - especially for CYC
- Negotiate the rules with the young people, or, at least make sure they accept them. Value their opinions. It's extremely important to them. Don't forget, leaders are also expected to keep the rules!
- Make sure everyone is clear about what the rules are.
- Be firm but fair. They will respect you for it.
- Avoid reacting hastily to provocation.
- **Never** use physical punishment.
- **Never** lose your temper.

Spend time with the young

- Build links with other CYCs and ecclesias
- Establish links between CYC and the ecclesia
- Let them know about Youth weekends, camps etc
- Encourage friendships within the community
- Be prepared to become involved with weekend activities, camps, etc.

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DEALING WITH ISSUES

Inform Parents

- It's important to send home a copy of the CYC programme to tell parents about the issues that you will be dealing with.

Age Range

- If you have a very wide age range of young people at CYC split into smaller groups to deal with the things that are important to the different age groups.
e.g. 16 year olds may need to talk about money, relationships, or drugs. A 10 year old may be more concerned with bullying.

Take it Steadily

- Build up to talking about the more serious topics. Wait until the young people feel at ease with you and with each other.

Session Format

- It's often difficult to get young people talking in discussion. A tried and tested format to follow is:
Get discussion going
Let them voice their own thoughts and opinions
Continue with 'Let's see what the Bible has to say about this'.
Ask them questions e.g. 'Why do you think God says this?'

(This is by no means the only way to deal with a session. It's a useful starting point, though.)

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How to Start

- Getting discussion going is another difficulty.
Try giving the group a problem to solve to begin with. This could be done through telling them a short story and then asking the question 'What would you do in this situation?'

Group Work

- You could give them a more complex problem written down.
- If there are more than about 6 people in the group, suggest they work in twos or threes. They will generally feel more comfortable doing this and will be more inclined to speak out in discussion.

Write down a few questions for them to consider in their groups such as :

- Why do you think x behaved as he did?
- Whose fault do you think it was? Why?
- How do you think he felt?
- What would you do if you were x?
- Why would you do that?

The issues can then be explored more fully with the whole group.

Why use problem solving?

- The advantage of using 'problem solving' is that it starts with something that is external to the individual. It's easier for a young person to verbalise how they feel about difficulties that apply to someone else. They will then find it easier to apply the lessons to themselves.
- Explore Bible teaching in the context of the problem set. This way the group will more readily understand and accept God's word. It will have greater relevance for them.

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During discussion

- This needs sensitive handling. Young people often like to be controversial just to see what reaction they provoke. Try not to react. They will switch off if they think you are judging them. Instead, try asking questions such as

Why do you feel that way?

How do the rest of you feel about that?

Let's see what the Bible tells us.

- Let them have their say. Sometimes they voice extreme views because they are unsure of what to believe. If they feel 'condemned' then it will be difficult to get through to them and they may not want to 'open up' again. Alternatively, they may voice more extreme views, not because they believe them, but more to see the reaction they provoke! Understanding and a non-judgemental attitude are needed. These will be more effective in leading individuals to a state of mind where they can accept God's teaching.

Remember you are human too!

Often, young people see their CYC and Sunday School teachers as leaders and not as human beings. They find it hard to imagine that we have problems and temptations in our own lives. This is one of the reasons they find it difficult to share their worries with us. They may think that we couldn't possibly understand their problem. So . . .

- Don't be afraid to show your vulnerability occasionally.

Please note: *This needs to be done at the right time, in the right way and with great sensitivity towards the needs of the young person/group. Occasions may arise spontaneously, or you may decide to talk about certain issues as part of a programme of group discussions. Respond to questions but always be on your guard in this type of situation. Disclose a little, not a lot. That's all that is needed to connect with the group.*

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For example

- if you were bullied at school share something of it with them. Tell them your feelings of pain, anger, helplessness. How did you deal with it?
- Or perhaps you were the bully. Why? How did it happen? How did you feel?
- Or maybe you didn't get on with your parents, brother, sister when you were younger. Be prepared to admit to it. What did you do? How did you cope? How did the other person(s) cope? How did you each get through the difficulties? How do you feel about it now?

Young people will want to know about all of these because they are the sorts of things that affect them. They will listen more readily to someone who has 'been there' or who has had problems of their own to cope with.

Most of us respond in a caring way to another's pain, to their difficulties or to their concerns over past mistakes. The young are no different.

Sharing in this way builds bridges because you become a real person and not just a 'youth leader'. It establishes a more adult relationship with the young people and they will respect you for it.

More importantly, they will be more receptive to what you have to say about your relationship with the Lord - how He works in your life and how He can work in their lives too.

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Give them the Facts

- Even though they can be controversial in their views, young people do want advice. And they want it from people they know and trust and who care about them. They will generally listen to our opinions on different matters but if we 'preach at them' we've lost their attention and their co-operation.
- As young adults, they want (and need) to be treated as such, and to be given the facts on which to make their own informed choices.
- For example:

At schools and colleges leaflets/booklets are available and distributed on many different topics such as bullying, drug abuse, AIDS, abortion and so on. Some are better than others. It's possible to use a selection of these as a starting point for discussion with teenagers about moral values generally. God's commands and Christ's teaching have more impact when they are considered in the context of the important issues that face young people.
- It is important that we have worked out for ourselves the basis of our belief on any moral or controversial issue that we discuss with young people.

Finally . . .

After all our efforts, it occasionally happens that some young people are, unfortunately, just unlikeable, unlovable and unpleasant at this time in their lives. Their main aim seems to be to shock others and to draw attention to themselves.

It's worth remembering that people are sometimes unlikeable because they don't like themselves very much; and this is often the case with young people. Their brashness can be hiding insecurities and uncomfortable feelings of vulnerability that they are unable to express and own up to.

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This does not mean that we should accept or tolerate disruptive behaviour, particularly if it affects the spiritual growth of others in the group.

Loving discipline involves enabling an individual to grow to be responsible for his/her own actions. It may mean a young person being excluded from CYC or from a particular activity for a time because of unacceptable behaviour. However, exclusion does not mean loss of contact.

It is the responsibility of each group of leaders (with input from their young people) to establish a code of behaviour that is acceptable to all.

Working with the young can be

fun, enjoyable, rewarding, uplifting,
infuriating, exhausting
and much, much, more.

Above all, it's a real challenge to our discipleship:

to teach, train, encourage, enable, admonish,
and to show the love of Christ in all circumstances.

*Love . . .
bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never fails.*

1 Cor 13:8 (NKJ)

May our Heavenly Father bless all our efforts as we do our best to help and guide our young people as they face the challenges of their everyday lives.

To obtain a copy of the Child Protection Guidelines issued by The Care Group, contact the Secretary
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email Andrew@collinge.co.uk