

EVERYDAY YOUTH MINISTRY



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Y is for Youth Worker

Essential Youth Ministry Skills, From A to Z

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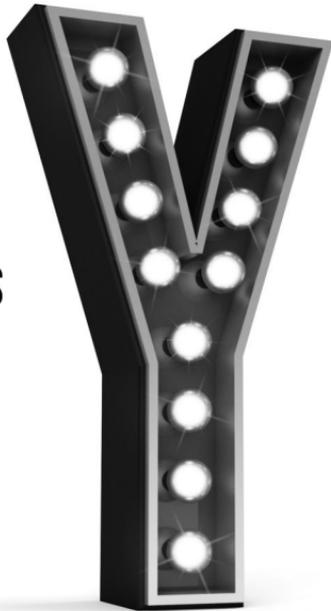
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Y IS FOR YOUTH WORKER

Essential Youth Ministry Skills, From A to Z

BY ERIK WILLIAMS



AN **EVERYDAY YOUTH MINISTRY**
RESOURCE FROM SIMPLY YOUTH MINISTRY

:: THE VOICE OF THE IN-THE-TRENCHES YOUTH WORKER

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INTRODUCTION

A is for adventure, we hope it brings us fame; camping, snowboarding, late-night talks, and even a blue flame.

Remember those books like *S Is for S'mores*? You opened the book and encountered the whole alphabet as a children's rhyming book—in the case of that particular book, with a theme of camping. They were engaging ways for you (or for your children) to learn about a specific topic.

Y Is for Youth Worker is a take on that concept. No, you won't find rhyming phrases to keep you guessing what the next line is, but you will work through the whole alphabet, with a different topic that corresponds to each letter of the alphabet. Each topic deals with some sort of youth ministry issue. Some of it is anecdotal in nature, and some of it will give you practical insights and ideas for specific areas of youth ministry.

We all can use some ideas and words of encouragement, no matter how long or brief our tenure in youth ministry. This book is filled with ideas that you can implement right away. Find the things you like and circle them, jot them down, or take a picture with your phone and add it to an idea file in your Evernote® app. Tucked inside this book you'll find a full outreach event planned for you that's ready to take and replicate. And I've even included a few small group lessons that you could use in a pinch.

You likely will identify with many of the things you read in here and find yourself saying, “Yup, that is something I have had to deal with.” I hope you will also find yourself saying, “Oooh, that’s a great idea. I think I’ll try that out for youth group next week!”

Whether you’re a full-time youth pastor, a part-time youth worker, or a passionate youth ministry volunteer, this is a great book that is relevant to anyone who is serving in youth ministry. I hope it encourages and inspires you.

A

A

ALL-NIGHT PARTIES AND LOCK-INS are the events that just won't die. Love them or hate them, they seem to stick around no matter what you do. These are the types of events that demand a great deal of effort in order to ensure that everyone has a great time. There are phone calls to be made to the places you will be visiting. There is a budget to worry about (you never want to have too many high-priced events during the year). Your leaders and team members need to be committed for the entire time.

Most of the activities that have been planned for the event seem like they will be fun, and each part of the program would be a great stand-alone event. Now they are all being packed into one night! You will have a basketball tournament at the gym. Students can play at the arcade or participate in laser tag competitions. Swimming will be fun, but you worry that you might fall asleep if you go in the hot tub. And of course there will be bowling at some early-morning hour when you wonder if God is truly awake.

Then it happens. You sit on the bus or in a van with some students you don't normally connect with. You play laser tag at 1 a.m. and have a crazy, fun-filled, shared experience with a group of students that you high-five because your team won. You play basketball at 3 a.m. and challenge a group of sixth-graders to

take you, five-on-one. You even offer ice cream at the snack bar if they can beat you. Those five students never forget that game—win or lose. You bowl with four other students in one lane at 5 a.m. and you create a dance and cheer every time someone bowls a strike.

So many fun and funny stories come out of these events—moments you will remember for a long time because you laughed so hard that your stomach ached and your throat was raw. These are great ways to make memories, for sure. Perhaps the greatest highlight of this insane, sleep-deprived event is that moment when you sit down next to a student during a non-game portion of the night and ask him what he is thinking about. It sparks something inside of him and he unloads some pretty heavy issues that are going on in his life. He even asks if you would pray for him. And you do. As you drive home, prying your eyes open in every possible way, you think, “I can’t wait till next year to do this again.” Or perhaps you think that after you sleep the rest of the day away!

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

6:45 PM

Registration (take any monies due; it is preferable that you receive your release forms ahead of time so you know how many to plan for)

Music playing with scrolling pictures from prior events (lots of close-ups)

7:00 PM

Welcome

Explanation of evening

Crowdbreakers

7:30 PM

Travel to local game center (go karts, laser tag, bumper boats, and so on)

8:00 PM

Local game center

10:00 PM

Head to YMCA

10:30 PM

YMCA (basketball, volleyball, racquetball, pool, and so on)

1:00 AM

Return to church/youth center

1:30 AM

Brief talk/message

1:40 AM

Games (foosball, carpetball—whatever you have available)

Set up board games

Show a movie (choose a rated-G movie because you don't want to take a chance that someone is not allowed to watch PG movies and then you get in trouble—or make it known ahead of time)

Have a no-sleeping-or-you-will-get-wet rule (just for fun)

Have leaders wandering throughout your meeting space so that no “shenanigans” happen

4:00 AM

Head to bowling alley

4:30 AM

Bowl

6:00 AM

Return to meeting space

6:30 AM

Have breakfast prepared for everyone

7:00 AM

Depart

7:05 AM

Clean up your meeting space

7:30 AM

Go home and crash for the day

You may want to swap out some of these outings that cost money for cheaper/free things like:

- Photo scavenger hunt (hashtag everything with your youth ministry name on Instagram® and have participants load the pics there)
- Glow stick games in someone's field (someone that you know and knows that you are coming)
- Hide the leader (assign them all points and have students go in groups of three to five)

B

B

BIBLE STUDIES are a core part of every youth ministry. They are the backbone to going deeper than you can typically go in your weekly meetings. During your weekend services or midweek meetings, you have so many elements in place that you don't always know what is going to stick. The messages, although important, are often not the things that go deep into the memory banks. As hard as you try to make a point that hits home, you also have a game planned and your worship team will be leading some of the group's favorite songs. You don't want students to miss out on what God's Word has to say to them. And that's where Bible studies come in.

The great thing about a Bible study is you can host them anywhere. They can be in your youth room or at a coffee shop or in your home. They are also flexible as far as how many times you will meet. You don't need to meet for an entire year. You can have a six-week Bible study and students can sign up for just one round. It is not a deep commitment, yet you can cover a lot of ground during your time together. They can always sign up for another six- to nine-week study after you finish one round.

One of the benefits to meeting in your home is the chance to be away from the "church environment." This creates an opportunity for students to invite their

friends who don't attend church or who haven't placed their trust in Jesus. You can even have the study in a student's home.

When you are in church, you aren't on students' turf, and they may put up walls because the comfort level is not nearly as high as in a home. But when teenagers are on their own turf, walls don't go up so quickly, and the conversation can be real and deep.

Taking time to study the Bible with students is one of those highlights in life that you look back on with fond memories. That moment when you have the opportunity to answer a question that comes out of genuine desire for knowledge of God's Word. That's when you find joy welling up inside. And that's when you realize that this is why you put all that time and effort into caring for and loving on students.

Those moments of brilliance don't abound every time you meet with students. You know you can go home and share with a loved one how great your Bible study time was, and the following week, the same student who asked such insightful questions will suddenly fart, make fun of someone, or seem as if they could care less about what you are talking about that day. That is youth ministry, and it's OK.

5 FREE LESSONS (from the Youth Ministry Emergency Kit I developed)

LESSON 1

TOPIC: Listening

GAME: Telephone

This is a classic game that requires listening and typically includes someone who likes to completely change what you say. You whisper a phrase or a sentence to the first person. That person whispers what they heard to the person next to them, and so on. The last person then shares out loud what they heard. You will almost always have some new variation to what you said or something completely different. The final result usually makes everyone laugh. For extra incentive to encourage students to get every word correct, use a phrase like this: “If you don’t change a single thing, everyone will get ice cream.”

MESSAGE:

Ask:

- *How many of you meet someone and 10 seconds later totally forget that person’s name?*
- *What does it take to be a good listener?*
- *Why do we value friendships with people who are good listeners?*

SCRIPTURES: Ecclesiastes 5:2; James 1:19-26

STORY: The story is told of President Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, “I murdered my grandmother this morning.” The guests responded with phrases like, “Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir.” It was not until the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, “I’m sure she had it coming.”¹

PERSONAL STORY: Share a story about listening from your own life. Be appropriately vulnerable.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

- Do you ever open your mouth and say things before you think about it—and get yourself in trouble as a result? Share about a time that happened and what it was like.
- What are some specific things you can do to become a better listener?
- When was the last time you heard God? What did God say or reveal to you?
- Share about a time when you responded to what God was telling you. What did you learn from that experience?
- Read James 1:19-26 again. Share what this passage could mean for you in real life today.

LESSON 2

TOPIC: Worry

GAME: Missionary Madness

(The connection to the topic is that you can get stressed in this game trying to win and “worry” if you will win or lose)

Items Needed:

- One pen per group
- One die per group
- One piece of paper per person

Instructions: This is best done with a group of 10 or less. If you have more people, split into multiple groups. Each group needs one pen and one die, and each person needs his or her own piece of paper. The first person rolls the die. If that person rolls a 1 or a 6, he or she picks up the pen and starts writing from 1 to 100 on his or her paper. The next person rolls; if he or she rolls anything but a 1 or a 6, play moves to the next participant. But if that person rolls a 1 or a 6, he or she takes the pen from the person writing down numbers and begins writing on his or her own piece of paper, starting with the number 1.

In other words, only one person in the group is writing numbers at any given time.

Let's say someone got to 14 before another person took the pen away. The next time that person rolls a 1 or a 6, he or she continues with 15, 16, 17, and so on. The first person to reach 100 wins.

MESSAGE: *Turn to a partner and share something that you worry about. When did you start worrying about this, and how big of a worry is it for you?*

Scriptures: Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:6-7

Story: The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety. George Muller Massena, one of Napoleon's generals, suddenly appeared with 18,000 soldiers before an Austrian town that had no means of defending itself. The town council met, certain that surrender was the only answer. The old dean of the church reminded the council that it was Easter, and begged them to hold services as usual and to leave the trouble in God's hands. They followed his advice. The dean went to the church and rang the bells to announce the service. The French soldiers heard the church bells ring and concluded that the Austrian army had come to rescue the town. They broke camp, and before the bells had ceased ringing, they had vanished.²

Personal Story: Share something about worry from your own life. Be appropriately vulnerable.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

- What are some specific things you worry about?
- Why do people worry about so many things?
- Share a time when you worried about something and then chose to pray about it. What did you learn from that experience?
- What does it mean to give your worry to God? How do you do that?
- Form groups of two or three, and pray together about something each of you worries about.

LESSON 3

TOPIC: The Bible

GAME: Dollar Jump

(The connection to the topic is the “truth” that you can’t jump over the dollar bill...and that the Bible is Truth)

Item Needed: Dollar

Instructions: Hold up a dollar bill and offer it to anyone who can perform a simple task. Bring your volunteer up front and explain that the dollar is theirs if they can simply jump over it the way you designate. Lay the dollar on the ground. Have the person stand with their toes to the dollar. They must bend over and grab

their toes.

Now tell them that they can't let go of their toes and they must jump over the dollar. No matter how they bend, contort, or move, they won't be able to do it. Give other students a chance to attempt it, too.

MESSAGE: *Form groups of two or three and discuss this question: Why is it important to read the Bible and spend time studying it and meditating on it?*

Scriptures: John 8:31-32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Story: In the year A.D. 303, Roman Emperor Diocletian issued a decree that he hoped would extinguish the spreading flames of Christianity. One of his primary objectives was the seizure and destruction of the Christian Scriptures. Later that year, officials enforced the decree in North Africa. One of the targets was Felix, bishop of Tibjuca, a village near Carthage. The mayor of the town ordered Felix to hand over his Scriptures. Though some judges were willing to accept scraps of parchment, Felix refused to surrender the Word of God at the insistence of mere men. Resolutely, he resisted compromise. Roman authorities finally shipped Felix to Italy where he paid for his stubbornness with his life.

On August 30, as the record puts it, “with pious obstinacy,” he laid down his life rather than surrender his Gospels.³

Personal Story: Share something from your own life about how you have studied, explored, obeyed, and lived out the Bible and its truths.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

- Do you ever struggle with consistently reading your Bible? If so, when and why?
- What are some of the most encouraging things you have discovered about the Bible?
- Share with the group what your time with God and reading the Bible looks like. This is not a competition. There are no right answers—we just want to encourage one another here. If you are struggling, it’s OK to share that.
- Open your Bible and share one passage that has meant a lot to you—and why it’s so meaningful.
- What is one thing you can do this week to get some time in the Bible?

LESSON 4

TOPIC: Unity/Conflict

GAME: Card Ninja

Items Needed: Mini playing cards

Instructions: Split your crowd into groups of two players each. The two players will face each other. Each player will draw (or be given) five cards, face down. They can arrange them in any order, but they cannot look at their cards!

When the game leader is ready, he or she asks the groups to pick a number between 1 and 10. The student in each group that is closest to the chosen number gets to go first.

The game begins when the leader yells, “One, two, three, fight!” The players will do a martial arts move and show their top card. The highest card wins the duel (like War). The player who wins the most duels out of the five card duels wins the battle. The winner then chooses another winner to play against. They need to shuffle their cards and you still play the best out of 5 rounds (even though they now have 10 cards). Go until you have a winner.

MESSAGE:

Ask: *Have you ever gotten into an argument with someone and felt like it led to major disunity or conflict? Do you know people who got into an argument over something and as a result they are no longer friends?*

Scriptures: Ephesians 4:3-6; 1 Peter 3:8-12

Story: In a Peanuts® cartoon, Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here, and take over?" asks Linus.

"These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually, they're nothing, but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

"Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"⁴

Personal Story: Share something from your own life about conflict and unity. Be appropriately vulnerable.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

- What kind of person is the hardest for you to get along with, and why?
- Share about a time when you had an argument with someone and how you felt afterward.

- Share about a time when you were able to work out a disagreement with someone and how that felt afterward.
- Using the concordance in the back of your Bible or using a search tool on your smartphone, find as many verses as you can on unity. Each of us will then read a verse that has not already been read today.
- What is one thing you can do this week to get along with someone that you might be struggling with?

LESSON 5

TOPIC: Truth

GAME: 2 Truths and a Lie

Item Needed: None

Instructions: Break into groups and have each person think of two things about themselves that are true—but things that most people wouldn't know about them. Then have each person also think of something that isn't true. Each student will then share all three things, and the rest of the group has to guess which is the lie.

You could also have your leaders come up front and offer three statements, and see how many students can guess each lie. (And for what it's worth, we certainly aren't encouraging lying—just some creative revelations.)

MESSAGE: *Turn to a partner and share about a time when each of you lied and what happened as a result.*

Scriptures: John 8:31-32; John 14:6; John 16:13

Story: “To please his father, a freshman went out for track. He had no athletic ability, though his father had been a good miler in his day. His first race was a two-man race in which he ran against the school miler. He was badly beaten. Not wanting to disappoint his father, the boy wrote home as follows: ‘You will be happy to know that I ran against Bill Williams, the best miler in school. He came in next to last, while I came in second.’ ”⁵

Personal Story: Share something from your own life about truth and honesty. Be appropriately vulnerable.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

- How do you feel when you lie?
- Are there different levels of lying? Are some lies worse than others? Why or why not?
- Why do people lie? Why do you lie?
- What steps can you take to tell the truth more consistently?

C

C

COUNSELING is often one part of youth ministry life for which you weren't prepared. You figure a few things out as you go along. You might even sit in on a training day to gain a few insights, but you often feel like you are in way over your head. This part is not easy. Teenagers deal with so much pain, and you often feel ill equipped.

One day a student sits down with you and shares that he overheard his parents say they were getting a divorce. He doesn't know what to do and is looking for your advice. Another student confesses she has been cutting herself just to feel something. A girl stops by your office to tell you she has been sticking her finger down her throat so that she can be skinny enough for the beauty pageant her mom makes her participate in. These situations can feel so far outside of your realm of understanding that you feel useless. What do you do?

The biggest thing you can offer is a listening ear. We all want to feel like someone cares for us and accepts us. Everyone wants to be heard, even if it is just for a little while. When you listen, students feel cared for. They feel loved. They feel accepted. That is at the core of what we all want and need. You may not have the answers. You may not be trained. But you can listen. You can ask questions that push to deeper responses.

Often the answer a student is seeking is inside of them already. They just need to talk it out with someone and be asked some solid, soul-searching questions.

If you do not know the answer to something, please do not make something up. All that does is lead to confusion. We all want to have the answers to everyone's questions, but it truly helps no one when we make something up. You might lead someone down a dangerous path. Most likely you will be trying to make yourself look good, and that is not a good idea either. When you say, "I don't know" to a student, it's a reminder that you are not perfect—and that's OK. Simply let the student know that you will do what you can to help find the answer or at least point that person in the right direction.

It is also essential to know your state's laws about mandatory reporting. If a student shares that he or she is being abused, you likely have to report it to the authorities—even if that student asks you to promise that you won't tell anyone. Never make that promise. You need your students to know that you won't break their confidence, but if they tell you something that is potentially a legal matter, you must let them know what you are required to do.

Here is a good rule of thumb. If they are hurting themselves or someone else, give them 24 hours to tell their parents. Let them know you would be willing

to go with them when they do. After 24 hours, you need to talk to their parents and make sure the student has had a conversation with the parents.

Some other good rules: Never do any counseling with your door shut. If at all possible, don't counsel a member of the opposite sex. And always counsel in a public place. You don't want to risk any potential false claim that could ruin your ministry and reputation.

Suggested Resources:

Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers; Chap Clark

Life Hurts God Heals; Doug Fields, John Baker, and Megan Hutchinson