



Advisor-Leader Handbook

A sample handbook for training youth leaders.



ADVISOR-TEAM LEADER HANDBOOK

(c) The Congregational Church of New Canaan

YG MISSION STATEMENT

Our Mission:

We will foster a community in which our youth may experience and share the love of God. Our community is inclusive of all youth, of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientation or gender expression.

Our Beliefs:

We believe that the way of Christ offers our youth a life that is abundant, flourishing and everlasting.

We believe that flourishing life is best nurtured in a community marked by love, covenant and participation.

- Love: A community in which all our youth, wherever they are on life's path, are unconditionally loved and accepted as they are.
- Covenant: A community in which our youth share covenantal commitments to clear and understandable values and boundaries.
- Participation: A community in which our youth passionately participate in something larger than themselves: the great adventure of loving and serving in God's name.

We believe that caring for our youth in a community of love, covenant and participation will equip them for a lifetime journey following the way of Christ and characterized by faith, hope and love.

BEACONS

Community

We welcome our youth into a community that is unabashedly and passionately counter to a secular culture too often characterized by self-centered competition, judgment and exclusion. Our youth ministries welcome our youth into a community that fosters a safe space of unconditional acceptance and other-regarding love. Here, a deep sense of Christian community grows out of shared experiences of fellowship, spirituality, service, and just plain fun. In our youth ministries, every child can just be themselves.

Fellowship



Christ taught that God is known and experienced when we keep his commandment to love one another. Our youth ministries understand that relationships are just as likely to grow in zany, exuberant play, as in deeply moving vesper discussions, as in urgent collective action to complete a mission. We gather our youth into small, relational teams, each led by a caring young adult. Our teams draw kids into community regardless of grade, gender and social groups where they form lifelong friendships. In our youth ministries, every child has a small group to call “home.”

Service

God calls all of God’s children out of cramped self-centeredness and into participation in God’s larger labor of love in the world. When our youth respond – by feeding the hungry, by housing the homeless, by serving the poor, by seeking justice, by mentoring a child – God’s love flows through them and they experience God as channels of God’s grace. Our youth ministries facilitate frequent, varied and age-appropriate opportunities for our youth to serve their brothers and sisters in need. In our youth ministries, every child learns that God has already equipped them to love and be loved in God’s name.

Spirituality

Our young people don’t just want to be told about God, they want to experience God for themselves. They have a passionate desire to encounter the living God who is passionately committed to being there for them. Our youth ministries introduce our young people to powerful communal prayer, inspiring worship and music, ancient forms of Christian meditation, and revelatory stories of the faith. In our youth ministries, every child learns the practices and traditions that will support their own ecstatic experiences of the transcendent.

Fun

Did we mention that our youth ministries are fun? Again and again our young people have taught us that they are as ready to engage serious human need as they are to break into raucous, run-around games – as ready to share their deepest hopes and fears as they are to break into spontaneous dance. Our youth ministries are characterized by a serious playfulness and a playful seriousness. In our youth ministries, every child finds time and space to just be a kid.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT FOR THE KIDS?

- To experience God
- Be transformed by God’s presence
- A warm and nurturing environment that treats youth as ends in themselves
- Be a part of a community of shared values:
 - Unconditional love and acceptance



- Clear and understandable values and boundaries
- Participation in something larger than self
- Support
- Understanding and compassion
- Forgiveness
- Service of others

THE BEACONS IN ACTION

Community

- Positive role models in the lives of the kids
- Weekly events, Youth Worship, Mission trip, etc.

Fellowship

- Provide a network of support
- Creation of teams
 - A group where each individual is a known and an essential part
 - Build relationships with peers outside of their normal groups
 - An entity with its own identity within the larger group
- Vespers
 - Provide a safe space for kids to bring issues from their lives
 - Reflect upon experiences, shared and unshared
 - A time to realize you are never alone
 - God is always there
 - The team will back you up
 - Encountering others' faith as well as developing your own

Service

- Answer the call as Christians to go out and serve others
- Step outside of ourselves
- Use our ability and blessings to be able to serve
- Relate to the larger world outside of our own

Spirituality

- Regularly recognize and give thanks to God
- Provide a space for God in our lives
- Provide a space for the development of each person's own faith journey



Fun

- Games, scavenger hunts, etc.
- Chinese Night, Progressive Supper, Coffee House, etc.
- Team nights

GOALS FOR LEADERS

- Build positive and healthy relationships with the YGers
- Be supportive and trustworthy
- YGers always come first, it's not about us
- Help YGers see and understand they are worthy of love and they are loved just the way they are
- Enrich YG with your own input and creativity
- Have fun

EXPECTATIONS FOR LEADERS

- Attendance at all YG events
 - If you cannot attend an event or meeting you need to inform the Youth Director at least two weeks in advance, unless it is an emergency or health situation that arises suddenly
 - Covenant and travel events are a non-negotiable
 - Should attendance become an issue, a meeting will be set-up with the Youth Director and the Senior Minister
- Support the Youth Director in the facilitation of events
- Be a positive role model for the YGers
- Maintain a solid and active presence in the lives of the YGers
- Clearly define and maintain appropriate boundaries with the YGers
- Maintain passion and energy for leadership

LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Sunday Meetings
 - Arrive before the event to help set-up and meet with Advisor Team
 - Generally 30 min before
 - Help facilitate event
 - Keeping order
 - Picture taking
 - Active participation in event
 - Stay after the event to help clean-up
 - Generally 30 min after



- Stay after clean-up for check-in meeting
 - Generally 15 min
- In Week Contacts
 - General Presence
 - Attending sporting events, plays, concerts, etc.
 - Team
 - Contact team parents
 - Weekly contacts with your team
 - Emails, texts, phone calls, etc.
 - Twice a month team events
- Attend monthly planning meeting
- Report all issues involving youth to the Senior Youth Director right away
- Maintain communication with Senior Youth Director
- Work together with each other

DISCLOSURE PROTOCOL

We minister into the lives of these youths in service of one belief, that God wants them to lead a healthy and flourishing life and to have it abundantly. Of course no path through adolescence occurs without some bumps along the way. Because of this, our ministry is important and exists as non-anxious and listening presence in the lives of these youths. We will be the existence of unconditional, non-judgmental love in the midst of their lives. We are a place to turn, a shoulder to cry on and a caring soul, but we are not a fix-it or a solution.

For the instances that threaten this abundant life and go beyond the normal woes of adolescence, the following is written to give you a guideline on how to respond. Confidentiality is important in your relationship with these youths, but as situations are diverse and varied the following is only a guideline.

If any of these topics, suicide, self-harming or depression, should arise when talking with one of the youths please follow this guideline:

Follow up with the child without asking too many questions.

- Ask how long the child has been feeling like this
- Try to determine if there is a specific cause
- Ask if they have spoken to anybody else about it

Say to the child something along the lines of, "Thank you so much for sharing this with me. You know what you tell me is in confidence, but I think I could be of more help if I shared this with and [Youth Director name]."



If the child gives you permission then great, but if not say something like, “I care and worry about you and do not want anything bad to happen to you so I really need to tell [Youth Director Name]”

Tell [Youth Director] about the conversation with the child.

- This is regardless of whether the child gave you permission or not.
- [Youth Director] will then talk to the child and determine the next steps to take.

If you feel that you are unable to leave the child alone for risk of them hurting themselves or others you need to call [Youth Director] immediately. If [Youth Director] cannot be reached then call [Minister]. If someone is in immediate danger call 911.

If any of these topics – substance abuse, eating disorders or physical abuse – should arise when talking with one of the youths please follow this guideline:

Follow up with the child without asking too many questions.

- Try to get as much information as possible.
- Say to the child something along the lines of, “Thank you so much for sharing this with me. You know what you tell me is in confidence, but I think I could be of more help if I shared this with [Youth Director].”

If the child gives you permission then great, but if not say something like, “I care and worry about you and do not want anything bad to happen to you so I really need to tell [Youth Director]”

- Tell [Youth Director] about the conversation with the child.
- [Youth Director] will then talk to the child and determine the next steps to take.

In all of these situations, stay away from giving advice. Be present just to listen.

Insert Contact List