

How do we set the right rules for our youth ministry?

TEN×10

Every time I make a list of rules, no matter the audience, #1 stays the same: “Don’t die.” Half joking and half genuinely concerned for safety, I have repeated it so often that former students still mention it to me. It became memorable and impactful, and it gave me an agreed-upon starting point when asking someone to stop whatever dangerous antic they were currently enjoying.

“Don’t die” was my way of covering the unknown and working with my own ADHD by keeping things short and simple. Building upon that central first rule, the rest of the list always matched the space I was in, whether it was middle school girls in a minivan headed to camp, high schoolers sharing a bean bag chair, or volunteers at a summer work camp. The principle of safety was always first, and everything else came after.

Identify the Needs of Young People

Let the specific needs of the young people around you and your own commitment to safety merge together to create your rules. Then, decide on central tenets that act as principles to guide behavior. Some central tenets, or principles, that have often been helpful for our youth ministry are making sure young people do not speak over each other, that everyone is shown respect even if they disagree, and that boundaries set by the leader are followed to create a safe space for everyone. Share these tenets with your young people and include their input as you finalize your group’s rules.

Expect the Unexpected

No matter what your rules are, young people will find a way around them or will break them outright. Knowing this, your rules will probably need to be general until a specific event necessitates spelling something out that you never thought you’d need to say. Think in broad strokes and encourage your students to think before they act.

Incorporate the Values of Young People

Ask your young people what values they want the ministry to embody and rules they think are important. You might be surprised how thoughtful (and strict) their answers are. More importantly, they will have a sense of ownership over the rules/guidelines and be (slightly) more inclined to follow them.

Keep your young people safe while giving them room to have fun and be their chaotic, free-willed selves. It’s the nature of their developmental stage to test boundaries. As long as they aren’t a physical, emotional, or spiritual danger to themselves, others, or church property, let them run (reasonably) wild.

Check Out
This Resource
→

Developing Faithful Leaders
UMC YoungPeople



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