

The PYM School Leavers Resource – Helping young people to grow in faith even when they grow out of youth group

Setting the scene

Despite all our great work with young people 60-70% of our youth group members walk away from faith. Many do so in the transitions in our out of youth ministry. In this session we discuss some of key things we need to focus on to help our taiohi to transition well.

Big picture principles of Faith Development

Connecting young people to the Family of God

Goal is for young people, 0-25, to know that they are part of the family of God and to experience being part of Gods family.

Why?

- Relationship with church is more than just the children's/youth ministry and so less likely to get lost in the transitions when moving between age-appropriate ministries. Age specific ministries are the icing on the cake. Family of God is the cake.

How?

- Congregation need to be aware of how important they are
- Teach and model Church as place of belonging
- Make sure young people are engaged in some way to many parts of the church. Any all-age activity the church does, worship, camps, celebrations etc can all play a part in this. Try and make time to get young people along to see and be involved in different age specific parts of church life and invite some people who your young people don't usually get to see (for example people who attend a different worship service than they do)
- Showing young people their place in the FOG at each age level.
- Intentionally building relationships across generations at every age level, including ministry leaders, but wider into rest of the congregation.
- For more intergenerational ideas go to <https://here2stay.org.au/8pillars/generations/>

Helping young people take ownership of their Faith

Young people leave friendship groups all the time...

- It's easy to leave a club or a group. It's easy to get lost in the transitions between age ministries for a number of reasons (friends, leaders, activities, day of the week...), but harder to walk away from a faith which you have made a commitment to and that shapes all aspects of your life.

Thinking about what's going on inside...

As young people move through ages 13 to 15 their cognitive abilities develop, they move from "concrete thinking" into "abstract thinking." Abstract thinking allows someone to be able to zoom out on aspects of their life and see the bigger picture. For example a young person who was operating in predominantly concrete thinking may define being a Christian as going to church or attending a youth group or praying because they can only see Christianity as a set of things they do, whereas a young person who has begun to move into more of an abstract way of thinking might define Christianity as a relationship with God or a way of living et cetera.

As young people move through our youth ministry it's really important that we give them helpful frameworks to understand what being a Christian is all about. For young people who are still in a predominately concrete thinking phase a lot of our great teaching week to week gets absorbed in disconnected and unrelated ways - It's a bit like taking a box full of unassembled Lego and just dumping it on the floor.



All the blocks are there but there is little connection between the blocks and no big structure forming from them. So when we present ideas we want to do so in such a way that young people are able to take the building block of an idea and easily connect it to the structures they already have. These people will benefit from clearly hearing what they are meant to know, be and do as a Christian and to have these ideas reinforced regularly, and linked to any topics that you cover in the course of your youth Ministry education.

For example here is one approach to introducing a topic you are going to teach on "Welcome to youth group, we are here to learn what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ. We are learning to love God and to love other people, to let Jesus live through us as he brings heaven to earth... Today we are going to be learning about prayer which is a powerful way for us to connect with God, for God to help transform us into more of the person he dreams we can be and for us to participate in God transforming the world."

Apologetics - Defending the faith

Hand in hand with our young people knowing what they believe is knowing why they believe. I think we often leave these important questions too late in the faith development of our young people. Often times we don't start thinking about helping young people to defend their faith until they are in or close to university age but a lot of the research shows that young people are checking out of faith because they think it doesn't hold up to scrutiny much earlier when they are 14 or 15 years old. We'd suggest teaching some age-appropriate apologetics as soon as you can. I'd even go so far as that they should be taught in children's ministry too. An interesting and helpful read on this is "Mumma Bear apologetics" <https://www.amazon.com/Mama-Bear-Apologetics-Empowering-Challenge/dp/0736976159>

Mind your faith have lots of resource suggestions on their website <https://resources.thinkingmatters.org.nz/resources>

Cultivating an active spiritual life in all of life

It's also really important that our young people see their pursuit of following Jesus not just something that happens in the program we offer but as something that transcends their whole life this is definitely something that we hope will happen as they move from concrete to abstract thinking. We want to be instilling into our young people that following Jesus is a 24/7 seven day gig. One way we can do this is that we can keep helping our young people to apply the principles that they're learning when they're with us at worship or at youth group to specific parts of their lives for example if you've just done a series on forgiveness, it would be great to help young people to explore what the principle could look like lived out in one or two different spheres of their life maybe at home (how could you possibly ever forgive your annoying brother) and at school.

Spiritual disciplines

We don't want youth group or church to be the one place where young people are growing in their understanding and connection with God. In the same way that parents teach their kids over the course of the teenage years to be able to make food for themselves and not rely upon the efforts of their caregivers we want to be teaching our young people to be self-feeders when it comes to their spiritual nourishment too. This is where spiritual disciplines come in.

The best way to teach these is to model them when you are together and then invite and challenge them to do them at home. Be realistic with what they can do for a start. Celebrate 5-10 minutes a day. Consider using a social media feed as a place to share and encourage on this

Here are some links to spiritual disciplines

<http://pym.org.nz/resources/spiritual-disciplines/>

Partnering with Parents

Getting Practical

So, we have heard the big picture thinking around Faith Development, the importance of each young transitioning from having an inherited faith to owning their own faith, and all the different strategies for that to happen.

We are now going to get practical and consider what we can do as youth leaders to specifically help with the transition times

- into youth ministry
- From one youth ministry to another
- And out of youth ministry.

All of our ministries are different. The truth is the strategies of transition in and out of youth ministries have **general principles**, but will look different depending on the situation. -

The truth is, we need to give a good amount of time for the transition, as we explore different strategies this evening, we suggest that you might want to plan as much as **6 months** for the transition.

The most significant thing for us to consider in the transition is the **Connection Points** for the young people. And today I would like us to explore these three connection points:

1. Relationships
2. Context
3. Activity

For each of these three connections points we need to tread carefully, because they are all potential points for disconnect. Quick examples include.

Relationships - If a young person is really close to a youth leader, and then they move to another youth ministry in the church without that leader and then they don't connect with the new ministry leader its possible they may not continue with the new youth ministry.

Context - If a young person goes to a ministry in their neighbourhood, and then get told next year the age-appropriate ministry is at the other side of town, well it may just not be possible for the young person to attend.

Activity - If a young person attends a football outreach ministry and then gets invite to a bible study, that might just be too big of a jump of an activity for the young person to handle.

But on the flip side, if we try to specifically target and strengthen these three connection points, we can increase the likeliness of a successful transition. So let's explore that.

Relationships

Firstly let's name the key relationships that exist for young people in our churches.

1. Relationships with leaders
2. Relationships with peers
3. Relationships with the wider congregation

We want to have as much stability in relationships as possible, though this will certainly will not be always possible.

Relationships with leaders

Let's consider relationships with leaders. In most situations the leaders in the new ministry will be different.

Some churches try to match leaders with growing children, ie the pre-school teacher becomes a children's leader, and then becomes a youth group leader. To be fair in most of our settings this is probably unrealistic to even try to install, but it is a great consideration. Can the leader either transition or be at both the old and new ministry? One of the most likely places for this to happen is when you are inviting a young person from an outreach ministry or event to a church youth group. For example, if the leader at the weekly football outreach is also a leader at the Friday night youth group. It is much stronger to say, would you like to come to the Friday night youth group with me, than you are welcome to attend the church youth group. Leader constancy strengthens the connection point.

When we don't have leader constancy, we want to ask how the young person can continue the relationship with the old leader and start to develop relationships with the new leaders. In the example of a young person finishing youth group and moving city, this may look like the old leader commenting on social media posts or asking online how the young person is doing periodically. Its also extremely helpful if the church connects the young person with a Campus pastor or church young adults pastor in their new city. We will look later at how PYM can help with this.

Relationship with Peers

It is worth noting that relationships with peers have a big impact on attendance in youth ministry. Is it possible to leverage this in times of transitions? I love this story of a rural youth pastor. A few years back one of her young people moved to Wellington and settled into a church, this young lady loved the church so much she raved about it. The following year another couple of young people from were moving to Wellington, and so the youth pastor just made sure the three young adults met in Wellington, and of course it led to those young people attending the same church.

Relationships with the wider congregation

We heard earlier on the importance of intergenerational relationships in the faith formation of young people. And while often younger youth leaders come and go because the transient nature of their life stage often the congregational members are more consistent and can provide the stability and love that is so beneficial.

Get intentional at transition times. When your young people are heading to pastures new, intentionally setting up parishioners to pray for, to communicate and send care packages can help encourage these young adults in their faith and help them feel connected to their family of God.

Some churches set up mentoring relationships that stay consistent over a transition period. For example from year 8 and 9.

Context

Whether the transition is to a different room in the same building, or a church at the other end of the country every time a young person walks into a new environment it heightens anxiety, even if just a little.

Allowing the young person to visit the new location in the 6 months before the transition, can help them visualise the new environment, while in the safety of the current programming.

At the younger age bracket, this could be through a formal visit, or the current programming using the new room for some reason. It could be similar if you were inviting young people from an outreach ministry to church ministry.

At the older end, this could mean the young adult and their parents planning a scouting trip to the new city, they could visit a recommended church on that trip or visit the chaplaincy centre.

Activity

Note that some students are leaving town some aren't

The third and final Connection point is Activity. Changes to programming activity in a transition can lead to a significant response from the young person. The activity can draw the young person in, and in fact encourage them to invite friends, if the activity is more age appropriate or more meaningful or fun. But likewise, a young person can disconnect if the new activity is not so engaging or plainly just not what they had been used to.

If there is a change in programming you need time to prepare your young people for that.

That may mean allowing younger children to attend youth group in the term leading up to the change.

If your young people don't sit in church on a Sunday morning, because there is bible class or something similar, it might be a good idea that the year 13 students sit in the church services on a Sunday morning, in preparation for the next year.

If you have year 13 students about to move city, it might be a good idea that they visit some neighbouring churches with their parents and discuss what they may want to be looking for in their new church.

It may mean when you are inviting young people from outreach events to more church centric events you intentionally don't make the programming gap so big.

To sum up,

At time of transition think about Relationships, Context and Activity.

Communicating with Parents

In these transitions, it is important we communicate well with parents. Explain why and what we are trying to achieve with all the extra little things we are offering in this 6-month transition period.

And while we may think that it is less important dealing with parents when the young person is 18 or over, if they are moving city they will be leaning heavily on their parents for the move, and they may be in a better position than anyone to help their child think about the next stage in faith.

So organising info night for year 13 students and parents may be a good way to get great conversations happening in the home.

Rites of Passage

- They become great points of reference to come back to.
- It involves memories, recall, connections and anticipation.
- It is a recognition and encouragement of progress in life.
- It reinforces family culture and community.
- And an opportunity to celebrate

I do encourage you to think of ways you can mark these transitions as a faith community.

What are ways that year on year you can celebrate each young person's growth?

For some more ideas on rites of passage go to <https://here2stay.org.au/8pillars/ritesofpassage/>

PYM help

PYM is always happy to chat to you about supporting transitions.

When it comes to young people moving cities, PYM can help with helping facilitating relational connections. If you don't have good contacts in the new city, we can let you know about Chaplains and leaders in the city that would be happy to take your young adult out for a coffee when they arrive.

Conclusion

To help young people transition to new cities or ministries

- connect with new leaders
 - Visit new location
 - Become familiar with the new ministry style
 - Partner with parents
 - And celebrate each young person's development.
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- 1) Prepare for transitions 6-12 months out - Could use a hiking/climbing analogy – needing to prepare before setting out
- 2) Help young people to understand that they belong to the whole family of God not just a programme - Help young people understand that there is more to your church than just your youth group and its leaders –
- 3) Make faith their own - Spiritual disciplines and rhythms outside of church programmes – we don't want attenders of programmes – we want life-long followers of Jesus
apologetics
- 4) Relational Connection is key -
 - a. connection to new ministry people
 - b. connection with former ministry people
 - c. connection with wider church - Ingergen plug,
- 5) Familiarity with new programme , Landmarks- ensure there is some consistency across the programmes from kids ministry to high school programme

Leaving youth group -uni .work

Make faith your own

Spiritual disciplines

Relationships

Welcome

The challenge

Leaving home to study or work is the start of an exciting adventure. Free to develop

For lots of young Christians leaving home and or transitioning to work or university can also mean eventually leaving faith. A staggering 70% of young Christians walk away from faith in their young adult years, never to return.

Whats even more staggering is that for the majority of these young adults who leave faith

Student Chapters

Planning to move

Staying Connected with home church

Serve in a church (vs church shopping) >it's totally fine to look around different churches but Stay connected to one place and serve there. The best way to get set in a new church is to begin serving.

The first few weeks away from home in a new city are critical because you are establishing patterns and habits. It's easy to allow other things to crowd out church attendance so make it a priority to find a church. For better or worse you will not find a church or youth ministry just like the one you left. Nor will you find the perfect church that does everything the way you want it done. Don't just think about what you can get from a church but look for ways to be involved and to give. Involve God in the decision-making process and allow him to lead you toward your new spiritual home. In practical terms the process of finding a new church may involve attending a number of them. That's OK, but don't spend too long searching. Many people working in ministry with students and young adults notice the average search time tends to be around 6-8 weeks max.

Parachurch/chaplaincy (Jordan, do TSCF etc replace church)

Get connected with a Uni Chaplain

Deuteronomy 31:8 “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Guide for Churches

They grow up so fast! Just how fast young people grow up is an uncomfortable reminder of how much older we're getting as youth leaders. Often it feels like a blink of an eye between the time that a young person joins our youth ministry is a year 7 or year 9 and when they graduate a year 13.

These ministry transitions, when young people join or depart our youth ministry are exciting and important but they can also be vulnerable times. This guide sets out to highlight some of the key strategies we believe will help to usher your young people in and out of the youth ministry of your church well.

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- 2) Help young people to understand that they belong to the whole family of God not just a programme - Help young people understand that there is more to your church than just your youth group and its leaders –
- 3) Make faith their own - Spiritual disciplines and rhythms outside of church programmes – we don't want attenders of programmes – we want life-long followers of Jesus

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