

# Gearing-Up Your Youth Ministry

## Icebreakers, Games & Discussion Starters

### Icebreakers

**Amoeba Mixer:** Give students each a card with a question on it—such as, “What is your favorite color, favorite place to eat, mother's maiden name, or shoe size”. Each student writes the answer to the question and returns the card without putting their name on it.

Shuffle the cards and distribute them to the students. Students try to find the person described on the card. When the person on the card is found, students join hands and the front person (who has been found but has not yet found their person) takes the other with them to find the person they are looking for. When the last person is found (they are at the end of the line), the line forms a circle. The game is finished, and everyone may sit down. NOTE—Students are not allowed to ask, "Is this your card?"

**Balloon Name Game Icebreaker :** For this icebreaker, have the group stand or sit in a large circle. To start off, go round the circle and have each person say their name.

Next, introduce a balloon into the center of the circle. Hit it in the air and call out the name of a young person. You go back to your original place in the circle while the student whose name you said has to run into the center of the circle. They need to hit the balloon up in the air before it hits the ground, calling out the name of another of the teenagers and standing back in the circle themselves.

The student who's just had their name called does the same thing – runs into the circle before the balloon hits the floor, knocks it into the air and calls out another name.

### *Levels of Difficulty*

If you want to make this icebreaker a bit harder, here are a couple of suggestions:

1. Don't let them use their hands to hit the balloon in the air.
2. As they start to learn names more, introduce up to three balloons of different colors. They then have to call out a name and the color of the balloon they're hitting at the same time. Having different color balloons will help ensure you don't have three young people going for the same balloon at the same time.

**Comic Strip Mixer:** Take a Sunday paper comic strip (one that has about eight or nine frames to it), and cut it up into its individual frames. Take those frames and tape them on the backs of the students in the group (one frame per person). When the game begins, the students try to arrange themselves in the correct order, so that the comic strip makes sense. Since the frames are on their backs, it means that there will be a lot of communication required

**Guess Who?:** For an easy get-acquainted activity, ask your students to write down something about themselves that probably no one else knows. If they have trouble coming up with a unique contribution, suggest an unusual pet they might have or a weird snack or sandwich they like. If you get really desperate, ask for their mother's middle name. Collect all the responses.

As you read the clues aloud, have students try to guess the identity of the cluegiver. Award 1000 points for each correct guess (have students keep their own scores.)

**I'd Like to Know:** Want your group to know each other better? Give everyone a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil. Have students write their names at the top of the sheets. Underneath their names they should write, "One thing I really like about you is \_\_\_\_\_" and, halfway down the sheet, "A question I've always wanted to ask you is \_\_\_\_\_".

Now have them exchange papers, notice the name at the top of the sheet they have now, and finish each of the two sentences. Exchange several times so that each sheet has many affirmations of and questions about the sheet owner. When the sheets are returned to their owners, give the students a few minutes to read what others wrote about them and to them. Then, one at a time, have the students read and answer one question asked of them. Even if your group knows each other pretty well, there are bound to be some surprises.

**Tattoo:** This easy mixer doubles as a reminder that individual identities make a church body strong. Each player writes their own name on each label on a sheet of blank labels. On a signal, participants begin to "tattoo" everyone else in the room with their labels. Players must introduce themselves to others before tattooing them.

The first person to run out of labels is the winner. A second winner is the one who collects the most labels. Before all the kids remove their tattoos, ask them to review the names they are "stuck" with.

## Games

**Group by Categories:** Have everyone mingle and then yell out a "category" like eye color or age. Everyone needs to group up according to the category. Do this several times.

**Stand up if you've ever:** Have everyone sit in a circle and then read off different descriptions. If the person matches the description, they have to stand up. Descriptions include: Blue eyes, wearing green, hates carrots, etc.

**Quick Sort:** Two teams. The leader gives a category and each team sorts itself as quickly as they can into a line the order the leader has suggested. For example, if the leader calls out, "Sort by age, youngest to oldest," each team should form a line with the youngest person on one end and the oldest on the other. You can increase the difficulty by telling everyone they have to do the exercise without talking.

**Everybody's IT:** This game is like regular tag only everyone is 'it'. Everyone runs around trying to tag everyone else. When you're tagged, you sit down. The object is to be the last person left standing.

**Whatever it takes:** The object of this game is for students to recognize that we all tend to keep people out of our groups even if we don't realize we are doing so! First, you get the students to stand in two groups. The size doesn't matter. Then, select two volunteers from each group. Next, tell the volunteers out loud in front of the others that they are to do whatever it takes to get into the groups of teens left. They can jump over, push their way in, whatever. On the count of three, the volunteers try to get into the groups. After about 5 minutes, pull your volunteers out and ask them out loud, "what did you have to do to get into your group?" The volunteers will say, "I had to push, shove, etc." Ask them even if they weren't successful in getting into the groups. Ask the unsuccessful ones what they tried to do. Tell them, "I bet it was hard!" Then, after you go over what they

tried to do to get into the groups, tell the groups this: "I told our volunteers to do whatever it took to get into your group! But I never told you to keep them out!" They will be shocked to discover that was true! The students learn that we do things to keep people out without even realizing we are doing it. Remember, do not tell the groups to keep the volunteers out, only tell the volunteers to do whatever it takes to get in!

**What are we?:** Break up the group into 2-4 teams. Have them assemble together. The judge or judges have to get to a somewhat of an elevated position. You can stand on a chair. You call out an object and each group has to make that object as it would be seen from above. The judge decides whose shape looks the most realistic and awards a point. Play 5 or 6 rounds increasing the difficulty of the shape. Some examples of shapes are, a stop sign, a chair, a palm tree with coconuts, a dog, a person, or a pair of sunglasses

**Shoe hunt:** Have everyone put their right shoe into the middle. On the count of three, everyone gets one shoe and then finds the owner of that shoe. They must find out one interesting fact about the shoe's owner.

# Let's Get Acquainted

*Directions: For each of the following items, get the signature of one person who fits the description. You must get 20 different signatures.*

1. I use Listerine: \_\_\_\_\_
2. My house has 3 bathrooms: \_\_\_\_\_
3. I've gotten more than two traffic tickets: \_\_\_\_\_
4. I have red hair: \_\_\_\_\_
5. I have been yelled at for spending too much time in the bathroom: \_\_\_\_\_
6. I have been inside the cockpit of an airplane: \_\_\_\_\_
7. I play the guitar: \_\_\_\_\_
8. I enjoy eating frog's legs: \_\_\_\_\_
9. I've been to Hawaii: \_\_\_\_\_
10. I use your brand of toothpaste: \_\_\_\_\_
11. I have used an outhouse: \_\_\_\_\_
12. I watch reruns of old sitcoms: \_\_\_\_\_
13. When I went water-skiing for the first time, I got up on my first try: \_\_\_\_\_
14. I know what charisma means: \_\_\_\_\_
15. I love broccoli: \_\_\_\_\_
16. I am left handed: \_\_\_\_\_
17. I carry a pocket knife: \_\_\_\_\_
18. I have a private bath at home: \_\_\_\_\_
19. I don't know your last name: \_\_\_\_\_
20. My last name sounds unusual: \_\_\_\_\_

## Discussion Starters

**Chutes and Ladders:** Life is full of ups and downs. Using a Chutes and Ladders game board and rules, play with the following additions: When players land on a ladder, they describe a good experience; when landing on a chute, they describe a bad experience. If players have trouble thinking of specific experiences, use the following questions to prompt them:

- What was the experience?
- Has the experience left a lasting impression on you?
- Would you describe the lesson as a reward or a reprimand?
- How have you grown from this experience?

Conclude the play by discussing the kinds of experiences that individuals apparently have little control over — like the roll of the die. Ask the group how they think God fits into these kinds of experiences. Ask how God is a part of the good and the bad in our lives.

**Human Continuum:** When discussing subjects that have many points of view, have the students arrange themselves (prior to the discussion) in a human continuum from one extreme viewpoint to the opposite extreme. For example, if you are discussing drinking, have the students line up with all those who are for drinking on one end and those who are against it at the other. Undecideds or moderates would be somewhere in the middle.

Students may discuss the issue among themselves as they attempt to find the right spot in the line in relationship to each other. After they are settled, further discussion or debate can take place as students attempt to defend their positions. Anyone may change positions at anytime.

**Rug Discussion:** Here's a great idea to use when you just don't have time to plan your usual terrific youth meeting. It's simple and works like a program that you've spent hours working on.

Pass out 3x5 cards to everyone in the room. If you have a topic you were planning to discuss, ask each of the students to write out a question relating to the theme about something that's been bothering them or that they're struggling with in their lives. If you aren't using a theme, then they can just write out questions they have of any kind. Cards should not be signed.

You will get a great variety of questions. After students finish writing them, pass a box or container around the room to collect them. Have the leader read the questions, one at a time, and let the students suggest some answers.

This is a useful approach to questions because students can often do a great deal to help out their peers and because honest questions can be asked when they're anonymous. To make this a "rug" discussion, have all the finished 3x5 cards thrown on the rug in the center of a discussion circle, mixed up, and then read.

**Yarn-Sharing Experience:** In order to get your group to open up and share their inner feelings and Christian experience, try using this technique. Take a ball of yarn (size is determined by the size of the group involved) and explain to the group that you are going to ask them to participate in a little experiment. Tell them that in a moment you are going to throw the ball of yarn (while holding onto the end so the yarn will unwind) to someone in the group. The group should be standing in a circle. When that person catches the ball of yarn, she should share either:

- What God has done for them.
- What God has done for someone they know.
- What God has done for all of us (Christ's death, given us his Word, etc.).
- Something that they are thankful for.

Then after they have shared one of the above, they will throw the ball to someone else in the circle (while holding on to the yarn) and the next person who catches the ball will also share one of the four things above. Keep this going until everyone in the group has had a chance to share at least once (several times is best, but this depends on the size of your group and the time you have).

After you have made a spider web pattern with the yarn and everyone has had a chance to share, stop the ball and ask:

- What is this yarn doing for us physically? Answers would range around the idea of holding us together. (Comment that the effect of the sharing has created a somewhat beautiful web between the members of the group.) Mention that for a beautiful pattern to evolve, everybody had to participate.
- Then have one or two members of the group drop their hold of the yarn. Immediately the center web becomes loose and the effect is for the circle to widen a little. Then ask: "What happens to the group when someone drops their yarn?" It becomes less close — looser knit and it makes something beautiful fall apart and turn ugly. Follow up with a brief talk on how the Bible teaches us to bear each other's problems, to share our happiness and sorrows, to be thankful, etc. Emphasize that in sharing, a beautiful network of relationships and ties are formed just like what is physically illustrated by the yarn, but that it takes everyone to hold it together.

### **What Would You Do?**

Sometimes it's easier to get into Scripture when it can be looked at in light of some everyday situations. The following six situations are designed to help students to think through various passages of Scripture and how they might apply to them personally. One good way to use them would be to divide the entire group into six small groups and give one situation to each group and give them enough time to work through the discussion questions. When they are finished, each group can then share their conclusions with the other groups.

#### *Cheating (Jeremiah 17:9-10)*

In an English exam you need an A or B to pass the course for the semester. You studied long and hard. Your friend didn't study at all. While the teacher is busy checking papers, you notice that your friend is copying answers from another student who always does well. You get a C while your friend gets an A.

1. How do you feel?
2. What would you do as a Christian?
3. Does this experience change your relationship with your friend?

4. Would you discuss the issue with your friend? Other friends? Your parents? The teacher?
5. How would you feel if you were the cheater with an A knowing your friend studied and received only a C when he needed at least a B?

*Instant Gratification (Proverbs 1:29-31)*

The group is going to an amusement park and you need \$20. Your parents agree to help you earn it by allowing you to keep money from the recycling of aluminum cans and the return deposits on glass bottles. Normally the money is put into the family entertainment budget. On the way home with the money, you discover a new CD by your favorite group and decide you can get the money for the trip from the next returns, so you buy it. When you get home your parents are very upset and tell you that they will not help you earn any more money and, because you broke the agreement, you cannot go on the trip even if you have the money.

1. How do you feel?
2. How do you think your parents might feel?
3. Who was cheated?
4. Has an impulsive act such as the above ever cost too high a price?
5. If you were the parent would you have handled this differently? If so, how?

*Trust (Proverbs 3:1-6)*

You are not allowed to go on any type of dates. You've agreed to meet your girl/boy friend at the movies. You tell your parents you are going to the movies with your best friend. Your parents discover what you did. Now you can go nowhere unless taken and picked up by your parents. Over the last few weeks you feel they are beginning to trust you again.

1. Did you "fess up" or try to "fake it?"
2. Will you go sneaking around again now that they are beginning to trust you again?
3. How do you think your parents felt when you betrayed their trust in you?
4. Would a Christian react differently?

*Loyalty (Proverbs 16:6)*

You are at your friend's house. Your friend "sneaks" a cookie for you. You say nothing even though you think it is not quite right not to ask. On the way home from school, you and your friend stop at the store to pick up an item for your mom. When you leave the store, your friend gives you a candy bar. After you've eaten it, your friend tells you he "sneaked" it for you from the store.

1. How does the candy taste now?
2. How do you feel about your friend?
3. Should you tell someone? Who?
4. Should you have discussed it earlier when you noticed that the friend was "sneaking" the cookie at home?
5. Would you discuss this with your parents? Why or why not?
6. If this pattern continues, does your friend deserve your loyalty?
7. Can you get into trouble for being loyal? How or why not?
8. Does loyalty overlook anything and everything?

*Obedience (Deuteronomy 5:16, 1 Samuel 19:1-3)*

Your parents don't allow you to call guys/girls on the telephone. You feel times have changed and your parents are old-fashioned. You go to a neighbor's house "to use the phone." The neighbor discovers you are using the phone to call guys/girls and also knows that your parents do not approve or allow it.

1. In what position do you place the neighbor?
2. Do you know why your parents do not want you to phone guys/girls?
3. Do you open discussions with your parents, or just complain to your friends?
4. Do you expect parents to automatically know how you feel? Why or why not?
5. Will your parents trust you if they find out?
6. Did you consider the consequences of being found out?

*Respect for Others (Matthew 25:34-40)*

Your youth group goes on a retreat. You find yourself the only person from your group in a discussion group. You are not being included so you speak up but the others ignore you. You ask a question or make a suggestion. They pour cold water on your idea. You attempt to sit closer to the nucleus of the group and someone pulls the chair out from under you just as you sit down.

1. How did you feel?
2. Could you have done anything to improve your situation?
3. What should the group have done?
4. Did it upset you differently coming from a church group rather than a school group?
5. If you had been part of the antagonizing group, what would or could you have done to improve the situation?
6. Have you ever been part of a group that excluded someone? How did you feel? What were your thoughts? Your actions?
7. Would a Christian react differently?

**Would you rather questions**

1. Would you rather be a dog named Killer or a cat named Fluffy?
2. Would you rather be a giant hamster or a tiny rhino?
3. Would you rather be forced to tell your best friend a lie or tell your parents the truth?
4. Would you rather be forgotten or hatefully remembered?
5. Would you rather be happy for 8hrs/day and poor or sad for 8hr/day and rich?
6. Would you rather be the most popular or the smartest person you know?
7. Would you rather give bad advice or take bad advice?
8. Would you rather give up your computer or your pet?
9. Would you rather love and not be loved back, or be loved but never love?
10. Would you rather meet an alien visitor or travel to outer space?
11. Would you rather never use the internet again or never watch TV again?
12. Would you rather not be able to use your phone or your e-mail?
13. Would you rather only be able to whisper or only be able to shout?
14. Would you rather publish your diary or make a movie on your most embarrassing moment?
15. Would you rather have one wish granted today or three wishes granted in 10 years?
16. Would you rather visit the Doctor or the Dentist?
17. Would you rather have a shower or a bath?



18. Would you rather go into the past and meet your ancestors or go into the future and meet your great-great grandchildren?
19. Would you rather have more time or more money?
20. Would you rather have a rewind button or a pause button on your life?
21. Would you rather be able to talk with the animals or speak all foreign languages?
22. Would you rather win the lottery or live twice as long?
23. Would you feel worse if no one showed up to your wedding or to your funeral?
24. Would you rather be without internet for a week, or without your phone?
25. Would you rather meet George Washington, or the current President?
26. Would you rather lose your vision or your hearing?
27. Would you rather work more hours per day, but fewer days or work fewer hours per day, but more days?
28. Would you rather listen to music from the 70's or music from today?
29. Would you rather become someone else or just stay you?
30. Would you rather be stuck on a broken ski lift or in a broken elevator?
31. For your birthday, would you rather receive cash or gifts?
32. Would you rather go to a movie or to dinner alone?
33. Would you rather always say everything on your mind or never speak again?
34. Would you rather make a phone call or send a text?
35. Would you rather read an awesome book or watch a good movie?
36. Would you rather be the most popular person at work or school or the smartest?
37. Would you rather put a stop to war or end world hunger?
38. Would you rather spend the night in a luxury hotel room or camping surrounded by beautiful scenery?
39. Would you rather explore space or the ocean?
40. Would you rather go deep sea diving or bungee jumping?
41. Would you rather be a kid your whole life or an adult your whole life?
42. Would you rather go on a cruise with friends or with your spouse?
43. Would you rather lose your keys or your cell phone?
44. Would you rather work in a group or work alone?
45. Would you rather be stuck on an island alone or with someone who talks incessantly?
46. Would you rather be too hot or too cold?
47. Would you rather have a cook or a maid?
48. Would you rather be the youngest or the oldest sibling?
49. Would you rather get rich through hard work or through winning the lottery?
50. Would you rather have a 10-hour dinner with a headstrong politician from an opposing party, or attend a 10-hour concert for a music group you detest?
51. Would you rather be proposed to in private or in front of family and friends?
52. Would you rather have to sew all your clothes or grow your own food?
53. Would you rather hear the good news or the bad news first?
54. Would you rather be your own boss or work for someone else?
55. Would you rather have nosy neighbors or noisy neighbors?
56. Would you rather be on a survival reality show or dating game show?
57. Would you rather be too busy or be bored?
58. Would you rather watch the big game at home or live at the stadium.
59. Would you rather spend the day with your favorite athlete or you favorite movie star?
60. Would you rather live where it is constantly winter or where it is constantly summer?
61. Would you rather travel the US and see the sights in a motorhome or by plane?
62. Would you rather be a little late or way too early?

63. Would you rather have many good friends or one very best friend?
64. Would you rather be 4'5" or 6'7"?
65. Would you rather be poor and work at a job you love, or rich and work at a job you hate?
66. Would you rather have your flight delayed by 8 hours or lose your luggage?
67. Would you rather be in your pajamas or a suit all day?
68. Would you rather be the star player on a losing basketball team or ride the bench on a winning one?
69. Would you rather spend the next year exempt from all taxes or have a one-month paid vacation?
70. Would you rather have the best house in a bad neighborhood or the worst house in a good neighborhood?
71. Would you rather end hunger or hatred?
72. Would you rather be a character in an action-packed thriller or a romantic comedy?
73. Would you rather be stuck on a train or a bus?
74. Would you rather be able to breath underwater or fly through the air?

### **"Get to know you" questions**

- If you could have an endless supply of any food, what would you get?
- If you were an animal, what would you be and why?
- What is one goal you'd like to accomplish during your lifetime?
- When you were little, who was your favorite super hero and why?
- Who is your hero? (a parent, a celebrity, an influential person in one's life)
- What's your favorite thing to do in the summer?
- If they made a movie of your life, what would it be about and which actor would you want to play you?
- If you were an ice cream flavor, which one would you be and why?
- What's your favorite cartoon character, and why?
- If you could visit any place in the world, where would you choose to go and why?
- What's the ideal dream job for you?
- Are you a morning or night person?
- What are your favorite hobbies?
- What are your pet peeves or interesting things about you that you dislike?
- What's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?
- Name one of your favorite things about someone in your family.
- Tell us about a unique or quirky habit of yours.
- If you had to describe yourself using three words, it would be...
- If someone made a movie of your life would it be a drama, a comedy, a romantic-comedy, action film, or science fiction?
- If I could be anybody besides myself, I would be...
- If you were a comic strip character, who would you be and why?
- What thought or message would you want to put in a fortune cookie?
- If you had to give up a favorite food, which would be the most difficult to give up?
- What is one food you'd never want to taste again?
- If you won a lottery ticket and had a million dollars, what would you do with it?
- You've been given access to a time machine. Where and when would you travel to?
- If you could be any superhero and have super powers, which one would you like to have and why?
- What award would you love to win and for what achievement?
- If you could transport yourself anywhere instantly, where would you go and why?

- In your opinion, which animal is the best (or most beautiful) and why?
- What is one item that you really should throw away, but probably never will?
- Growing up, what were your favorite toys to play with as a child?