

## EXPECTATIONS OF A YDISCIPLE SMALL GROUP ADULT MENTOR

### 1. **Affirm the teachings of the Catholic Church.**

As a representative of our parish, your role is to help teens trust in the authority and teachings of the Church that Jesus Himself established. Recognizing that teens don't want to be told what to believe, you will facilitate dialogue and discussion. It is important for teens to know that your Catholic faith is important to you but that you don't judge them for what they believe. You accept them as they are but you also provide encouragement for them to grow in their spiritual life.

### 2. **Strengthen the authority of parents.**

Teenagers naturally "push back" against their parents as they are in the process of establishing their independence. This can be a challenging time for parents and they need to know that you are an ally and that you desire to strengthen the relationship they have with their teen. That being said, it is also important for teens to know that what they share in the group will not get back to their parents or to peers outside the group, unless they share something that falls into the area of "mandatory reporting." This confidentiality gives them the freedom to open up about their thoughts, doubts, and struggles. They may even share struggles they have in their relationship with their parents. You want to listen patiently to them while giving their parents the benefit of the doubt.

### 3. **Engage parents.**

A key way to help strengthen the relationship parents have with their teen is to give them the opportunity to host your meetings in their home. This allows them to show their support and get to know you and their son/daughter's friends better. Ask the parents to welcome teens, provide snacks/drinks, mingle with the group for 15 – 20 minutes, and then to give your group privacy for the session. You will discover that teens open up more and are more committed when they are experiencing hospitality. If for some reason you are not able to meet in homes, be sure to create opportunities for parents to be involved. Your role is to consistently encourage your group members to communicate with their parents. You also want to be sure to communicate often with parents and provide them the Parent Sheet after each session.

**4. Be a facilitator, not a teacher.**

The videos and the Leader Guides will help you introduce topics and facilitate discussion. You should become genuinely interested in what teens have to say and try to understand their frame of reference. Avoid making judgments about their ideas or convictions. When their ideas/convictions conflict with Church teaching, respectfully ask, “Have you thought about it this way?” While you want to make sure that the teens do most of the talking, you also want to share how the topic of the session has personally impacted your life. Your testimony and witness is more powerful than teaching. Remember, teens don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

**5. Be a mentor, not a parent.**

Parents have the responsibility of reprimanding their children and giving them direction. As a mentor, you do not have this responsibility and this is a powerful leverage in helping them grow. For example, they may share with the group a movie they watched that their parents would not approve of. This is a great opportunity to dialogue with them about the movie and help them evaluate their decision. You can ask how you might be able to help them resist these temptations in the future and even build accountability around media use within the group. Your role is to encourage them to do good rather than correct them or be disappointed in them when they fall. However, you do need to use your authority to enforce the rules of the small group: respecting one another, allowing everyone the opportunity to share, and maintaining confidentiality with what is shared.

**6. Expect to be blessed.**

Don’t underestimate the impact you can have by simply taking a genuine interest in the lives of teenagers and their parents. The research overwhelmingly shows that the majority of adults active in their faith today had three key influencers in their adolescence: faith sharing in the home; relationships with other caring, faith-filled adults; and peer support. You will be blessed in these relationships and your generosity will have eternal significance!

*“Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand.”*

—Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 105