HOW TO CREATE SIMPLE CHURCH GAMES FOR TEENAGERS

If you've spent more than a few weeks in youth ministry, chances are you've played *a lot* of games. Games sit at the center of ministry because they give teenagers (and leaders) a chance to make connections. When you're playing a game with a teen or watching them play with one of their peers, you're experiencing connection in action. Ultimately, games are more than a way for us to empty our students of all of their energy. They help us create memories through common experiences.

Sometimes, we can fall into a pattern of playing the same handful of games in rotation. There are a ton of reasons why that happens, from our levels of comfort to our genuine enjoyment of the game. But what if you wanted to *create* your own game? What if you wanted to make something special just for the teenagers in your ministry? You might be surprised to find out it's a lot easier than it seems. So what does it take? First, you'll want to ensure you have the right host for your games, space, mood, and energy level. But once you've secured those things, you can follow this simple formula.

PICK A THEME

The first step to building a great game from scratch is to find a theme. You might want this to connect to what you're teaching that week, but you might want something more universal that you could play every week. Regardless of how well your game does (or doesn't) connect to your teaching content, you'll need to theme to hold everything together. A strong theme is what draws people into the game.

Think about something like *Angry Birds.* It's a classic game about launching birds toward some pigs hiding behind blocks of wood, ice, or steel. But most of what we know about *Angry Birds* is really related to the theme. If you took away the theme, you'd just have someone launching soccer balls at wooden structures. It might be fun, but having a theme on top of the gameplay is what makes the game compelling and fun.

So, start your game construction by choosing a strong theme. Maybe look to random holidays for inspiration and build a game off of that. You could look at the events in your calendar, like the Super Bowl and the Olympics. You might even be inspired to build a game based on a popular TV show, movie, or song. The possibilities for your theme are endless, but what's most important is to choose a theme.

PICK A STRUCTURE

Once you've selected your theme, you're ready to move on to the next step—pick a structure. Every game is built around a simple structure or framework. We'll take a look at four different structures for your games, but this isn't an exhaustive list by any means. There are so *many* structures for games, but these are just some 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 hula 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:** Not every week needs to have a high-energy game! For those weeks, try out some trivia. When you do trivia right, you can make connections with teenagers who might not want to join in with the louder, more active games. But just because trivia takes less energy than a relay race,

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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 them 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. You can do so much 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 in one minute or grab a bubble machine to see who can pop the most bubbles using a toothpick in 45 seconds. Just make sure all of your action takes place so everyone can see what's happening and ensure the goal can 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 people 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 focus, allowing you to build up the anticipation in your teens.

Just remember to rotate your game structures at least every other week. When you play the same types of games over and over, your games can become predictable and less exciting for teenagers. Don't be afraid to shake things up and try a new structure or even combine a few structures together. There are so many games you can create within these structures!

FIND SUPPLIES

Once you've established your structure and your theme, it's time to get your supplies. Sometimes, your supplies can inspire your games, like Random Object Mini Golf, where players use anything but a golf club to play. But when it comes to creating your game, there aren't many with unlimited supplies. Clean toilet plungers can become pool cues. A volleyball net can become a slingshot, pool noodles can become javelins, baseball bats, and anything else you can imagine. If your church doesn't have a lot of supplies for games, ask your volunteer team what they have. You might even consider calling up another church in the area to see if you can borrow some of their supplies. You don't need an enormous budget to create great games. You just need a little imagination (and maybe the phone number for the church down the road).

TEST IT

You've done it. You have a theme, you have your structure, and you found your supplies when you realized carrying the fake plants around the church could make a great relay. Now, the last step in creating your game is to test it. You should test every single game you ever play—whether you created it or not. You can make this easier on yourself by picking a few volunteers to test out each of your games during the week or before your weekly environment. When you test out your games before you play them, you can see what parts of your game need adjustment. Maybe you need more time during your time trial. Maybe one of your trivia questions is incorrect. Maybe the plants are too heavy for teenagers to carry safely. Whatever it is, testing your games before you let teenagers play them gives you the time to find the problems, make adjustments, and increase the fun for everyone involved. Plus, it makes for great social media content and fun staff meetings!

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EMPOWER YOUR TEAM

Creating games from scratch can take a lot of time and energy. It might be something you don't always have time to do. If that's the case, consider empowering your volunteer team to help you in the process. We love it when churches ask their volunteers to invest in big ways (we think it's the first step in creating a great volunteer culture). Asking your volunteers to help you create games isn't just about your time and schedule, but it's about pulling out incredible ideas from your team. Consider making a game creation a part of your volunteer meetings, or maybe you could set up a way for volunteers to share the random, silly game ideas that pop into their heads. Give them the space to be creative, have fun, and make something special just for your teenagers. You might be amazed at the great things they come up with!

And if you're looking for great games to plug into your youth ministry right now, check out the Grow Games App for iOS and Android. Inside the app, we have over 500 games ready for you to add to 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 ones you've already been playing in your youth ministry. So, for the times when you need a break from creating your games from scratch, you can use the Grow Games App.



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