4 GAME STRUCTURES USED IN YOUTH MINISTRY

If you've spent any amount of time in youth ministry, you've probably played a few *incredible* games. Games are a central part of youth ministry. They give us a chance to make new connections with teenagers and help them relate to their peers. Games are more than just a way for us to drain teens of their energy before we head into the quieter, more reflective parts of our weekly environments. They're a way for them to build genuine relationships based on a shared experience. So, what are some ways you can better help your teenagers make these relationships? Well, take a look at the structures of your games!

Every great game is built upon a structure. This structure provides the basic limits of how the game will work. Let's take Angry Birds, for example. At first glance, you might only see a slingshot full of birds you can launch toward some pigs hiding behind wooden towers. But once you strip away that theme, it's a game about launching objects at a target. Sometimes, when we see or hear about a game, we only focus on the game's theme and not the structure. But as we pull games apart, we'll find so many of them use similar structures. So, if you plan to build your own games for teenagers, you'll want to grow familiar with some of these structures.

Here are a few of our favorites...

- **RELAY RACES.** Relay races are a great way to get multiple groups of people involved. There are a couple of different ways to handle your relays. You can have players from each team race to complete the same action at the same time, like hula hoop five times in a row, before tagging their teammate. Or, you could have players from each team perform *different* actions like one player hoops five times, another whistles a Taylor Swift song, and the final player answers some trivia questions. No matter how you plan it, relay races are high-energy games that get the crowd cheering on their friends and favorite teams.
- **TRIVIA.** Trivia games are great for those weeks when you want something with less energy. When you do trivia right, you can make connections with teens who might not want to join in with the louder, more active games. But just because trivia takes less energy than a relay race, that doesn't mean it needs to be less fun. To build your trivia game, just choose a topic, come up with some questions (or Google them), and then throw them up on your screen. Group your teenagers by age, grade, or however you want, and have some relaxed fun. If you want to raise the energy, ask a question and give them 45 seconds to write down their answers and run them to the stage. There's so much you can do with trivia, but just remember to pick a theme!
- **TIME TRIALS.** In time trials, every player is racing the clock. The format is really simple—choose your players, give them a short amount of time, and have them compete against each other and the clock to determine a winner. You could see who can shake the most ping pong balls out of an empty box of tissue attached to their waist in one minute or grab a bubble machine to see which contestant can pop the most bubbles using a toothpick in 45 seconds. Just make sure all of your action takes place where everyone can see what's happening *and* make sure the goal can actually be accomplished. If no one can see what's happening or your game is too difficult to make any progress, your players and your audience will start to check out.
- **CONTESTS.** These games can take a lot of different forms, but it might be best to think of them as ongoing challenges. A contest could look like the Impossible Shot, where you set up a trash can or hoop somewhere far from your stage, and players try to throw a ball into it. You could create a series of "On the Spot" contests where players have five minutes to paint the best picture, write the best song, or tell the best jokes. Contests are a good change of pace from your other game structures. They can be fast-paced, or they can take some

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focus, allowing you to build up the anticipation in your group.

These are just a few of the game structures that exist, and they don't always need to stand alone, either. You can create a timed trivia game or a trivia relay race. Each of these structures can be blended into the next to help you create something unique and fun for your youth ministry. Don't be afraid to shake things up and try a new structure or combination of structures for your games. There are so many great games to create!

If you need help building a game on any of these structures, then check out our guide to creating games from scratch. Just remember you don't have to do it alone! You can ask your volunteers for input or even empower a few of them to take over creating your games altogether. You never know what great games a volunteer has hiding in the back of their minds!

And if you're looking for great games that you can plug into your youth ministry right now, then check out the Grow Games App. In the Grow Games App for iOS and Android, we have over 500 different games for your youth ministry. Each game comes ready to play with instructions, editable image files, and a supply list so you can get started right away. Plus, you can add your own games to build up a database of all the great games you've already been playing in your youth ministry. So, when you're looking for a new game structure, you can use the Grow Games App.



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