

Introduction

In this edition there is a short article on relating well to teenagers, written by someone known to us who is an experienced youth leader. [p.1] His advice is appropriate for parents, teachers and all who work with young people. We have also looked at helping children and teenagers to deal with traumatic experiences, with links to some useful resources. [p.2] Finally there is a section on talking about war with different age groups, with some helpful links and guidelines. [p.3]

An interview with a youth pastor

Last summer we had 15 people on our training course for new MK staff. From this group, few had experience of working with young people, so we decided to enlist the help of the youth pastor at our church, whom we will call Greg. He is married and a father of three children, including two teenagers, and he has a lot of experience of working with young people. Here are some of the questions that we asked him, and the answers that he gave.

How do you go about building relationships with teenagers?

How do you encourage young people spiritually?

- If you want young people to grow and develop spiritually, you need to be doing this yourself. They will follow your lifestyle, not just listen to your words.
- The most valuable thing that you can offer them is your relationship with God. Model to them what it is like to walk with Jesus each day.
- Start from where they are, not from where you want them to be.
- A relationship with God is not a checklist. Don't let things become formulaic.
- Help the young people to feed themselves. Don't make it too easy for them, try to stretch them. Provide tools for Bible reading and prayer. Encourage them to start where they are – maybe pray one sentence, or share something in a Bible study.
- If they fail, encourage them to learn from it. They don't have to be perfect.
- Give them problems to solve, rather than answers to remember.
- Young people can seem 'OK with God', but they may be just conforming to the group. Be aware of that and challenge it appropriately.
- Doubts are OK. Give them the freedom to struggle with doubts as part of their journey to their own faith.

What is your advice on behaviour management?

- Have clear expectations for your relationships, group or activity, and communicate these clearly at the beginning.
- Mood swings are normal, so don't be surprised or put off. This doesn't mean that you have to accept rudeness. Your young people might be really happy and chatty one day, and down and moody the next – it is part of their development.

- Teenagers push boundaries. You need to be clear as to where your boundaries are set, and why. Communicate the boundaries clearly at the start of the relationship, and remind them if needed.
- They 'tell it as it is'. Don't expect them to be flattering. Sometimes they might be grateful to the adults giving input into their lives, but often this just doesn't occur to them. Be sure that your ministry to them is for the Lord, rather than looking to the young people themselves for appreciation.
- Some negative behaviours are similar to those of adults, but teenagers are less good at hiding them.
- We are all sinful. Don't be surprised by sin.
- Show compassion before addressing the sin.
- Talk one-to-one if you have to address an issue. They don't want to be embarrassed in front of their friends.
- Don't prejudge them, even if you know them. Don't make assumptions such as 'Tracey always annoys the other girls'. Give them an opportunity to show a positive attitude.
- Encourage them to see a situation from the perspective of others. This is not always easy for teenagers, who are struggling to work out their own identity.
- Address the heart, not just the behaviour. Our actions are the result of our motivations and desires.
- Deal with the person, not the problem. Each one is an individual.
- Be calm with language. Say something like 'Help me to understand why you did that'.
- Remember that love is demanding, and working with people is messy. You won't see instant results, and there will be more progress with some young people than with others. There may be fruit in their lives that only becomes evident ten or twenty years later.
- On a positive note...they are full of energy and enthusiasm. Direct this well! God loves to use young people in his kingdom. Find ways to help them serve and take responsibility. Get them involved in some outreach – local, small-scale, or even cross-cultural.

What about supporting them through traumatic life experiences?

Greg explained that the difficulties faced by our young people included social anxiety, standing for their faith at school, coping with family breakdown, the sickness of a parent, or moving home due to the parents' deployment in the armed forces. Greg also has an ongoing connection with locally-placed teenage refugees.

There is some overlap between the experiences of young people living in their home country and those who have moved overseas due to their parents' work. Greg had no experience of helping those who had lived through evacuations, political instability or other events familiar to a significant number of MKs, but he had some good general advice.

- Listen to the young people and let them express themselves. Give them time.
- Don't be put off by strong emotions.
- Try to point them to God's redemption in their situation.

Resources to help with traumatic experiences

A free resource to help with trauma is available from Crisis Care Training International, a ministry of WEC International. For children up to the age of 11, there is an illustrated colour booklet called *There is hope for me*, which children can work through with the help of an adult. It is available on English, Arabic, Dutch, German, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian and Spanish.

There is also a youth version, so far available only in English.

In addition there is a Facilitators' Guide, which is recommended as essential for adults working with the children.

We also recommend the following article:

www.alifeoverseas.com/7-ways-to-teach-your-tcks-process-grief/

Explaining war to children

The current global situation and the constant barrage of media reporting mean that we need to be prepared to help our children to understand and cope with the fact of war. Some of our MKs have already experienced being in a war zone, and others will be aware of the conflict in the Ukraine. The following resources are designed to help us deal with this.

1. An article by a TCK who experienced war as a child and is now faced with explaining war and supporting her own children. She states this:

Though the voices of the news commentators are tinged with uncertainty and even fear, their tone doesn't own our home.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/explain-war-children/>

2. An article on the FaithinKids webpage, explaining how to talk with children of different age groups about war.

<https://faithinkids.org/blog/app/archive/2022-03/title/dad-will-this-turn-into-world-war-3>

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