13 WAYS TO TEACH TEENAGERS MORE EFFECTIVELY

If you've spent any time in youth ministry, you've probably asked yourself this question—*Are they learning anything?* It's a question that drives youth pastors everywhere to adjust and refine their programs.

It's pretty easy to tell when teenagers are having fun. We can see it in the ways they laugh, play a game, or participate in the activities we design for them. It's not always easy to tell if they're learning and *growing*, and we all want to help teenagers grow.

To teach students effectively, we can't just open the Bible and teach. We need **strategic and age-appropriate teaching methods** if we want them to remember, personalize, and apply what we teach.

In Grow Students Curriculum, our teaching time is designed to answer three questions. We didn't invent these questions. Rather, they're the questions teachers and communicators from every discipline agree are answered by every compelling sermon, talk, lecture, or lesson.

- **WHAT?** What are we talking about?
- **SO WHAT?** Why does it matter to God and to us?
- **NOW WHAT?** What should we do about what we just learned?

When we teach, every element should help teenagers process through and answer these questions. The problem is we often hear "teaching" and start thinking of sermons and talking at teenagers, but remember that thing about **age-appropriate teaching methods**? For most teenagers, listening to a sermon isn't the best way for them to learn. Sure, sermons are great, and they're an important part of how we tell them about who God is, but if we want to be effective communicators, we'll want to incorporate other strategies too. So, here are 13 ways (with examples from Grow Students!) you can make your teaching effective—by using something other than just a sermon.

SCRIPTURE

Reading passages from the Bible is a big part of how we teach about who God is. Scripture can be an effective teaching tool when we ...

- Read passages of Scripture together as a group.
- Invite a volunteer to read to the group.
- Invite a student to read to the group.

QUESTIONS AND POLLS

These two methods give teenagers the chance to share their opinions and thoughts, which keeps them engaged and helps us better understand their perspectives. You can ask things like ...

- "Which son are you?" to help teenagers start to identify with characters from a Bible story.
- Use a poll about following through to help teenagers relate to one another.

PERSONAL STORIES

Our own stories and experiences can give teenagers real-life examples of faith, doubt, and difficulties to learn from and remind them they're not alone. You can use stories to ...

- Talk about a time when a friend challenged you to grow in your faith.
- Tell about a time when we needed help to set up our Scripture for the week.

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IMAGES, VIDEOS, AND MUSIC

We all know how hard it can be to keep the attention of teenagers. Images, videos, and music work to engage their eyes and ears, and help us recapture their attention when it wanders. You can use these three building blocks to ...

- Teach about the importance of checking in on your friends with a video clip of two superheroes taking care of each other.
- Show what happens when we strip away all of our distractions with an image of the dark and not-so-dark sky at night.

OBJECT LESSONS

Even though teenagers can grasp more abstract ideas, it can help teach them with concrete examples. Object lessons give concrete experiences to help them understand or remember these ideas. You could use object lessons to ...

- Demonstrate what happens when we give our fears to God by dropping written fears into a bucket of water.
- Show how friends can grow together and protect each other by planting beans, corn, and squash together in the Tres Hermanas method of farming.

ACTIVITIES

Activities help engage teenagers by getting them moving and interacting in ways that will help them better remember what they learned. Activities are effective because, at the end of the day, teenagers don't just hear a lesson—they experience it. You can use activities to ...

- Play a game from the Grow Games App.
- Help teenagers connect with the power of God's words through a simile shuffle game.

MOMENTS OF REFLECTION

It's important to give teenagers a chance to sit quietly, write, think, or pray, so they can better process what is being taught. Reflection moments can look like ...

- Having teenagers write down how they plan to respond to God on a plant marker for their garden.
- Filling out a handout reflecting on the changes they could make to grow in their relationship with God.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESPONSE

A response helps give teenagers a chance to do something about what they've learned, like make a commitment or choose the next step. Responses can look like ...

- Building a sculpture that reminds the group of the ways God rescues us.
- Creating a photo booth for teenagers to take pictures together as they remember the ways they can support and care for each other.

PRAYER

Prayer helps teenagers connect and talk with God on their own or as a group. You can use prayer to ...

- Show teenagers how to pray and talk with God.
- Create short, memorable prayers for teenagers to build into their spiritual habits.

DISCUSSION

Discussions create space for teenagers to process out loud and learn with their peers. To be most effective, discussion questions shouldn't only summarize a lesson but should also ask questions that get teenagers thinking and personalizing what they've learned like ...

- What's one step you're going to take to be a catalyst for change?
- If a friend was struggling to forgive someone who hurt them, what words of advice or comfort would you give them?

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If you're looking to make your teaching more effective for teenagers, consider adding some of these building blocks into your teaching time. With a weekly teaching strategy and a little creativity, you can teach in ways that capture the attention of teenagers and get them to learn *and* grow.

And hey, if you're using Grow Students Curriculum, we're using these 13 teaching building blocks already! For every week of every year, we provide teaching content designed by real in-the-trenches youth pastors who understand how to teach teenagers effectively. And we give you everything you need to make it happen!



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