

Storytelling Strategies

1. Speak in Pictures. Try to see your story as a series of pictures or a mental movie. Describe it to your group. Paint scenes for your listeners describing details that stimulate their imagination (like old-time radio stories).

2. Share Feelings. Description of feelings will help stories come alive. These stir up feelings in listeners. How did you feel? How did your feelings change? How other feelings? Give yourself permission to re-experience those feelings. Describe them directly or by comparing them to common experiences. For example, “I felt like I had just flunked my driver’s test, or like I was going to the dentist.”

3. Use Non-Verbals. Use facial expressions to communicate your story, showing feelings – surprise, sadness, joy, disgust. Use your whole body, arms, legs. Move around to enliven and demonstrate the action. Bring listeners up to help make the action come alive.

4. Use Your Imagination. Imagine what others are thinking and feeling in order to broaden the story and to add color to the experience. For example, “the look on Sally’s face when I slammed my fingers in the car door said it all....” Feel free to exaggerate for the sake of the story, but not beyond belief.

5. Practice Your story. Decide how you will introduce the story, its main characters. How you will describe them, the development of the action, the climax, and the conclusion. Rehearse it in your mind. Write it out or outline it. Close the door and practice telling it out loud! Imagine your group, listening intently, laughing in the right places, and quieting down when you want them to. Ham it up when you practice. Have fun with it. All of these things will enliven your stories.

6. Just Tell the Story. Allow the story to speak for its self. No need to analyze it or impose your personal interpretation before you give listeners a chance to interpret it. Make some connections once the listeners have had time to reflect on the story’s meaning. For example, like your own story of being forgiven with a Scripture story of forgiveness. Give your group a single question to think about after your story. Let all reflect with quiet music playing, or in silence.

7. Listen to Experienced Storytellers. Learn from the masters, whether it’s a professional like Garrison Keillor or your Aunt Gladys who always attracts a crowd at holidays by telling some of the same old stories that everyone loves. Listen and watch carefully. See how they tell their stories. Try not to imitate them. Trust in your ability to learn by simply enjoying a good story. Reading good stories can also be helpful, but the oral story is usually better.

8.The Best Stories are Your Stories. Your own experiences may seem insignificant or boring, but they can be real gifts to struggling adolescents. Telling stories about our own adolescence make us vulnerable. We get in touch with feelings and experiences our listeners are living every day. Our adult struggles an issue is not all that different than the ones young people are working on.

Remembering Adolescence

To build trusting relationships with young people, we must get in touch with our own experiences of adolescence. The following reflections should stir up memories and feelings from your high school years. Your remembrances will likely generate a large number of stories.

1. What did you look like? Be honest describe the fashion of the day. How did you feel about appearance?
2. What was your family like? How did your parents shape your maturing? How did brothers and sisters affect you junior high or high school years?
3. Who was your best friend?
4. What was the most fun ever had in high school?
5. Describe your first date, your best date. Did you date in high school? How did you feel about the opposite sex – curious, nervous, scared, indifferent? Did you have any real friendships with the opposite (or complementary) sex?
6. What was your most embarrassing moment in adolescence?
7. What was the hardest part about “growing up”? Who helped you trough it? Who made it harder?
8. What is high school like? What were your favorite and least favorite classes? What sports, clubs, or activities did you get involved in?
9. What music was popular at that time? Who was your favorite group or singer? Why did you like their music?
10. What adult had the most impact on your personal growth?
11. How important was your Christian faith during adolescence?
12. What were your dreams about the future? Did you imagine yourself in our present occupation, single or married?

Storytelling Strategy 1

This storytelling process starts with a story from life experience and connects it with Jesus story. It can help young people focus on their life experience or reflects on their life experience with a story from the life of another, from contemporary music and video, from contemporary films, of from literature. A step-by-step approach to storytelling follows and begins with a story that can be related to the hearer’s experience:

1. Tell a story (or play the song, show the video, or show the film), and then select a story which will relate directly to the interests, concerns, and experiences of the hearers;

2. Give each group member a chance to share his or her feelings when the story ends;
3. Challenge each participant to get in touch with an experience that the story/film/song/video has recalled;
4. Invite each member of the group to share his or her story with others (in small groups, or in a larger group of eight or less);
5. Call participants to quiet reflection on the personal insights that have surfaced in this process;
6. Invite each learner now to recall something about Jesus, or another major figure in our religious tradition (part of his story, an experience from Jesus' life) that resonates with individual stories and gives meaning to them;
7. Ask learners to name or share the Jesus stories they recalled;
8. Challenge them to identify in their groups the religious meaning of this experience and encourage them to speak about how God has been active in their lives;
9. Discuss the implication of their religious insights for their lives and how they will now change or live differently.

Storytelling Strategy 2

This storytelling process does not presume that the young people are deeply familiar with the elements of Jesus' story. Thus, it starts with a story about him and then helps participants relate some of their personal life experiences to the Jesus event.

1. Tell a story about Jesus (through a Gospel passage, a song, a video, a storybook), then choose a story that will connect directly with the concerns, interests, and hopes of the hearers;
2. Give each group member a chance to share his or her feelings as the story concludes;
3. Challenge learners to name the character in the story with whom they most identified, and why;
4. Ask participants (again, these steps can occur in smaller groups, or in a larger group of eight or less) to share what significance they found in the story;
5. Encourage all to discuss the chief insights they gained about Jesus' mission and ministry;
6. Urge each participant to identify a life experience he or she has had that has been recalled through the Jesus story and, if desired, ask them to write their reflections on this life experience;
7. Invite all to share their personal experience;
8. Encourage them to name chief insights they have gained in linking personal experiences with the Jesus story;
9. Challenge all to reflect on and discuss the implication of these religious insights for their lives and how they will now change personal or live differently.