



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH



ADVENTIST YOUTH MINISTRY

SYL  
SEMINAR 2

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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# YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

## *Understanding Youth*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The youth of today live in a world different from that of their parents and the adults of the church when they were the same age. All youth—from time immemorial—dream, but today our youth live in a society that digitally makes their dreams seem “real,” and transports them into a virtual world full of vision. The fact that they live in a virtual world encourages them to develop a lifestyle in accordance with the great mutation of this world. This way of living is often decried and misunderstood by the adults of the church. As a youth leader, the time has come to seek a better understanding of the mentality of today’s youth in order to make them feel understood and feel that they belong to God’s family. This will in turn help them to improve their spiritual growth.

### 2. SEMINAR OBJECTIVES

In this module we will study to understand Jesus’ example with regards to cultural accommodation, discover the challenges faced by young people, understand the world in which they live, and know the steps in the process of being acquainted with the youth environment and entering into it with them.

### 3. RECOGNIZING THE DIFFERENCES

First we must realize this important point:

“Teen brains aren’t finished yet. The frontal lobe of the brain — the part responsible for decision-making and reasoning — isn’t fully developed until a person’s early-to-mid-twenties. “According to Abigail Baird of the Laboratory for Adolescent Studies at Dartmouth, the human brain continues to grow and change into the early 20s. ‘We as a society deem an individual at the age of 18 ready for adult responsibility,’ she states. ‘Yet recent evidence suggests that our neuropsychological development is many years from being complete’ (Grossman, Lev, “They Just Won’t Grow Up,” Time, January 24, 2005, p. 42-53).

“As a result of this physical reality, your teenager is caught between two worlds: that of being a child (with simple, incomplete thinking and a minimal data bank of experience), and that of being an adult (with more complete, mature thinking and a bigger data bank). Youth can and do act like adults at times. This is normal. And they can and do act childishly at times. This is also normal.”

The entire above section, including the Baird quote, was taken from  
<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teens/letting-go-of-your-teen/why-parents-want-tocontrol-their-teens>

Given this important fact, youth tend to think that they’ve got it all taken care of, but things such as rightly perceiving the world and managing their emotions are also things that they’re still working on and are a consequence of their brains’ not being complete yet. Knowing this will help us keep patience with these creative, lovable, but often frustrating young humans.

Next, we must understand that youth culture and societal systems really are different and distinct in important ways from the adult or mainstream culture around them. Today, even in remote regions of the world, the digital age is creeping in, and in all developed nations, youth have more autonomy, at least in a digital sense, than ever before. Many of their parents, particularly in nations where the digital age has

come more recently, do not understand computers, the internet, social media, cell phones, and newer forms of entertainment as well as their children do. They may not completely realize that their children are inhabiting a different world than their own. Getting inside that new world is a necessity for today's youth leader. We must see, and encourage them to see, that youth and adult cultures are both independent of each other, and at the same time inseparable.

We need them, and yes, they still need us. As we seek to understand the challenges and feelings of youth, it can seem like a daunting task. Can we adequately generalize youth and their culture in a way that makes sense to us and to them? Has the negative media attention affected the way youth and young adults are treated...do they have a chip on their shoulder?

In this seminar we are seeking to find methods and ways to help us honestly explore their values and concerns in the context of the church and a developmental relationship with God and the church. We must find ways to re-engage the youth and provide a productive social bond between youth and adults in the church. We must find ways to show them that they are taken seriously and keep them (or pull them back) into the larger church community.

#### 4. EXAMPLES FROM THE BIBLE

The Bible teaches that to win people, it is important to understand their environment and their lifestyle and enter into that environment and lifestyle with them.

##### A. THE BEST EXAMPLE OF THIS IS JESUS HIMSELF.

In order to understand the situation of humanity and to demonstrate His love for us, Jesus first left the unimaginably different environment of heaven to come to earth and live as a human in a specific society and time, wearing their clothes, eating their food, listening to their music, and learning their trades. He came down to meet our situation and lived in the context of fallen mortals overwhelmed by the consequences of sin. This not only allowed Him to understand human suffering, it also made it possible for Him to demonstrate His love for humanity. This is well explained by Paul in Philippians 2: 5-7:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”.

While here, Jesus mingled with people in order to understand them. He then taught them new things that were opposite from what they had been taught. For instance, He broke the local social codes (based on a narrow understanding of actual Bible passages) in spending time with people Jewish society deemed unacceptable.

“As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt 9: 10-13).



In Luke 15, the result of mingling is clear. It is said that those whom the Pharisees called “sinners” were drawn to Jesus because he stooped low to their level and understood their situation. Only then could He begin to pull them up to His level.

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1, 2).

#### B. TO WIN PEOPLE AND MAKE HIMSELF UNDERSTOOD

“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

It could be noted that many Christians would feel better becoming “as one under the law” than “as one outside the law.” They might face less opposition and rebuke, too.

In verse 23, Paul gives the reasons why it is important to mingle and adopt the culture of people. “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”

### 5. COUNSELS FROM ELLEN WHITE

Ellen White gives the successful method Jesus used to save souls. This method applies equally well in the context of youth.

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (Christian Service, p. 119).

This method of understanding the mentality of youth requires a genuine sympathy.

“The youth are objects of Satan’s special attacks; and the manifestation of kindness, courtesy, tender sympathy, and love, will often work the salvation of those who are under the temptations of the evil one” (Pastoral Ministry, p. 275).

She urged that we adapt religion to the youth in order to attract them.

“They should make their religion attractive to the youth who come within the sphere of their influence” (Christian Education, p. 24). A good understanding of youth culture can lead them to use the potential God gave them in the service of the church.

“The minds of many of the youth are rich in talents which are put to no available use, because they have lacked opportunity to develop them. Their physical powers have been strengthened by exercise; but the faculties of the mind lie hidden, because the discernment and God given tact of the educator have not been exercised in bringing them into use. Aids to self-development must be given to the youth; they must be drawn out, stimulated, encouraged, and urged to action” (ibid., p. 30).

## 6. PRACTICAL METHODS

### A. UNDERSTAND THE YOUTH'S ENVIRONMENT

Young people have a capacity of rapidly adapting to the social climate in which they are immersed. This is how God created them—intending that they be surrounded by a positive, godly environment and that they soak it in and then add their own creativity to enrich it. But today's world has twisted this capacity of youth. With young people, things change according to the economic and social transformations of their environment. These affect their desires, their needs, their sensibilities, their relationships, their way of dressing, their appearance, and their understanding of spiritual lifestyle.

They tend to build their identity in conformity with the world around them. Today, the younger generations are characterized by their use of modern communication technologies, bringing what is commonly called “the virtual world.” This environment provides access to many opportunities that previous generations did not have, and undoubtedly affects the moral and emotional lives of young people. It shapes the concerns and the needs of young people, making them different from those of adults.

In many churches, young people have the strong impression that the church does not know what to do with them. It is not uncommon to find young people isolating themselves from the group and raising critiques about what is being done. For instance, they complain about the way the music is played, the way programs are run, and so on. In short, today's youth live in a world different from that of adults. Even though the latter feel they are doing well, the young people do not see things this way.

A journey into the world of the youth is necessary in order to understand, accept, and guide them. This will allow the church to detect and satisfy the needs they may have so as to integrate them and make them feel part of the church family.

### B. UNDERSTAND THE YOUTH'S SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

1. Family. From babyhood on, especially as long as the youth is at home, the family remains the first source of influence. This influence is marked by two main things: the training given by parents and, especially, the impact of social life at home.
2. School. The school exerts an impact on the life of young people. They are transformed by what they learn, by their teachers, and also by their friends. The kind of school they attend can make a difference in their behavior.
3. Community. The young person is influenced by his or her community; and since their tendency is to be in groups, they are bound to find one in their environment. The neighborhood, friends and everything that come into play in their relational life has an impact on the young person's life. This can vary by how deeply a given country's life is community-oriented, but it is true in all countries.
4. Mass Media. Today, mass media, and especially television, internet, and smartphones, are influencing young people and transforming their way of seeing things and apprehending the world.

### C. UNDERSTAND THE DESIRES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

It may not always seem like it, but young people are looking for adults capable of responding to their moral, social, and spiritual needs.

1. Young people are seeking recognition as part of the family of the church
2. Young people are looking for adults and leaders with whom they can confidently communicate the realities of their lives



3. Young people are looking for framework and opportunity in which they can say what they think without being punished or disqualified
4. Young people have visions and ambitions that are often different from what is usually done. They look for new ways and innovations and seek out leaders capable of bringing changes that take their opinions into account.
5. Young people love their church and want to see it evolve and grow. They are willing to defend her in their environment so far as the actions of the church are worth being proud of.

#### D. ENTERING IN THE YOUTH'S UNIVERSE

To be able to understand the youth culture, there is a need of entering into their world. Here are some ways:

1. Organize frequent meetings to discuss the problems they face while asking their opinions. Do not taboo their ideas and points of view. Also arrange one-on-one time with each youth.
2. Tolerate young people's language and behavior. What they say and how they say it must be tolerated. Give them the opportunity to freely express themselves while gradually drawing their attention to any improper conducts they may exhibit. This allows you to understand their world while at the same time allowing them to ponder their deeds.
3. Allow young people to express their emotions and feelings. Generally, negative ways of acting and reacting stem from internal resentments they have.
4. Make space for listening-based dialogue. Make it a habit to find time to listen to young people instead of talking to them.
5. Organize informal programs and activities with the youth. Find time to just play. It's important to them, and it's still important to adults, too.

It is necessary to know that young people, in general, are not interested in hearing adults' experiences of yesteryears especially when these experiences have nothing in common with the present. Rather they yearn to see condescending adults and leaders ready to understand and accept them in the context of their world. It is all about seeing leaders identifying with the struggles and hopes of young people to better understand and minister to them. If you listen to their stories, they may listen to yours, if you find relevant ones and learn to tell the stories "in their language."

#### E. CREATING A FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Once immersed in the culture of young people, it is necessary to create space for them to feel at home. You will need to:

1. Create an environment where young people feel accepted and important. This will allow them to take ownership of the church.
2. Encourage young people to create informal meetings. They feel more energized when they create their own groups.
3. Organize forums for exchange and conversation where young people are called upon to make decisions. Preach less and put them into exchange groups.
4. Create diverse experiences where young people have the opportunity to bring their ideas to life with youth-oriented music and other arts.
5. Frequently allow young people to lead programs. This allows them to take initiatives. When young people hear and see other young people in action, they will know there is room for their age group.

6. Create intergenerational activities. This allows for a crossroads of cultures for mutual understanding of both adult and young people's world. Everybody will learn from each other and appreciate one another.

## 7. CONCLUSION

If Jesus was able to come close to us in order to understand us in the context of our world, we can also do the same with our youth.

- Learn to be compassionate in your dealings with youth so as to express authentic sympathy and kindness to the young people around you.
- Ask the Lord for wisdom and passion for youth work so as to minister to the hearts of the young
- Remember the goal is to help them develop a close relationship with Christ.

## 8. ACTIVITIES

### PART 1

Today at the seminar, try answering the questions below. Keep your answers in a safe place at home or in your office; you will need them when completing Part 2 later.

1. Two factors that most influence the youth of your church
2. The musical trend of the youth in your church
3. The value placed on the church by the youth
4. The leisure activities of the youth
5. Their favorite media
6. The influence of church leaders on them
7. To whom they talk about their problems with confidence
8. The main complaints about the life of the church
9. The heroes they would like to resemble
10. Their understanding of Christian living

### PART 2

Next, use the methods outlined above to get involved with the youth of your church for a quarter. During this time, find out how close you were in your original answers to the statements--without interrogating the youth. The aim is to crosscheck the depth of your knowledge vis-à-vis youth-adult relationships. If you were mostly correct with your Part 1 answers, congratulations. If not, you know what you need to work on, and no doubt you have come much closer during the quarter of learning what your youth really think about and how they feel.