

Training - Discipline – myfishbites.com

Intro

This is an introduction to discipline. This is not all-inclusive, but aims to be a help. As new tactics and methods arise, I'll post them up here.

Why, What For?

This section is a little look at discipline, crowd control and people handling strategies, often used by teachers in the classroom. This is extremely relevant to youth ministries, where most youth workers may not have had any training in this area. Why do we need it? Well, although youth work is essentially relational, we will work within groups and situations where we need to exercise an increased level of control, such as in youth clubs etc. You may also have a rowdy 'churched' group. So we need effective management tactics, so that a sound structure underpins all our relational efforts. Without this base, our relational skills become far less effective (who can 'relate' (talk to) to any young people while they're kicking off all over the place). What we're aiming for is a structured, well managed and relational environment.

Finally, we know that many of the young people we work with come from difficult and chaotic situations. Many families have no idea how to parent their children effectively as they've never been shown themselves, and the extended family has often broken down too. As strange as it may seem, you may be the one that is 'parenting' some of these young people, while in your care, as well as being a youth worker to them.

Communication

This is essential in any relationship or youth work ministry. It's a bit obvious but if no-one knows what you are saying or is unable to listen, then you will not be able to communicate effectively. So, you need to create an environment where you do and can communicate.

But it's more than this - you need to make sure that your communication has been heard and received by the young people. So it's not enough to say, 'this week, we're playing this game first' if none of the young people are actually sat still or listening, or if they're distracted.

Communication is the full picture - so we have to go one step further still and include the ability of the young people to understand what you say and act on it. You mumbling, or not understanding what needs to happen yourself, will mean the young people are equally confused. So don't stick someone up front who can't handle this, or train them, or stand up front alongside them until they can.

This means that whatever you do must be well prepared. You cannot / should not turn up at a youth club with a booklet in hand, reading through it, hoping that somehow your abilities will bring you through. Why? Because you being

unprepared is disrespectful, will not enable discipline or a controlled environment. You must bring a calm, clear, air of prepared authority to what you do. So, know your stuff and what you want to achieve.

In schools, teachers are supposed to have lesson plans. You may do well to follow this. In essence, you need to know what you are doing, why you are doing it, and communicate this to the young people. Remember that your leaders must be well briefed too. If they have no idea what's going on, they become disempowered and unable to help effectively.

Your Physical Presence

We've all seen people up front or leading sessions in varying contexts, who have no charisma or ability to 'hold' a group. Learn from this and develop your skills up front.

1. Stand confident but not arrogant. Don't crouch or shrivel your body inwards. Have an open posture / stance.
2. Don't continually wander left, right, backwards, forwards. Everyone will go dizzy. Create dynamic movement that is controlled. So, when something is important, move with an air of its importance.
3. Project your voice but don't force it or shout. A determined, controlled, firm voice - communicates that you are in control, which you are (or should be). Do not under-estimate the power of your voice.
4. Use your voice dynamically, as with movement. This is like when reading a dramatic book - your voice should go with the drama of the characters and the situation - via intonation, speed of dialogue, different voices etc. Dynamism is engaging - a monotonal, robotic voice will have everyone asleep or losing interest..
5. Use of the hands and facial expression can really help - not to deliberately exaggerate, but to accentuate the importance of something. Again, facial expression and eye contact is incredibly important to involve, encourage and to warn.
6. If people are kicking off, you may want to move to where they are and deliver part of the session from next to where they are, as it will likely reduce them causing disturbance (as you are so close to them). Alternatively, move the young person to the front where you can keep a closer eye on them.
7. Your voice is a powerful instrument - so there may be occasions where you need to call out someone's name loudly if they are misbehaving to get their attention and serve as a warning for others.. 'Jamie!' Followed by a calmer voice, 'please sit down' or similar tactics!
8. DO NOT exercise your final warning too soon! If your ultimate sanction is

chucking someone out, then have levels and rules that everyone is aware of, leading up to this. Don't make this the first level of punishment. AS IMPORTANTLY, always follow through on your warnings and policies, not doing so undermines everything.

Relationship

It is very difficult to constantly work with young people who you don't know and don't know you - just ask any supply or replacement teacher. In youth work, things are a little different as our ministry is to and for the young person - often we're a kind of brother / father / mate / teacher. But the principles are the same. As we are consistent in who we are and the way we act towards / care for young people, the more that relationship will be built up to a clear understanding.

Obviously, as we build healthy relationships with young people in our care, we can calm them down through the power of the relationship and respect built with you. Many times as a youth worker I have calmed down students in school, who teachers were unable to calm. Partly because I was not threatening, partly because of a healthy relationship - built through detached work, basketball, football or helping with the school play for example..

1. Be consistent, in your actions, your life outside of your youth work situation, and on the night / towards the group. Be consistent in enforcing sanctions and use your judgement wisely. Don't discipline someone who's normally good after losing your patience with the group, having had the naughty ones kick off previously (and allowing *them* to get away with it). I've seen it happen too often.
2. Be there every week if you say you're going to be there.
3. Get to know the names of young people and allow them into your life (with clear boundaries).
4. Don't try and be cool if you're not like that, just be real, be yourself. Young people will see through you fronting immediately.
5. Don't try and 'befriend' young people as though they're your best mate, but keep the boundary of leader, while getting alongside them. This is a difficult boundary to define and it's one that will vary young person to young person. Sometimes getting alongside gives you a respect with them. Other times you may need to distance yourself.
6. Remember their interests, needs, situations, schools, favourite music etc. Be aware of spending too much time on your own alongside young people of the opposite sex. Find 'connecting points' between you and the young person.
7. Be loving, but in a Godly way. Be respectful of them. Don't embarrass young people in public. Don't force them to do games they (personally) may feel very

uncomfortable with - but encourage them into games to build up self-confidence. Remember each young person is different, comes with different backgrounds and issues.

8. Have someone on the door as young people come in and leave, saying 'hi' and 'good night, thanks for coming'. In a youth club, build this as an essential thing and make it someone's job. Talk to parents that come along too, get to know them.

9. Manage the outside of a youth club, before and after. Have at least one leader outside, or looking on. In more tricky situations, you will need 2 leaders working together. In difficult situations, don't be afraid to ask a reliable young person to go and get help, or call the police.

10. Humour is very important, as is the confidence to be able to deliver it effectively. A joke will crash and burn told badly or at the wrong time, or with incorrect timing. If you can't, try not to. Or build a relationship with students where they understand your humour. Remember, not everyone understands dry humour.

Other Basic Principles - (from the Excluded section)

1. Very clear communication. You are responsible for telling people what is going to happen and how it happens. Your communication skills must be up-front, confident and extremely clear. Watch a video of yourself if you'd like to improve. A clear, confident voice helps. Create very clear eye contact around the room, don't just focus on one area or one group. Use your movement to reflect your actions. For example, if you want quiet, stop moving, put your hand up etc.

2. Get youth leaders or workers to sit in between groups or with groups/individuals. If you've got 8 young people and 4 leaders, try to sit 2 young people then 1 leader etc.

3. Another management technique is to break down a group into smaller more manageable groups. Break down into lads and lasses - you often get better work (less showing off!)

4. If 1 person is behaving badly and refuses to leave then move everyone else out of the room away from that person until they calm down, kick off on their own or leave!

5. Make sure there is a clear purpose to the group and that the group know the purpose. If not it can mean you're fire-fighting or crowd-controlling all the time!

6. Take people aside at a convenient time and challenge them fairly and firmly about whatever behaviour they are displaying. Ask them if anything is going on - you may find a situation away from the group is causing them concern. It may be they just don't want to engage!

7. The weather plays a major part in behaviour. As you'll probably realise, a very hot room produces hot and lively behaviour. Alternatively, if it's windy it can make young people hyper. If it's been raining a lot and they haven't been out (or if they simply don't go out much) think how you can channel excess energy!

8. Diet, food also plays a part in behaviour. A poor diet, lack of fruit, vegetables, vitamins or too much caffeine, e-numbers etc. can have an impact on behaviour. How can you deal with this? Remember that lectures on diet don't go down well!!

9. A final point is have high expectations and communicate these to the group regularly. However, don't expect miracles. A lot of them have complex lives as you'll know.

10. If the group isn't one that copes well with written work, then get them standing up and physically enacting the things you want them to do / make the exercises more physical. Be careful this doesn't hype the group up too much though!

11. If you have a group for say 11-14s and a group for say 8-11s, here is something to think about. If your older group is misbehaving, and they have come through from the 8-11s group, what is the behaviour like in the 8-11s? If they have learned to play up in that group, they will bring that to the 11-14s group. So, conversely, if we teach them sound discipline principles for their own benefit at a young age, and consistently and fairly enforce that, we can expect better behaviour in our 11-14s group.

Your Physical Environment

You may be limited by a poor church building (as we are). We use an old church hall for our Rock Solid (YFC) club. Trouble is that because the roof is so high and there's a wooden floor, there is a massive 'reverb'. This means even the slightest sound is magnified. So what practical steps can we take?

1. We are going to put in some fabric across the roof of our building, on reels (so they can be put up and down easily), in order to artificially 'lower' the roof. This will reduce the noise considerably. Carpet also reduces noise (as does bodies) as the sound is 'absorbed'. Noise absorbent tiles will have an even greater effect, but are expensive.

2. Bring students into a smaller room (if you can) initially. This stops them running around and causing havoc. Alternatively, you may find you want to bring them into a bigger room and have them run around first to let off energy.

3. Don't have 'tuck shops' until the end of evenings, due to the sugar and 'e' numbers that create hyper-activity!

4. Make sure surrounding doors are locked and as many 'temptations' as possible are out of the way. So, cut down the physical environment (such as flowers, leaflets, books etc) to have less to distract the young people.

5. Manage your physical environment closely. Make sure students are not too spaced out from each other, bring them in if necessary, have barriers to make a room 'smaller'. Don't allow young people to sit on anything other than the chairs provided, if necessary. A circle of chairs can be intimidating for some young people (be aware), but it says, 'informal, discussion, we're together'. More formal settings with chairs in rows, speaks of 'classroom, organisation, face forward and listen'. So think carefully.

Small(er) Groups

Let's look at some strategies for working with smaller groups. These are *in addition* to the principles above.

1. If people are talking, remain quiet until they have all finished talking and go quiet. This may not always work but can do.

2. In younger groups, it can help to have a physical action that the group have to copy, which they know means they must be quiet. For example, finger to the lips, which everyone has to copy. This is more of a strategy for the youngest ones.

3. If everyone is sitting down, stand up to lead the group.

4. Stopping speaking if someone is talking and staring at them. By using a firm stare you can create silence. If not, use the person's name directly. When there is quiet, move on and say, 'thank you'.

5. Explain to a group this is for their benefit. The purpose is that you help them. By them mis-behaving, no-one will have any fun and this is not what any of you want. So let's work together as a team..

6. Having a good leader to young person ratio. Having one other leader to help nudge and quieten young people will help. You may even put a leader between people or with certain people.

Large(er) Groups

1. Have very clear but strong and simple rules. Stick to these without wavering. Enforce them clearly, fairly and consistently.

2. Tell people what they're doing, don't ask them. You are not there to ask their opinion of how you do things. They are there to listen and obey you. If they don't want to do this, they don't have to come.

3. If things / numbers are too difficult to manage, make the games for a few people only, while the others have to look on. Those that play the games are the ones who behave. You behave, you play..
4. Create a strong and united team alongside you. Commit to building good relationships with your leaders.
5. Have very clear expectations for the group and the young people, clearly stated, each week if necessary - or even throughout an evening.
6. Each exercise must be clearly communicated - young people can't do something they don't understand.

Conclusion

Hope these will be some help to you. If you have any more suggestions, please feel free to contact us to make suggestions.