

Do's and Don'ts of Youth Games

Do Make Sure You Know Your Youth And Their Comfort Levels and Abilities

So many games involve competition, physical activity, being in the spotlight, pressure, etc. You need to know your youth to know who to call on for a particular game. If a student gets upset if they feel they let a team down you probably shouldn't have them come up as part of a small team vs. team challenge where all the pressure could fall on them. If many in your youth group really can't do much physical activity you should limit those kinds of games. Games should be a way to bring your group together, break down boundaries, and have fun. If you don't know your group well, though, games can be a barrier to relationships, growth, and attendance.

If You Wouldn't Want To Do It, Don't Make Your Youth Do It

If there is a game that you would be reticent to participate in, then don't make your youth play it. For instance, "Musical Baby Food" where you pass baby food around and whomever it lands on when the music stops has to eat it or sit down. If you wouldn't want to eat it then don't play it. If you wouldn't want to eat chocolate pudding out of a diaper then don't play that game (yes there's a real youth game like that, just look it up. I don't recommend it).

Do Make Sure You Are Prepared

If you're going to lead a game make sure you are prepared. Know the rules and the set up and have everything you need. Nothing ruins momentum like having to stop and say "oh wait I need 3 chairs and some balloons, hold on." Make sure you have your supplies and know the progression of the game. You don't want to stop the game halfway through because you forget an important rule or part of the game.

Don't Play Messy Games If Your Youth Aren't Into Them

Some youth groups love messy, dirty, and disgusting games. They will thrive on them and be laughing about them all week. Many kids will jump up to volunteer to stick their face in whipped cream or have peanut butter smeared on their face. But some youth really don't like it. You need to be attuned to what your youth like. The overwhelming majority of my current group don't really like messy games, so we don't play them. I've had groups in the past though that have loved them. Try one once and see what the general reaction is. Don't just force your group to play games they aren't comfortable with or people will start not coming because they'll be worried they'll have to get dirty, wet, etc.

Don't Embarrass Your Youth

There are many games out there among resources that just serve to embarrass your youth. While the rest of the group may like, that individual student may not think it's so funny. If you know your youth well it may be okay from time to time to pull up a student who thrives on that kind of attention and doesn't mind being laughed at, but you have to be careful. New youth to your group may see such games and be nervous they could be called up one day. You don't want to do anything that could be a barrier to a youth coming to and enjoying youth group. Again the key is knowing your group and your youth.

Do Play The Games With Your Youth

Many games require partnering up, large teams, or large group mixers. If your group has more than one leader, then the leaders not leading and explaining the game should get involved. This is a great way to connect with youth, laugh with them, and create memories. It puts your leaders in the mix with the youth and not just standing on the sidelines watching.

Don't Be Afraid to Have a Leader Win A Game

Don't be afraid to win. Leaders should rarely ever just let youth win. In some cases you may want to, but that goes back to knowing the youth. If you have a youth who has self-esteem issues and winning a game could really give him/her confidence then you might consider it. If you are playing a game like competition game and a leader wins- great. The leader can toot their own horn a bit in a fun fashion and that will just make the youth want to play again so they can beat the leader next time. I used to play ping-pong with youth and beat them all the time and always joke with them about it. They would just want to play more and more and try to find times to play even apart from youth group. When they finally did win it meant so much more to them.

Don't Start A Game By Saying, "We're Going to Play A Game"

The best way to start a game or mixer is with a "sell" which means selling the game in a creative way. It could be with a character coming out, or with a skit, or with a leader explaining some scenario. If you don't have a game sell in mind, then just start the game. Just say "Get up and stand in a straight line and number off 1, 2, 1,2 etc. They'll catch on quick, but just saying "We're going to play a game" makes it seem monotonous and boring each time.

Do Make Sure Games are Fun

Make sure your games are fun and energetic and exciting. Even fun games can have a message and not every message has to be a Bible message that gets beat over the kids head. Some games help teach critical thinking skills or teamwork and you never have to point that out. Some games can even teach using the Bible and you don't have to point that out. Not every game needs to have some long drawn out sermon attached to it. If the games become to message based and plotted like that they can become boring or become just part of a long sermon and youth might start dreading them. Games should be a piece of your meeting that energizes the youth.

Do Have Variety of Games

If you find a game that the youth like then play it from time to time but make sure you have variety. Have some really active running around games and some games that requires more sitting and thinking. Play games that a few people participate in and others watch and have games that everyone participates in. Having a variety of games keeps youth guessing and keeps them excited for what will happen next.

Don't Be Afraid To Try Something New

You can always try new games and make up your own. Just use what you have and the area you have and see what sort of crazy ideas come up. Often youth like those the best. Sometimes they may not work and it will just be something the youth will laugh at you for a while, but that is just a fun joke. I've made up games that were huge successes and huge failures. Just don't be afraid to try.