



Fears

A Discussion Exercise for Halloween

OVERVIEW

This combination name-tag game and small-group exercise is designed to uncover some fears of young adolescents. In addition to naming fears, the participants brainstorm ways to deal with them.

Suggested Time

20 to 30 minutes, or slightly longer with a large group

Group Size

This strategy can be done with any size group.

Materials Needed

- ☀ Halloween decorations
- ☀ light-colored construction paper, a half sheet for each person
- ☀ markers, one for each person
- ☀ newsprint
- ☀ masking tape
- ☀ a tape or CD player, and a recording of Halloween music or sounds

PROCEDURE

- ☀ sheets of paper and pens or pencils (or sheets of newsprint and markers), one for each small group
- ☀ a Bible
- ☀ a recording of a song that deals with our fears and God (optional)

Preparation. Before the young people arrive, decorate the meeting space in a Halloween motif and make the room as dark as possible. List the following items on newsprint. The examples in brackets are for your information only.

- ☉ favorite Halloween candy
- ☉ favorite scary movie
- ☉ favorite Halloween game [e.g., bobbing for apples, or pin the hat on the witch]
- ☉ favorite Halloween character [e.g., black cat, witch, or ghost]
- ☉ favorite movie monster [e.g., Godzilla, King Kong, or Frankenstein]

1. After everyone has gathered, turn up the lights and give each person a half sheet of construction paper and a marker. Point out the list of favorites you have posted. Tell everyone to write their name and their own favorites on their paper. When they are finished, they should tape the paper to the front of their clothing.

2. Announce that the participants are each to find three other people who have at least one of the same favorites as they listed. When they have found those three people, they are to sit down together.

While the young people are moving around, play a recording of Halloween music or sounds.

3. Tell the participants to figure out who in their group has the birthday closest to Halloween. Explain that beginning with that person and moving to his or her left, the group members are each to name two things they were afraid of when they were young children. Allow about a minute and a half for each group to complete this task.

4. Give one person in each group a piece of paper and a pen or pencil, or a sheet of newsprint and a marker. Explain that each group is to name three things that middle school or junior high students are generally afraid of—for example, a completely dark room at bedtime. The person who has the paper should write down the ideas, leaving space after each one. Allow 2 or 3 minutes for this task.

After the groups have brainstormed the fears of young teens, tell them to list some things that can be done about each fear. For example, if the fear is of a completely dark room, they might use a night-light or place a flashlight near the bed. Allow 2 or 3 minutes for this task.

5. Call the groups together. List on newsprint the fears and solutions they came up with. Or, if the groups already wrote their ideas on newsprint, have them post the sheets, and then review the sheets.

Tell the young people that all people—even adults—experience fears of some kind. When we figure out ways to cope with our fears, we seem to feel a little less afraid. Other people in our life can help us find solutions that make us feel more at peace.

6. Read Isa. 41:10. Then say the following prayer or one that you create spontaneously on the same theme:



O God, help us to turn to you when we are afraid. We trust your promise that you will always be with us. We ask this in the name of Jesus.

You may want to conclude with a recording of a hymn that deals with fear and God.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ Though Halloween is the ideal time for this activity, fear is a year-round issue. This strategy can be used any time of year, with or without the Halloween decorations and recording.
- ⊙ Using the passages listed in the following Scriptural Connections section, ask the young people to work with their small group to sum up in ten words or less what God says about handling fear. If time allows, you might encourage them to create a poster or a T-shirt of their summary statement.
- ⊙ For the closing prayer, ask one or more of the participants to choose and read a prayer about fear from *Prayers Before an Awesome God: The Psalms for Teenagers*, by David Haas (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1998), or *Looking Past the Sky: Prayers by Young Teens*, edited by Marilyn Kielbasa (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1999).
- ⊙ Follow this Halloween activity by asking the young people to trick-or-treat in the neighborhood for charity. They might collect money for relief efforts or nonperishable goods for the local food shelf. Announce the collection at the parish or in local media for a few weeks before Halloween. Be sure to provide the trick-or-treaters with a note explaining the activity, in case people want to check its legitimacy. Also invite other adults to participate so that the young people have adequate supervision.

SCRIPTURAL CONNECTIONS

- ☉ Ps. 56:4 (When we are afraid, we can turn to God.)
- ☉ Isa. 41:10 (God is always with us.)
- ☉ Isa. 44:8 (God has chosen us as witnesses.)
- ☉ Matt. 6:25–34 (Do not worry about tomorrow.)
- ☉ Luke 12:32–34 (God takes care of us.)

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.

