

STARTING A YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

(Much of the material is adapted from a seminar led by Dan DeHaan)

1. **THE NEED FOR A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP:** Many youth are ready to do more than we give them. Realize that some of the young people have a potential for real spiritual leadership, while others are still peripheral. You need to minister to both groups. There is a segment of that youth group that has a lot of potential. All they need is help with the small details and to have your passion.
Perhaps as a new youth director, you would spend a couple of months getting to know the kids through a lot of fun activities. But then have a good youth retreat with a "both barrels" challenge in the areas of leadership. Let the kids know that a new Bible study will be beginning for those that want to "live dangerously" or be "leaders in training".
2. **PRAY - FERVENTLY:** Ask God to give you a group of young people (perhaps only even one or two) who would be willing to take spiritual leadership and to have a heart for God. Ask God to give you that kind of young people who would go in your leadership training group. You could call it "Leaders in Training" or "A Youth Leadership/Discipleship Family", or any other name which would designate it as being basically for young people who are in training to be the leaders in the youth group.
The age limit should be 13 through college. Even adult sponsors could attend as students too, as long as they don't come as the leaders, but as those in training.
3. **HOW TO ADVERTISE:** You may want to make personal contact with young people who would have potential and would benefit by being in such a group. It's good if you can have some of the guys who are natural leaders in such a group. Advertise this to your young people through public announcements and in the church bulletins. Don't make it something where the young people feel that they have to attend. In fact, it should be at some time other than a regular church hour. Let them know the duration of these meetings.
4. **AT THE FIRST MEETING:**
 - A.Hint: You should already have in mind what you want them to do and say, but let them say it.
 - B.They choose leadership rules: After sharing a few ideas about your passion for developing real spiritual leaders in the youth group, ask the group for really specific, practical characteristics of a youth group leader. If this leader were to be a real spiritual force and example to others what would he need? Write down the suggestions which they give on a chalkboard. Make sure that everyone in the group agrees.
 - C.Sign a commitment: Once everyone has decided what it takes to be a real spiritual leader, chart it out as guidelines to follow for the next ten weeks. The youth themselves choose the leadership rules. At that time, you could ask for commitment from the young people for the next ten weeks. If they miss meetings for poor reason, they would be eliminated. And if they miss any more than three of the approximate ten things which would be needed to characterize a leader, on a weekly basis, they would be eliminated from the group. In other words, the chart which they have decided upon will be used as a basis to gauge their consistency as leaders.
 - D.Set a time limit: The first and subsequent meetings should last approximately one and a half hours, and always include sharing and prayer.
 - E.Give them the tools: At the first meeting, ask everyone to get notebooks (best if they all look alike). The three ringed notebook could be divided into four sections: (1) Sermon notes, (2) Bible study, (3) Prayer list, (4) Personal devotional notes. No one would be permitted in the discipleship group after the second meeting.
5. **AT SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS:**
 - A.Bring the notebooks and pass them around for others to see what they wrote in their devotional pages. These pages are not diaries, but are to be reflections which the young people get from reading the Word. Their

emphasis should not be legalistically reading the Word, as much as it should be having a heart for God.

B. Prayer should always be a very important part of your Leaders in Training. In addition to having an effective prayer list and developing one, each person should have a weekly prayer partner and that partner should be different each week (guys with guys etc.). Their commitment should be to pray for their prayer partner every day and call or meet with that person at least twice that week, to see how everything is going in their Christian life. They may want to pray with one another through meeting or on the phone.

C. Don't worry about heavy curriculum, since the main emphasis in the program is teaching young people to apply what they have been learning elsewhere. Naturally, you will want to teach them how to have effective devotions, and how to vary them. You will also want to teach them how to take good sermon notes.

6. COMPLETE THE LEADERSHIP FAMILY TRAINING: Finish at the end of ten weeks. Perhaps you could go on a retreat and do some fun, crazy things with a loose schedule. At that retreat, as well as at other times, everyone needs to continue affirming each other as leaders. They need to continually build up each other, because of what God is doing in their lives. They're leaders because they've chosen to discipline themselves, set priorities, be lonely for God instead of following a wrong crowd, etc. No doubt a number of them will drop out. Those who do can join when another training session begins.
7. CONSIDER STARTING ANOTHER GROUP: Have another group when the first ten week commitment is over. Have a brief break, but then begin another training session to develop leaders for your youth group.
8. CONTINUALLY CHALLENGE THE YOUNG PEOPLE: Challenge them with what they could do to be examples to others in their Christian lives. Some youth groups have done such things as sitting in one section of the church, near the front, and taking notes on the pastor's sermon. Perhaps they would also have small circles of prayer in the halls before church begins, to really challenge the people to the importance of the message which they will hear. Another youth group wrote a book called "Principles of Growth and Leadership". They passed it out, and shared their spiritual leadership with others. It was done entirely by the young people, not the youth director. After such groups continue, they are not merely disciples anymore, they are real leaders.