



Being a Welcome and Inclusive Youth Group

This lesson will explore creating a welcoming environments for teens of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

ENHANCER OF JOY

Holistic Sexuality Education

DURATION

60 minutes

LESSON DEVELOPED BY

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TIPS TO PREPARE

Be prepared for emotional dialogue and responses from participants. It is important to have a covenant (or set of group guidelines) for your youth group that includes details for how to engage with each other in respectful ways.

MATERIALS CHECKLIST

- Deck of cards
- Whiteboard or easel paper and markers
- Participant Handout

SETTING THE ATMOSPHERE

Easel paper should be hung at the front of the room, with the prompts written in advance.

It will be best to have lots of room for physical movement so a large circle setup is suggested.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

1 Corinthians 12: 12 -14; 26 (NRSV): *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*

Purpose

Creating a welcoming environment for teens of all sexual orientations and gender identities combats the sexual violence and harassment often experienced by teens. As we are called to be one body in Christ, we seek to affirm the uniqueness of each member and the collective purpose of being an example of Christ in the world.

Objectives

In this session, youth will be able to:

- Describe specifically what it means to be a welcoming and inclusive youth group
 - Explore opportunities for change, growth, and new programming within their youth group, in order to be more welcoming and inclusive
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Further Study

Huegel, Kelly. *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 2012.

Savage, Dan and Terry Miller, eds. *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living*. New York: Penguin, 2012.

TransFaith. <http://www.transfaithonline.org>. This is a national, nonprofit organization that is led by transgendered people and is focused on issues of faith and spirituality.

Additional social justice themed music by Mark A. Miller can be found on his Youtube channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCejbvFsRD8-4VhBQ0cD_Few.

Introduction for Leaders

Integrally important to promoting embodied flourishing and relational joy is a youth ministry where teens learn about sexuality in a way that affirms them in their uniqueness and as God's beloved. Various personal and social circumstances shape how we experience sexuality. Many external factors affect the power and agency individuals have to experience aspects of their sexuality in a holistic and holy way. While sexuality is much more than sexual orientation or gender identity, many LGBTQ teens face abuse and harassment. Sexual and gender harassment and abuse can severely damage a teen's sexual self-concept and interfere in their ability to carry on daily activities. This means we must create opportunities to proactively accept all teens regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Empowered with knowledge and resources, sexuality experienced as a healthy and positive part of teen lives enhances joy.

When facilitating the activities in this lesson, you should be prepared for emotional dialogue and responses from participants. It is important to have a covenant (or set of group guidelines) for your youth group that includes details for how to engage with each other in respectful ways. If you don't have a covenant, it will be important to create one BEFORE you facilitate these sexuality lessons.

Here are a few resources to walk you through the process of creating a covenant with your youth group members:

<http://religiousinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Questions-for-Creating-a-Youth-Group-Covenant.pdf>

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/families/workshop1/105585.shtml>

Here are some examples of youth group covenants that you can modify or adapt:

<http://www.gracemontclair.org/uploads/youth/youth-group-covenant.pdf>

<http://www.fpcponca.org/PresbyNews/covenant.pdf>

Knowing Yourself And Your Teens:

Reflect on the following questions, in preparation for facilitating this lesson:

- How difficult or easy will it be for you to conduct a discussion with your participants on the subject matter presented in this section?
- How might your own views of sexuality education for adolescents affect your ability to present the information in this lesson objectively?
- How might information that your youth participants have learned in other settings (health classes, home, etc.) influence their contributions to this lesson?

During the lesson, participants are prompted to reflect on areas that the youth group could improve, in order to be more welcoming and inclusive. The facilitator should be prepared to guide the participants to create an action plan to correct those areas where there are opportunities to improve the words and behaviors to be more welcoming and inclusive. Helpful resources are available through the toolkit provided through the Institute for Welcoming Resources found at this link:

<http://www.welcomingresources.org/welcomingtoolkit.pdf>

Gather

Prayer: Invite a participant to read 1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 26 (NRSV), One Body, Many Members

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one

body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Engage

Activity 1: Experiencing Welcoming, Neutral and Dismissive Interactions

- Using the selected cards from the deck of cards, the facilitator will tape a card to each participant's back. They should NOT be told what their card is.
- Invite participants to mingle and greet each other using the following instructions:

If the person they're greeting has a face card of any suit (Jack, Queen, King) on their back, they should be greeted warmly and in a friendly manner.

If the person they're greeting has a club or spade numbered card on their back, they should be greeted in a neutral manner.

If the person they're greeting has a heart or diamond numbered card on their back, they should be ignored or snubbed.

- Let the participants mingle for 2-3 minutes.
- After 2-3 minutes, ask participants to form groups with other people that they think have

cards that are most similar to theirs.

- Once they are in small groups, they can take the card from their back and look at it.
- The facilitator should call attention to the number of small groups and which cards showed up in each of the small groups.

FACILITATOR NOTE: Usually the people who were treated neutrally are more likely to be interspersed with the people who were treated negatively. Rarely do they group themselves with those who were treated warmly. This becomes important to notice for later in the lesson.

Ask the groups several of the following questions. You may want to visually display their responses on the whiteboard or easel paper to reference later in the lesson.

- How long did it take you to find out if you had a card that was valued and respected by the group (the face cards)? What verbal and non-verbal cues did you use to figure that out?
- How did it feel to be greeted the way you were during the activity?
- Who decided which cards were more valuable (worthy of being treated kindly)? How did it feel to have someone else decide what card you received and thus, your value?
- Why do you think the people with the neutral cards were more likely to be grouped with the people who were treated negatively?
 - Elicit or prompt for the following:
 - Neutral and negative sometimes looked or sounded the same
 - Both neutral and negative were clearly different from the positive greetings
- How did it feel to treat people differently based on the card that was taped to their back?
- How do you think this activity is related to our discussion today about being a welcoming and inclusive youth group?
 - Elicit or prompt for the following:
 - People are sometimes treated differently based on their different identities (gender, race, social status, sexual orientation)
 - If we aren't being actively welcoming, our neutral responses might feel like negative responses to people, even if that isn't our intent.
 - It's important to treat all people kindly because it can be quite hurtful to them if we don't. It's also hurtful to them if we're neutral.

Now, invite all participants to return to their seats and greet each and every other person in a warm and welcoming way as they find their seats.

Activity 2: Making our Youth Group Welcoming and Inclusive

Introduction:

Facilitator should introduce the activity by saying the following:

Today's lesson is entitled "Being a Welcoming and Inclusive Youth Group". Just like in the card activity that we just finished, the way that we treat each other in youth group can determine how comfortable people are in being members of our youth group. As we heard in today's scripture verse, God calls us each to a unique role in God's community. We are each different members of the body, but all one and equal to God. So, today, we're going to learn about and practice some ways that we can live out God's instructions in our youth group.

As a reminder, we have a covenant (or set of guidelines) that we've all committed to following so that we have a safe and supportive youth group, please remember that it will be especially important to follow this covenant during our discussion today.

Show the easel page with the words "welcoming and inclusive" at the top.

Ask the participants to define these terms. Write their definitions on the easel paper.

Then, show the easel page with the following formal definition:

A welcoming and inclusive environment includes people with multiple backgrounds, mindsets, and ways of thinking who are able to work effectively together. In such an environment voices are respected and heard, diverse viewpoints, perspectives, and approaches are valued, and everyone is encouraged to make a unique and meaningful contribution".

Next, on the easel page with "we are welcoming and inclusive when we..." at the top, have the participants brainstorm a list of words and behaviors and actions that would be present if the youth group was welcoming and inclusive.

Elicit or prompt for the following:

- Greeting everyone warmly and kindly
- Respectful of differences and different identities (including but not limited to gender, race, social status, sexual orientation)
- Supporting each other
- Seeking to understand other people's viewpoints by asking thoughtful and respectful questions and listening openly to their responses

Reflect

Provide each participant with the reflection handout and ask them to write or draw their responses to one or both of the questions.

FACILITATOR NOTE: You may want to have them work independently on the first prompt and work collaboratively, with a partner or as a small or large group on the second prompt.

The facilitator should encourage participants to be creative in how they respond, they can draw a picture or write a poem or a short story, write a script for a one-act play or draw a picture or a word cloud.

Invite them to share their responses with a partner. Again, encourage creativity. For example, if they wrote a script for a one-act play, have them act it out.

As a large group, have each set of partners share one thing they learned from their partner's sharing.

Send Forth

Lead the participants in this closing prayer:

The scripture says, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." AND "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

God as we go forth this week,

Help us to accept those we see as different from us,

Build up our community as we become welcoming,

Open us to rejoicing together!