



Inclusive Youth Group Dynamics

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Centering (8)

Spiritual revival. Get comfortable. Close your eyes as you are willing.

Count down slowly from 10 to 0. With each number, take one complete breath, inhaling and exhaling. For example, breathe in deeply, saying "Ten, I am" to yourself. Breathe out slowly thinking "at peace." On your next breath, say "Nine, I am", "at peace" and so on. If you feel lightheaded, count down more slowly to space your breaths further apart. When you reach zero, scan your body and intentionally relax any areas which are tense or tight. Open your eyes.

Adolescent Development:

In order to create inclusive youth ministry, we have to understand the unique stage of life that is adolescence, and how it comes with its own transitions, challenges, amazing strengths, and culture.

Adolescence is marked by the transition between childhood and adulthood. At no other time in a person's life do they grow and change in more ways and in more dimensions than during this time.

There are four developmental perspectives I'm going to mention briefly during this section, and you can see them on your screen. You can also find a good summary of this information in the "Adolescent Development Guide" published by the American Psychological Association, which is referenced at the end of this presentation.

1. The first developmental perspective I'd like to note is COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT. COGNITION refers to the mechanisms that describe the way we think, reason, and learn. Cognitive development refers to the way in which our ways of understanding the world around us change as a correlation with age.

During adolescence, we gain the ability for higher level reasoning which includes the ability to see more than one perspective at a time. The image you see on the screen is called an "ambiguous figure" because it can be seen as two different pictures. It can be either two faces, or a vase – or maybe a Chalice for us UUs. Before adolescence, we can't see that the picture is two different things. During adolescence, we gain the ability to see two different perspectives and to reason more fully about those perspectives.



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As such, Adolescents LOVE to argue. This newfound reason is exciting and exhilarating, and debating politics and religion – even when it seems to be tangential – helps them to exercise their new critical thinking muscles.

Adults can be more inclusive to youth by making space for this kind of discussion where youth can use this new tool. Adults can also give guidance through thoughtful questioning and new information.

During adolescence, youth's newfound reasoning also leads to leadership and planning ability. The congregation is a prime community for youth to practice these new skills under the guidance of adults.

2. The second developmental perspective I'd like to mention is Emotional Development. Emotional Development in adolescence is tied to the task of identity development, which is central to this time. As we will see later when we discuss Faith Development, Identity is tied to both a sense of acceptance from peers as well as a budding sense of individualism.

As youth discover their identities, the degree to which those identities are regarded as positive by society will lead to positive emotions about self and others. Likewise, the degree to which those identities are regarded as negative by society will lead to negative emotions about self and others. Our UU communities are instrumental in creating spaces for healthy emotional development as we truly affirm a youth's growing and changing identity, especially if those identities are typically marginalized by society at large.

3. The third dimension I'd like to mention is Social Development. We already know that adolescents orient themselves more toward their peer groups during this time as they seek independence from their primary caregivers.

Our Unitarian Universalist congregations have an unbelievable opportunity to support youth development by providing affirming spaces for youth to explore their identities and the social roles associated with them.

4. The final dimension of adolescent development I'd like to mention is faith development.

We can make the generalization, even with individual differences, that youth are probably somewhere in or in-between Fowler's stage three and stage four. In Stage Three, OR the Synthetic Conventional Stage, our identity is tied to the groups we belong to. In Stage Four, we see a push back from this stage. In the Individuative-Reflexive stage, we see a greater emphasis placed on



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identity apart from the group as individuals seek to define themselves in terms of their uniqueness.

Both of these faith stages have a correlation to adolescence. Stage three speaks to our need for belonging and the turning toward a peer orientation where the affirmation of friends is very important. Likewise, stage four speaks to our need for defining our own identity and discovery about what those identities mean to the world.

Unitarian Universalist congregations have a very important and difficult role in providing support for individuals on the spectrum of this development. We can support individuals in stage three by creating group dynamics that foster belonging and inclusiveness. We can support individuals in stage four by affirming a youth's growing identity and supporting them in transformation.

Finally, just a word about the misconceptions of adolescent development. Popular culture often portrays adolescents as lazy, unmotivated, contrary, depressed, or downright mean. As a whole, no group of people could ever be painted with such broad strokes, and adolescents vary in their development on all measures as well as their expression of those measures. While we can talk about what "adolescents are like," we have to remember that they are individuals with many different characteristics that should be celebrated and nurtured. They are multidimensional and are often experiencing a lot of intersectionality, which rarely gets portrayed in media.

So now I'll turn it over to Larissa, who is going to talk about multiple learning styles.

Covenant (14)

To quote the UUA website: Covenant is the silk that joins Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations, communities, and individuals together in a web of interconnection. The practice of promising to walk together is the precious core of our creedless faith.

"Covenant" is both a noun and a verb. It can be a written agreement among individual community members promising



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to behave in certain ways, and it can mean to engage in mutual promises with Spirit, with other people and communities.

Covenant (15)

Bringing the Web to Life, Jennica Davis Hockett's amazing LD curriculum.

Brainstorm – usual mode

Scaffold – never or many times, time saver

Many to one – gives everyone a voice

Rules / Contract? No.

Covenant (16)

Aspirational. How we want to be with one another? How will we treat each other when we fall short of our aspirations?

1) 7 Principles Approach

2) 5 Jagged Rocks Approach

Unity that makes us one

All souls are sacred and worthy

Revelation continues to unfold

Salvation in this life

Courageous love transforms the world

Covenant (17)

3) Jennica's magic questions

How do I want to treat myself?

How do I want to treat others?

How will I communicate?

How do I want to treat my environment?

How will I live my Unitarian Universalist faith?



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How do I become a person that others can count on?
What sacrifices am I willing to make in the name of the good of the community?
How will I make amends? (Restorative!)

Creating Safety for Youth in Intergenerational Settings

1. Adult advisors of youth must recognize that there is a power differential in the relationship between youth and adults, and thus they must take primary responsibility for the relationship.

This looks like two actions:

First, this means taking the primary responsibility for setting healthy boundaries around relationships with youth. Adults would be wise to know that being in relationship with youth is not an excuse to relive their teen years or to be friends with youth. Because there is a power differential, it is not possible to be friends as equals. The power differential means that it is not always appropriate to share everything in an intergenerational setting, and learning what is fine to share and what is over-burdening our youth is a skill that must be practiced.

Second, the power differential in youth-adult relationship might make it difficult for youth to disagree with or contradict adults. We can learn to be advocates for adults by advocating for youth voices in intergenerational community and actively supporting youth in saying what they need to say.

It is also important to pay attention to group dynamics which might center privilege and create safe space or marginalized voices. In intergenerational communities, this might mean centering youth voices.

Honing and modeling good listening skills will also make space for youth voices and normalize a culture where adults step back and listen first and contribute second. As with all aspects of church life, in order to create safety in intergenerational community, adults must focus on their own spiritual and emotional development so that they can lead by example, model exercising good boundaries and listening skills with youth, and also model living in our Unitarian Universalist Covenant so that our youth have strong examples of adult UUs.

You can consult both the Youth Ministry Advising handbook and the Safe Congregations Manual for more specific information about creating safer congregations for people of all ages and in a multigenerational context. Now I'll turn it over to Larissa, who will talk about steps to community building.

Steps to Community Building (19)

Social connection is critical to youth group success.



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Denny Rydberg's Deep Fun (20)

Bonding

Opening Up

Affirming

Stretching

Deeper Sharing / Goal Setting

Bruce Tuckman (21)

Forming, Norming, Storming, Performing

Key concept: Models exist. Find the best one for your / your youth's personality. Within these models there are stages. Approach them in a quasi linear progression. Regularly re-set. Even for a bonded group, but especially when new faces arrive. Team building regularly integrated.

INCLUSIVITY

As Larissa said in her steps to community building, an important first step to fostering inclusivity is Dismantling Cliques. All people will naturally form groups of individuals that they have more in common with inside a larger group. In order to form one cohesive group, it is imperative to dismantle those cliques that may have formed and create one cohesive group. This includes breaking down the clique of last year's youth group in order to include newcomers.

The most common way to dismantle cliques is to offer common experiences. It is important to periodically offer a group a shared experience that allows the whole group to have a frame of reference that is commonly held.

As Unitarian Universalists, as (eric) mentioned before, we are a covenantal not a creedal faith. Creating covenants that focus on inclusivity rather than exclusion can be the benchmark of our communities.

And when we talk about creating and living into our covenants, what we are really talking about is creating explicit behavioral norms for a group. The norms we create can be intentionally inclusive by establishing what I like to call "One Assumption Communities. One Assumption Communities are groups where we agree to and actively strive toward making only ONE assumption at all times: that there are a variety and spectrum of identities in the room, including race, ethnicity, culture, religion, ability, gender and gender expression, sexual orientation, and intersectionality, and some of those identities will not be immediately visible.



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Setting this One Assumption as the standard for behavior is not only a profound spiritual practice for most youth and adults, but it also creates a behavioral norm that is intentionally inclusive and makes space for everyone.

As with all aspects of ministry with children and youth, adults in the relationship have the responsibility of teaching and modeling inclusive behavior. This means first doing your own work. We all hold assumptions that are automatic and sometimes subconscious. We have to uncover those and learn how we may treat people differently and not even know.

Second, it means practicing “active inclusion.” The One Assumption is a great place to start, but it can become a passive philosophy if it isn’t backed up by actions. Active inclusion means paying attention to systems operating in the room which may marginalize or exclude individuals and then acting in ways that dismantle those systems. It can be as simple as giving introverts time to think before speaking or inviting someone to give an opinion who has been quiet. It could also look like modifying physical activities so people who are not able to stand and move about can fully participate. It looks like monitoring group dynamics to ensure everyone is participating in the group to the extent that they feel comfortable.

Which brings me to group dynamics....



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GROUP DYNAMICS

Creating inclusive youth groups means paying attention to the dynamics of the group.

As I said earlier, this means noticing and breaking apart systems that marginalize individuals. Sometimes, the voices who are marginalized are the youth themselves. We can remedy this by (a) understanding that as an adult we have more power in the relationship, (b) taking an intentional step back when necessary and (c) centering youth voices and other marginalized voices. We can also use the “amplify” technique, also called “the repeater” to do this, wherein if a youth says something and is not acknowledged for having said it, we can immediately repeat it and give credit to the youth. This helps to center youth voices without putting the youth on the spot and making them feel uncomfortable.

We also talk a lot about living in covenant at faithful Unitarian Universalists. We spend a lot of time creating covenants that are inclusive and foster respect. Often, though, we don’t come up with concrete methods for calling each other back to covenant. I know we will take time later to talk more about this, so I’ll just mention now how creating the covenant is only half the work. It comes alive when we break it - which we inevitably will - and call each other back. One method for doing this is the “oops ouch” method, where a person who feels hurt says Ouch. It’s a simple expression that can say so much. Then the person who is being called back has the opportunity to say “oops” by way of apology, and then can modify their behavior moving forward. Adults can manage these moments and make sure everyone’s needs are being attended to. Adults can also model covenantal behavior and calling each other back for the group.

Finally, managing group dynamics means paying attention to the strengths, passions, and talents of the group and making sure the activities and lessons line up with them. When the group is engaged and everyone feels like there is some opportunity to talk about their passions and talents, then the group fosters feelings of affirmation and inclusivity.

Managing group dynamics requires the balcony view of the group. The view from the balcony allows us to see the entire dance going on on the dance floor, not just the pieces. Then we can see how all of the pieces - or relationships - fit together to create a larger picture. The balcony view helps us to manage group dynamics toward positive inclusivity.

And now - toward positive inclusivity - I’ll turn it over to Eric for a word on CONFLICT!

Conflict Transformation (25)



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Inevitably issues arise in community. How we approach those issues can define the success of our ministry. Respond, not react.

BAM

Essential Partners

Invite Stories (26)

Encourage opponents to reflect on and share something about themselves related to the issue. A vivid story about their lived experience. Helps break stereotypes and inspires curiosity, empathy, and understanding.

Invite the Heart (27)

Speak about deep and fundamental concerns and dreams related to dignity, security, and identity. Get at meaning, which an opponent can still understand.

Invite complexity (28)

Share about the intricacies of one's thoughts that are normally reduced to black / white or pro and con. Avoid labels. Discuss hopes and fears which unlock areas of inner conflict. This approach can open the dialogue to commonality where folks once saw difference.

Rabbi Harold Kushner: This is where I'm coming from, this is where that takes me, and this is where I'm going.

Restorative Model (30)

Embodies conflict transformation process discussed previously!



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https://docs.google.com/document/d/19-bYDnFuDv-mYHIs_IDS300cNiTcN2YBG91U6nQ7PXM/edit?usp=sharing

Facilitated

Centering exercise

3 rounds / No cross talk

Covenant:

- Respect the group, the process, and oneself
 - Speak in “I” statements and from a place of personal truth
 - Refrain from cross talk
 - Deeply listen
 - Honor privacy
 - And???
-
- Impartial process observer reports after each round
 - Sharing and deep listening
 - A Common Understanding
 - Takeaways
 - Example: Heated racial issue in a PWR youth community. Families threatening to withdraw. No dialogue. Hugs by the end. Still involved and in community / covenant with one another.