

ANGLICAN YOUTH MINISTRIES



# connecting with teenagers

SEMINAR LEADER'S GUIDE

# introduction

## *Welcome to “Connecting with Teenagers”*

Our desire is to see young people thrive in their own personal journey of faith and enrich our churches. We believe a healthy relationship with adults in their church families is fundamental to this. One of the major obstacles we face is the growing ‘generation gap’ between adults and youth in our society. We want to see adults taking the initiative to connect with teenagers, showing them by their words and actions that Jesus loves them and that they are valued and important members of their church. This seminar offers some insights and tools to encourage adults to “make the first move” and help them overcome the awkwardness and misconceptions that often get in the way of connecting with teenagers.

## *Who to invite*

This seminar is relevant to all the adults in your church, and you could issue a general invitation. As youth leaders we have found, however, that the adults we want to come are more likely to attend if they are invited as part of a group they belong to, such as your church leadership team, the pastoral care team or the church greeters.

## *About this seminar*

In the “Connecting with Teenagers” seminar there are four main sections:

- » Adults and Aliens
- » Building a Bridge
- » Connecting in Conversation
- » Tips for Teaching (optional)

This ‘Seminar Leader’s Guide’ contains the overall seminar outline. It is accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation which contains all you need to run the seminar. You can find the PowerPoint on the AYM website: [www.aym.org.nz/connectingwithteenagers](http://www.aym.org.nz/connectingwithteenagers). The seminar can be run without the Power Point presentation (if, for example, you don’t have a data projector) as we have also provided printable handouts in the Appendix.

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# preparing for the course

## *What you need to do before the seminar:*

- » Go to [www.aym.org.nz/connectingwithteenagers](http://www.aym.org.nz/connectingwithteenagers)
- » Download the PowerPoint presentation
- » Embed the “Teenagers from Outer space” video into the PowerPoint (instructions on how to do that can be found on [www.aym.org.nz/embeddingvideos](http://www.aym.org.nz/embeddingvideos))
- » If you don’t have access to a data projector, print out the ‘Quiz on Youth Culture’, ‘Discussion Questions’ and ‘Quotes from Teenagers’ from the appendices.

## *What you need to bring to the seminar:*

- » Laptop computer, with PowerPoint & video files
- » Data projector
- » Portable speakers for sound
- » Paper and pens for notes
- » If you are not using the PowerPoint: printed copies of ‘Quiz on Youth Culture’, ‘Discussion Questions’ and ‘Quotes from Teenagers’ for each participant.

## *Other ideas:*

- » You could set up the room you’re having the workshop in with ‘youth stuff’ e.g. posters, props, have some popular music playing etc
- » You could have refreshments later and have some of the youth group serving them. That way the adults can have some practice connecting with them straight away!
- » You can interview your own teenagers, record their answers and swap them with the quotes in the PowerPoint.

*Even though the sessions in this Leader’s Guide are written like a script, feel free to personalise the content. You’ll be more effective that way!*

# welcome

## SLIDE 1: CONNECTING WITH TEENAGERS

Welcome everyone and introduce yourself if there are any people there who don't know you.

The purpose of this seminar is to help us to realize that we can all offer connection to teenagers in our midst, and in fact we all need to. Because God didn't design the church to be an organization, he designed it to be a family, and in a healthy family every member is connected to every other family member. The youth pastor may run the Friday night program, but we shouldn't see the young people in our church as their sole responsibility.

It's important to realise that teenagers aren't just vital for the church's future. Teenagers are vital for the church's present. We need people of every generation joining together in fellowship and worship, because when that happens we see a fuller expression of the God who is present with every generation - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This resource will encourage, challenge and instruct you in the goal of offering the gift that every teenager wants and needs, whether they know it or not - the gift of connection.

So thanks for coming. It's a huge blessing to have people like yourself taking some time to learn a bit more about this topic.

Let's begin with a short quiz on youth pop culture.

## SLIDE 2: QUIZ QUESTIONS

## SLIDE 3: QUIZ ANSWERS

# adults and aliens

## SLIDE 4: ADULTS AND ALIENS

For a lot of adults, teenagers seem like aliens. A bit like this trailer for an old 1950's sci-fi movie.



## SLIDE 5: PLAY VIDEO CLIP 'Teenagers from Outer Space'

Teenagers can feel a bit 'foreign' because different generations often have totally different cultures (even within the same ethnic or national culture). There are different slang words, different technology capabilities, different tastes in movies/music/fashion, different worldviews, different values, different senses of humour. Because of these differences we need to approach connecting with young people as a cross-cultural mission, in the same way that we would approach ministering to a different people groups on an overseas mission trip.



## SLIDE 6: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Have any of you ministered to other cultural groups? e.g. overseas missions trip, or to other cultures in your parish?*

*What challenges did you face in engaging with that culture?*

*In what ways were you able to bridge that culture gap?*

# building a bridge

## SLIDE 7: BUILDING A BRIDGE

One of the mistakes that some of the old colonial missionaries made was that they didn't just give people the gospel, they tried to impose their culture on them too.

It's easy to do the same thing with young people, in that we want to convert them to our own way of thinking and doing. We consider that we have what they need, and so they need to become like us.

Now it is true that you have something young people need. But they also have something you need. Connecting with teenagers is about building a two way bridge, where we can learn from each other.

Speaking to teenagers often requires earning the right to speak to them, by loving and liking them first. If we want young people to value us and respect our ideas and tastes... we need to do the same for them.

That might mean we need to stop hating their clothing styles and piercings! We might also need to let go of any generational snobbery (e.g. "real music is <insert your favourite artist from your generation>").



## SLIDE 8: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*What do you love about young people?*

*What do you struggle to like about young people?*

As adults we need to surrender our agendas and make connection our goal. Young people are very perceptive when it comes to seeing the strings attached. They want to know you value them simply for what they are, not who you want them to be. If we make transformation our goal, Then we may get frustrated if that doesn't happen. But when we make connection our goal we can succeed every time. Ironically connection actually creates the relationship dynamic that is needed for transformation. When teenagers know that the connection you are offering is free and not conditional, they will actually be more likely to listen when you do share your wisdom.

This is because, regardless of what it may look like sometimes, teenagers crave connection. Often they're just not that good at it! Puberty has pulled the rug from under their feet and they are re-learning how to connect. But that doesn't mean they don't need or want it any less than they did or did at other ages.



## SLIDE 9: DISCUSSION QUESTION

*We've talked about the cultural gap, what other barriers do you think stop older people from connecting with teenagers?*

Well we've asked our young people a series of questions about why older people sometimes don't quite "get" teenagers and here is what they have told us.

## SLIDE 10: WHAT DO YOU WISH OLDER PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD ABOUT TEENAGERS?

When connecting with teenagers it helps if you can try to identify with them. The number one thing that young people wish for is that adults would understand what it's like to be in their shoes.



## SLIDE 11: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Remember your experiences as a teenager. What were the main issues you and your generation faced?*

*Looking at these issues, how do you think they might compare to the issues today's young people are facing? Are some exactly the same? Are some the same underlying issue just in a different package? Are some no longer an issue at all?*

## SLIDE 12: WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES FACING YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?

It's interesting that when teenagers were asked what they wish older people understood about teenagers, many replied that "things are different for teenagers today". But, when asked about the main issues facing young people today, many of the teenagers identified things like rejection, acceptance, identity, and bullying.

These are the same issues every generation of young people has struggled with! Probably since Cain and Abel! The specifics may have changed but the underlying issues are timeless. That means that if teenagers don't feel like adults understand what it's like for them, either they're mistaken or we have forgotten what it's like to be a teenager. Remembering what it was like to be that age gives you a common ground for connection.

We've already gone back in time and looked at the issues we faced as teenagers. Now let's think about the issues we face today.



## SLIDE 13: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Identify the main issues you face today. What might they have in common with the issues teenagers are facing?*

The things you fear as an adult might be different from what a teenager fears. However even the fact that you both have fears is common ground.

Hopefully you are beginning to see that rather than being aliens from another planet teenagers are us and we are them. We may not understand each other's tastes in music or fashion etc. but underneath we are all just people trying to make sense of the world we live in. We are all struggling with our fears and our flaws and we are all seeking to find significance, acceptance and identity. Our goal as a society and especially as a church is to simply do this together.

*Take a short break*



# connecting in conversation

## SLIDE 14: CONNECTING IN CONVERSATION

Okay, so if connection is your goal that means that no time spent with young people is wasted. Because even if a conversation consists mostly of you asking questions and them mumbling “yep”, “nah” or “dunno”, it is still a successful exchange because you are offering connection. Persevere! Teenagers can often be incredibly self-conscious and so talking to an adult can sometimes feel very awkward for them. Don’t assume they’re introverted - that quiet kid might be the noisiest one amongst their friends. But most of all don’t assume that they don’t want to talk to you! Just keep chipping away... those muffled “yep’s” will often (eventually) give way to laughter and conversation.

You can lessen some of that awkwardness in a variety of ways:

- » Try doing an activity together, e.g. washing dishes, setting out chairs for that event, going for a walk, throwing a ball around etc. This way when the conversation goes quiet there’s still something happening rather than just awkward silence.
- » When attempting to chat to a teenager at morning tea after the Sunday service, try sitting next to them rather than standing face to face. A break in the conversation is way less uncomfortable when you’re sitting side by side rather than facing them.
- » You’ve probably heard people advising against asking closed answer questions, but the opposite can be just as counter-productive. Asking questions that are too broad or abstract (e.g. “how’s life?”) often doesn’t work as young people aren’t as self-reflective as adults. So questions that lend themselves to more than just a “yes” or “no”, but still have concrete answers, are better. Some examples of this might be “what was the highlight of your week?” or “seen any good movies lately?”
- » If a young person does share a problem with you, share your wisdom and life experience with them but don’t overload them with advice. Instead of just telling them what they should do in their situation tell them about a similar situation you’ve been through and what you learned or did in that situation. This will empower them to make good choices for themselves.



## SLIDE 15: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Can you think of a time when you felt like you connected well in a conversation with a young person?*

*What was it that about that conversation that made you feel like it was successful?*

We asked teenagers what advice they would give to adults who wanted to connect with young people.

## SLIDE 16: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ADULTS WHO WANT TO CONNECT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE?

# tips for teaching

## SLIDE 17: TIPS FOR TEACHING

Young people tend to have a shorter attention span than adults. It is commonly thought that having video clips and powerpoint slides are the best way to hold a teenager's attention. This can work well, but it's not a necessity and can work against you if you're not very media savvy.

Here are some tips for connecting with young people from the pulpit:

### *1. Try not to waffle*

Speak in soundbites as much as you can - shorter snappier sentences. When it comes to using humour, keep your jokes brief and punchy (those classic story jokes where you build up to the punchline don't usually work as well with young people as they will have stopped listening before you get to the funny part. They'll hear this: "There was a farmer and he had two donkeys. One of them he put in the paddock and the other he put in the barn. The one in the paddock...blah blah blah blah blah blah...and the donkey said "wait till you meet his wife!"). However teenagers do love hearing stories about something crazy that happened to you, or stories where you are the butt of the joke.

### *2. Speak to their hearts*

Teenagers are in a stage of life where emotions are prime. The movies they flock to see at the cinema and the songs they listen to are movies and songs that connect with their hearts... the ones full of feelings of joy, fear, romance, anger.

Teenagers often make decisions based not rational thoughts, but on their emotions (try telling a teenage girl that the boy she's in love with is not good for her!). Add to this the fact that teenagers spend a lot of time in school being engaged on an intellectual level, and you'll find that offering them an intellectual sermon will cause them to switch off. It's not that you shouldn't try to teach intelligently or in a way that engages a teenager's mind, but their hearts will be an easier gateway for your message to enter. Try to capture their hearts first, then speak to their minds, rather than the other way around.

### *3. Be raw*

Try asking questions or making statements that hit straight to the heart of an issue (e.g. "How many of you know what it's like to have your heart broken?", "Every person here deep down just wants to feel accepted", "Some of you know what it's like to look in the mirror and hate what you see"). In effect you're describing how teenagers feel. Share personal stories specifically mentioning how you felt in the situation you're describing.

Note: Adults will take a more middle of the road sermon and make their own heart connections with your message, but as teenagers aren't as self-reflective. It may be helpful to make those connections for them.

Personal stories are better than second-hand stories, as young people respond well when they hear the story of a "flesh and blood" person. A person talking about what they have seen, heard and experienced for themselves is way more relevant than a funky powerpoint slide or funny youtube clip.

#### ***4. Engage their imagination***

Young people are dreamers and idealists. They haven't become as jaded or cynical as a lot of adults are. They believe their dreams can come true. So in your preaching seek to engage that youthful idealism and get them to imagine how their life/relationships/family/classroom/society/world etc. could be different they were to only believe and act on your message.

As mentioned earlier, personal stories are great, and they can be especially useful in regards to engaging the imagination of young people, e.g. "this one time I acted this way, and this was the result - imagine if I acted like this all the time! Imagine if we all did!"

Or you could ask a rhetorical question that invites them to dream, e.g. "I wonder what would be different about our world if everyone did this?"

Or you could speak "prophetically" by sharing your dream of what could happen, e.g. "I believe that if we all started to do this, then this might happen. And who knows, if you start doing this, maybe even this could happen."

This can often be a powerful way to conclude a sermon. Identify what's missing and then invite them to dream about what could be.

# conclusion

In so many churches there is a divide between young people and the wider church. They sit on opposite sides of the building. They congregated in separate huddles at morning tea time. Many young people feel at home at youth group but out of place in the main service. And many of us adults feel like they don't want anything to do with us. We feel awkward when we try to connect with them and we prefer not to try. But I wonder, if we were to feel the awkwardness and then do it anyway, then maybe we would find that young people are hungry to connect.

I wonder what would happen if we all made an intentional effort to connect with the young people around us? Who knows, a conversation that you have with a teenager could be the first step towards healing issues of hurt and rejection that some young person has been carrying because of their situation at home. I wonder if we were to take some of the pointers in this talk and put it into practice maybe we would see our church come together across generations like we've never seen before. Because I believe that if we commit to make connection our goal, we will see our young people thrive in their own personal journey of faith, and our church will be enriched for it. Amen?



## SLIDE 18: DISCUSSION QUESTION

*Turn to the person next to you and share: What's one thing you're going to take away from this workshop?*

We asked teenagers what they appreciated about older people.

## SLIDE 19: WHAT DO YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT OLDER PEOPLE?

Pray [you could ask a teenager from your church to write a prayer for you to pray].

Here's one written by a teenager:

*"Dear Jesus, thank you for the awesome adults in our church and community. We thank you for how they always look out for us, and for all the wisdom you have given them that they can pass on to us. We pray that you would help them to understand who we are, and to connect with us. Help them to realise that they don't have to act cool around young people, and help them to just be themselves. In your name. Amen."*

*Thank everyone for coming. Tell them you'd love to catch up with any of them for further discussion.*

## SLIDE 20: CONNECTING WITH TEENAGERS

# quiz on youth culture

1. What does 'swag' mean?
2. What are fans of Justin Bieber called?
3. What would I be referring to if I bragged about my 'gainz'?
4. Who is the female star of the 'Hunger Games' movies?
5. Name any member of the boy band 'One Direction'.
6. What does CMU stand for?
7. What dance move is Miley Cyrus infamous for performing?
8. What is the name of the Sony's most recent video game console?
9. Finn, Jake the Dog, and Princess Bubblegum are all characters on which cartoon?

## ANSWERS

1. Style, looking good, confidence 2. Beliebers 3. The muscles I've built up at the gym  
4. Jennifer Lawrence 5. Harry, Louis, Niall, Zayn and Liam 6. Cracking myself up  
7. Twerking 8. PS4 9. Adventure Time

# discussion questions

## ADULTS & ALIENS



- » Have any of you ministered to other cultural groups? E.g. on an overseas missions trip or to other cultures in your parish?
- » What challenges did you face in engaging with that culture?
- » In what ways were you able to bridge that culture gap?

## BUILDING A BRIDGE



- » What do you love about young people?
- » What do you struggle to like about young people?
- » We've talked about the cultural gap, what other barriers do you think stop older people from connecting with teenagers?
- » Remember your experiences as a teenager. What were the main issues you and your generation faced?
- » Looking at these issues, how do you think they might compare to the issues today's young people are facing? Are some exactly the same? Are some the same underlying issue but just in a different package? Are some no longer an issue at all?
- » Identify the main issues you face today.

## CONNECTING IN CONVERSATION



- » What might they have in common with the issues teenagers are facing?
- » Can you think of a time when you felt like you connected well in conversation with a young person?
- » What was it about that conversation that made you feel like it was successful?

# quotes from teenagers

## WHAT DO YOU WISH OLDER PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT TEENAGERS?

We need to take steps at our own pace and not rush stuff, we need to take our time doing stuff.

I think that as teenagers we kinda need to make mistakes for ourselves and learn from that.

I wish they understood that our life is different to what they lived and we have different challenges to what they did.

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES FACING YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?

Relationships and friendships, people not being able to trust people anymore and some people just go behind your back and just being rude and stuff.

Boyfriend/girlfriend kinda things, they just hook up because everyone else is doing it or they try to fit in and they think it's cool to do stuff that other people are doing so they just do it as well.

Having to 'stand out' to be accepted by others, it's kinda hard to be yourself, you kinda need to prove yourself.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ADULTS WHO WANT TO CONNECT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE?

Just feel free to come and talk to us, take the first step, just be open... talk about anything.

Just hanging out with youth they want to connect with, people who not just hang out with me at church but want to know me outside of church.

Be genuine, be who you are.

Be laid back, don't say things that were cool when you were young, because that's probably not cool now.

## WHAT DO YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT OLDER PEOPLE?

They have been in the same situation we have been in and it may not be exactly the same but they know what it's like.

Their wisdom, their advice and their experience of things.

You can go up to them and like talk to them about stuff, about God and they will just tell you and they'll give you advice.