

HOW TO START A YOUTH GROUP

10 Tips on starting a youth group. These are not hard and fast rules, but this is the approach that the Diocese of Christchurch found worked well when they started 11 youth groups.

1. HAVE YOUR "FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH"

Just as Jesus needed "five loaves and two fish" to start with (John 6:9), there needs to be 2-3 young people already present in your church and interested in having a youth group. You also need 2+ volunteer leaders willing to give it a fair crack (with support and training). You also need your church backing the plan and providing behind the scenes support (e.g. in the kitchen).

2. TIMING IS EVERYTHING

It's easier to get people on board if you just commit to 6-10 weeks at first. Pick a day/time of the week that works with leaders (Thursday evening, Friday evening and Sunday evening are often best). Consider running it fortnightly if that makes it more sustainable for leaders. Fortnightly is fine with intermediate aged young people.

3. START WITH INTERMEDIATES

Intermediate age (Year 7-8s or 11-12 year olds) is a good age to start with. This age group will invite their friends to a church group – unlike most high schoolers! So you may want to begin with that younger age group. It's also a critical age where we see the largest drop-out rate from church life – normally because it's time to offer something more than Sunday School.

4. RUN A 2 HOUR PROGRAMME

Run the programme for 2 hours, finishing by 8pm (We found that either 5pm-7pm including a meal, or 6-8 including a meal or supper worked well).

5. SEND OUT THE INVITATIONS

Invite the following people to the group:

- Sunday school/church attendees aged 10-12
- friends of the young people in your church;
- children of anyone on your pastoral role aged 10-12;
- young people who were baptised in your church who are now aged 10-12;
- grand-kids of parishioners who live locally.



6. FOLLOW UP INVITATIONS

Send out a letter invitation 1 month prior and make a follow up phone call. Make a further phone call to those who showed interest the day before each of the first few youth group nights (especially the first one).

7. PROVIDE TRAINING FOR YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Prior to the launch, ask your [Diocesan youth co-ordinator](#) to come and do training with your volunteers on relating to young people and planning a programme. They could also run a debrief session after the first 2-3 meetings. Invite your core young people along and include them in planning the first youth group event.

8. CREATE A WELCOMING ATMOSPHERE

Consider what atmosphere the young people will walk in on. It should be vibrant, feel like a place for them, and provide things for them to do so that no-one is bored, alone or feeling awkward. Consider having a comfortable sit down area with cushions/sofas/bean-bags; youthful posters/wall hangings (rather than Sunday School or aged care posters!); have upbeat music playing; games for young people to join in on (like table tennis, shooting hoops, hacky sack, soccer); reading material; snack food; and leaders ready to greet, record their details and interact.

9. FOOD. LOTS AND LOTS OF FOOD.

Include food. Free food. Good food. (Enlist parishioners to provide it.)

10. START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

Include a 7-15 minute talk and discussion. (Use [Hooks](#) or [Talks](#)). It's tempting to down play the Christian stuff for fear of turning young people off, but if you don't start with that it's near impossible to bring it in later. 'Start as you mean to go on'. You just have to do it well – and that's what this site is here to help with. Have a clear missional goal: e.g. to switch young people on to a God that is relevant, interesting, helpful. Talks can follow the [Hook, Look, Book, Took model](#).

SAMPLE PROGRAMME

Here's what a night at youth group could look like:

1. Atmospherics: Set up the room well before young people arrive.
2. Check-Ins: Have a fun activity that gives everyone a chance to say their name and/or share something interesting. (See [Community Builders](#))
3. Run a [game](#) (model positive interactions, cooperation, encouragement)
4. Have a feed.
5. Have a talk on a Christian theme (see [Hooks](#) or [Talks](#))
6. Make a God-connection through prayers, singing, worship, candles etc... either now or at the end.
7. Play another [game](#)
8. Finish on time.

RESOURCED!
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