

Planning for the Unexpected

Surviving in the Surprises of Youth Ministry

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Overview

There are always surprises in youth ministry, and this session will discuss this reality. Even with great planning, events with teenagers almost always involve surprises. What is the role of a caring adult in the midst of these surprises—and how do we stay focused on a loving environment and discipleship in the midst of the surprise?

Big Ideas We Hope to Get Across

- Planning doesn’t eliminate surprises
- Spontaneity is best experienced on top of good preparation
- We need to be the “non-anxious” presence in the midst of the surprise
- Leaders make all the difference
- The heart of the matter is discipleship

Introduction

5 minutes

Say something like: Youth ministry is full of surprises. Even the best leader can’t guarantee that everything will go just as planned. If you want to control everything, then youth ministry isn’t going to be your favorite place to be!!

This session will give us a chance to talk about the surprises in ministry—and how we as leaders can handle what comes up on a trip, event or in youth group.

LEADER NOTE: If you have a short, funny story of a surprise on a trip, retreat or youth event—this would be a good time to share that.

There is a YouTube video that might work well here. It is using a commercial about “herding cats”. I have used it and it works well. You can find it by searching “Herding Cats Youth Ministry” on YouTube. The link is: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEU1IPzD5RQ>

Reflections: Life reflections

5-10 minutes

Break the group into small groups of 4-5 and have them discuss the following:

Share a surprise you have experienced in youth ministry—as a teenager and as an adult.

Ex: When the bus broke down on a trip, or a teen talked to you about a real spiritual issue when you thought they weren’t listening.

How did it turn out?

When things don’t go as planned—why is that hard on us as leaders?

What are the stressful parts of “surprises” for leaders?

What do you think is stressful about surprises for teenagers?

Video Segment: Tiger and Terri

5-7 minutes

Highlights of the video:

Ministry is full of surprises.

Flexibility can't be taught.

Some are positive—some are negative.

Get back to basics: safety, group, discipleship.

Reflections

10-15 minutes

Consider what Tiger and Terri talked about. Ministry is messy and surprises happen. Our role as leaders is to maintain the safety of the individuals and group, be a non-anxious presence, and use the situations that we are presented with as opportunities to name Christ present.

Write these 3 things on a large piece of paper for reference:

1. Safety is always more important than the plan.
2. The posture of the leader matters.
3. Unexpected situations can lead to discipleship opportunities.

Have participants get into small groups of 4-5 and discuss the different kinds of surprises listed, using these questions:

Which ones would be the hardest for them as a leader? Why is that?

How would you ensure the safety of the group in this situation?

What posture (attitude, reaction) of the leader would be important in this situation?

How could you use this situation as an opportunity to grow faith?

Group Surprise:

The bus breaks down.

Individual Surprise:

a) Cut foot and go to hospital.

b) Discipline issues—have to talk to a teen.

Pastoral Care Surprise:

a) Somebody's grandma dies while on a trip.

b) Covenant violation.

Logistical Surprise:

a) Driver doesn't show up.

b) Hotel doesn't have your reservation.

Some surprises are positive...but we still have to adjust. Share some reactions and thoughts about these surprises:

Group Surprise:

They just can't stop talking because they are so engaged with questions and application.

Individual Surprise:

A student wants to talk with you after the evening session about big faith questions.

Pastoral Care Surprise:

A student finally talks about an issue that has tripped them up all year.

Logistical Surprise:

a) All the parents show up for the meeting!!

b) The hotel has upgraded you to a suite!! (OK...we can dream!!)

Reflections: Large Group

10-15 minutes

Have the small groups come back together and share what they discussed using the negative examples first, then move on to the positive examples.

Which situations were hardest?

What safety issues were important to keep in mind? (*Make sure they consider both physical and emotional safety.*)

What posture/reactions/attitudes of the leader did you find most helpful?

How did you create discipleship opportunities in these situations?

Leader Note: What are the key struggles they are sharing? Are there any common themes that you are hearing? Share your observations or feel free to add your thoughts on the struggles of surprises.

Conclusion:

5 minutes

Unfortunately, this subject is one that does not involve 10 easy steps on how to handle surprises in ministry. It often challenges those of us who have some “control issues”...which may be most of us!!

Know you are not alone—and in the midst of the surprise, don’t lose your focus on safety, the group dynamics, and faith. If you keep those on your mind, you and your leaders will figure a way through the surprise. And, it might even become the highlight of their memory of the trip!!

Close in Prayer

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