

Effective Group Management

Effective group management is grounded in positive relationships of mutual respect between catechists and participants and among group members. Viewing young adolescents in a positive light requires dispelling stereotypes that portray them as uncontrollable, disrespectful, and rude. When programs for young people are well conceived, age appropriate, and directed by capable and caring adults, behavior problems are minimized.

Initially you may find that the young people are being forced to attend the program, which can contribute to negative attitudes and behaviors. However, as relationships develop and the participants experience positive program activities, their enthusiasm will grow, as will their cooperation.

As with any group, two dynamics are at play, and sometimes are in tension: the *task* to accomplish (the lesson) and the *relationships* among the members (how youth interact with one another). You will need to tend to both of these functions in order to manage the group. Two basic principles should guide you:

- Be well prepared to facilitate each session. If you are confident and comfortable with the lesson plan, you will be relaxed and more able to focus on the young people.
- Whenever encountering the participants, focus on building positive relationships. Get to know the young people, take an interest in their lives, be affirming, and let them know you care.

Principle 2

Whenever encountering the participants, focus on building positive relationships. Get to know the young people, take an interest in their lives, be affirming, and let them know you care.

Principle 1

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Techniques for Preventing Disruptive Behavior

The following techniques will help you not only to resolve but to avoid altogether the vast majority of discipline issues:

- Maintain appropriate expectations. Young people will live up—or down—to the expectations you set. Base expectations on the developmental characteristics of this age-group. In other words, expect them to be precisely who they are—adolescents—and be ready to love and enjoy them as they are.
- Establish clear boundaries. Make them simple, reasonable, and to the point. Young people need to know the limits. Explain exactly what the guidelines are and what they mean. Describe what *respect* means; don't presume the young people know! Basic guidelines could include the following:
 - ▶ Respect people and property.
 - ▶ Be positive and participate fully.
 - ▶ Only one person speaks at a time.
 - ▶ No put-downs.
 - ▶ Behave properly, particularly during prayer times.
- Explain clearly the consequences of broken rules. Impose them quickly and uniformly. If the young people learn that established guidelines for behavior can be dismissed without consequence, improper behavior will escalate. Establish a protocol for discipline: first warning, second warning, and so on. If disruptive behavior persists, you may need to speak with a parent.
- Use appropriate techniques for keeping the participants focused and for channeling their energy (see catechist tip sheets 2 and 5).
- Encourage the young people to assume positions of responsibility—as readers, prayer leaders, recorders, and so on. The more engaged they are, the more likely they are to behave appropriately.
- Positive begets positive. Recognize and affirm appropriate behavior. Young adolescents seek recognition and truly want to do the right thing. Encourage them when they do.
- In extreme cases, seek help. Some people have emotional and behavioral issues that require special handling. When encountering such a situation, seek help from the program coordinator or pastor immediately.