BROUGHT TO YOU BY Grow CURRICULUM & STRATEGY

6 WAYS TO MAKE YOUTH GROUP GAMES MORE FUN

One of our favorite ways to describe youth ministry is **fun.** We *love* having fun. We love fun activities, fun teaching, and fun people. No matter how old you are, we all gravitate toward fun. Fun isn't only helpful for making friends and new memories, but **fun can also help us create engaging environments for teenagers to experience Jesus.**

The games and activities you play with your teenagers aren't just a way for them to spill all of their energy before you get to the more serious parts of your service or event. These games allow teenagers to make connections and create memories around a shared experience. Ask a teenager about a fun memory from their life, and they'll probably recite it in detail—who was there, what happened, and why it's so important to them. **Fun helps ideas stick. Fun builds relationships. Fun is an essential part of youth ministry.**

However, you can't just throw a bunch of teenagers in a room and say, "Have fun! See you soon!" Sure, that might create fun for the teenagers involved, but it would not be a fun conversation with your lead pastor about the new holes in the wall, broken light fixtures, and the gallons of paint on the ceiling. There are ways you can increase the fun in all of your games and for everyone involved, regardless of their role.

THINK IT THROUGH

You're not alone if you've searched for "fun youth ministry games" the night before your service. There are certainly times when you'll need to scramble to find a new game for your teenagers, but if it's happening every single week, you're not setting yourself up to have the most fun with them.

As you prepare your service, you'll want games that help to level up your teaching and the other elements of your service. Don't just pick random games from the internet and try them out. You can do a lot to help your teaching stick by thinking about how a game connects to your main teaching points or a worship song you'll sing. When everything feels connected, teenagers have more fun playing games.

Don't just think through the connection to your weekly environment, though. You can increase fun in your games by thinking about the different varieties of games, too. We can fall into a habit of playing a specific type of game each week, like all-play games, screen games, or outdoor games. When we think through a rotation of every kind of game or cycle out older games for newer ones, we can help teenagers have new experiences and new ways to have fun.

RESPECT YOUR AUDIENCE

What's your first instinct when you've got a game and notice a few teenagers who aren't participating? Most of the time, we'll lead with encouragement. We want our games to be accessible and fun for everyone in the room, but occasionally, someone might need a gentle nudge to jump in. But what do we do when they *still* don't want to play?

Your response in this situation is an important indicator of how much fun the group will have. No one wants to be forced to play a game. Encourage them to play. Gently nudge them and keep the invitation open for them to hop in when they're comfortable and ready. **Never force someone to play a game.** Instead, focus on respecting your audience.

This strategy may seem different than what you're used to. You might expect teenagers to respect you and the environment you've worked so hard to curate for them carefully. But respect goes both ways. If you're out there forcing teenagers to play games they don't love, embarrassing them, or forcing them to pay attention, that's not respect—it's control—and being controlled isn't any fun.

©2024 Stuff You Can Use. All rights reserved. www.stuffyoucanuse.org

When teenagers sense that you respect them, they can lower their guard. They'll be more likely to take healthy risks and might even be willing to embarrass themselves for some fun. Take a small step in respecting your audience by allowing them to participate in games and other activities as they'd like. Communicate your expectations of alternate activities or responses. Focus your energy on creating a safe and respectful environment so everyone can have fun.

CONTROL THE ENERGY

Great fun can come from great energy. When planning out your games, remember to create an energy that matches what's needed for your game. The first place to start is with your music.

Your playlist can level up the fun for your students. When you match music to the feeling you hope to get from your games, incredible things can happen. You'll want to pair high-energy songs with high-energy and low-energy songs with low-energy games. But focusing on music is only part of controlling energy.

You'll also want to make sure you have the right hosts for your games. A great host can harness the energy needed for a game and draw it from the group. They're great at explaining instructions clearly and getting a whole room to cheer along, no matter the result. They're also great at keeping things positive. Sometimes, a game doesn't work out how you'd hope, or a student might struggle to reach their goal. A great host (and a respectful environment) can turn this situation around so everyone has fun.

INVOLVE SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Your small group leaders are essential to your ministry. They spend a lot of time having conversations with your teenagers. They bring support and structure to your services. They can also help set the tone for your environment by engaging in your games.

When you think back on your time in kids or youth ministry, was there a leader who went all out for games? Typically, this leader's energy is infectious. They can rally a group behind a concept or help them find the courage to try something new. Their relationship with teenagers can make a difference in bringing out a new level of fun.

Set out some expectations with your volunteers about how they can get involved. Like your students, give them alternate options to care for teenagers who may feel shy or want to try an alternate game or activity. Don't stop inviting them to participate in your games and build new memories with your students. Their experiences could open up a new path for conversations and connections that help teenagers grow closer to Jesus.

REWARD YOUR WINNERS

Prizes are an excellent motivator for games. When teenagers know ahead of time they're competing for something, they're more likely to get invested in having fun. As you plan games, create opportunities for your teenagers to compete for prizes and rewards. The trick is not to make things too competitive, though.

In the same way that a prize can motivate someone, too much competition can demotivate some. If your prize is so great that they are willing to do anything to win, that's not very fun for the people involved. Try to choose rewards that are accessible but still fun, like a gift card, free snacks, or an ice cream party for a small group. Prizes like these can build up the fun in your games without guaranteeing a free-for-all competition.

You could even choose rewards and prizes that are strategic to what's happening in your ministry. You could give away early entry or free admission to an event you're throwing or give out a discount on camp. If you connect your rewards to your ministry strategy, you can create incentives for teenagers and their families to stay connected to what's happening in your ministry and church!

PLAN YOUR TRANSITION

This last point is probably the most important. If you're moving from a higher energy portion of your weekly environment to something lower energy, you'll need to nail this transition. Smooth transitions aren't just about harnessing your group's energy but also about connecting each part of your environment.

©2024 Stuff You Can Use. All rights reserved. www.stuffyoucanuse.org

As you think through your games, you'll want to know what's coming up next throughout your service. How will you move from one point in your service to the next? What can you say to ease the transition? What items can you set up ahead of time to help you move from one activity to the next? There are so many questions to consider when transitioning between parts of your service, but each of them is important.

Creating smooth transitions requires some strategy, which takes us back to our first point of thinking through your service. Each week, you'll want to know which components make up your service and how they connect to the main point, or Big Idea, of your service. Knowing why you've included each element in your weekly environment, you'll better understand how to connect and transition between the different parts. When everything connects seamlessly (or, let's be honest, mostly seamlessly), you'll be able to maintain momentum and fun for your students and your leaders!

These are just a few ways to make the youth ministry games you play more fun. Best of all, **these strategies work with every type of game**—indoor, outdoor, screen games, all-play games, and more. And if you're looking for new kinds of games for your youth ministry, we've got you covered. In the Grow Games App for iOS and Android, we have over 670 different games for your youth ministry. Each game comes with instructions, a supply list, and editable graphics so you can be ready to play with your group. Plus, you can add your own games to build up a database of all the great games you've been playing in your youth ministry. So if you're ready to make your games more fun, just follow these six strategies and check out the Grow Games App!



TRY GROW FOR FREE!
FREETRIAL.STUFFYOUCANUSE.ORG

©2024 Stuff You Can Use. All rights reserved. www.stuffyoucanuse.org