

FALL PLAYBOOK

For Catholic Youth Ministry

*project*YM

 Alpha

 YDISCIPLE

 NEXT
LEVEL

WELCOME

Welcome to another great Fall semester! This is definitely an odd time to be living, let alone doing ministry, but think about the incredible relationship opportunities this semester brings! We want you to be excited! We want you to feel pumped up, supported, and ready to have some fun!

This is your **Fall Playbook**. We got together in the Coach's Room and asked ourselves the question "If we were running youth ministry this fall, how would we do it?" And here you have it! All you have to do is answer this one question: **Can you meet in person or not?** Whether your answer is "yes" or "no", we have a plan for that!

The way this playbook works is you will go to the page either titled "In Person Gathering" or "Virtual Gathering". On that page, you will see a series of category boxes. In each box is a set of plays. This is your game sheet for the semester. Throughout the rest of the playbook, you'll find **written out plays, youth night sample schedules, and an appendix for tips and skills you need!**

As you go through the plays, you will see these symbols **IP** and **V**. This will tell you which meeting scenario it would best be suited for. There are also optional adjustments you can make if the play doesn't work exactly with your group.

While we don't have a separate guide for people who are doing an at home option, we've indicated with a **AH** on the plays which ones would work well there too. We want you to have as many wins as possible this year!

The Fall Playbook will give you the opportunity to reconnect with your teens and their families. **Your goal for this semester should be to get to know them again.** Since you all have been apart, your teens haven't pushed "pause" on their relationship with Jesus. Or with you. You all need a chance to reconnect, get to know each other again.

Have fun with this! Use this season as an opportunity to push innovation, create new methods of engaging your current students and reach new students that wouldn't even set foot in your youth room.

Enjoy this year and let's kick it off right!

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1

PRAYER WARRIORS

Gather with your volunteers and spend time in prayer. Pray for your teens, their families, your community, and each other. Pray for the teens that have been involved, those that aren't around anymore, and those you haven't met yet.

Ask God to show you the right direction for your ministry for the fall. Thank Him for all the blessings He's given your ministry. Lift up all the struggles that this new way of doing ministry brings. Pray that you may decrease so that He may increase.

Ask everyone you know to pray for you, your community, and your teens. You can never have too many intercessors!

PREPARE

IP

V

AH

2

VOLUNTEER MEETING

Meet with your volunteers to pray together and talk about the mission and vision for your ministry. Understand that what you used to do is most likely not going work this fall.

Take the **Group Inventory** from the Appendix together and evaluate where your group is at spiritually, physically, and mentally.

Clearly communicate the plan and the roles that your volunteers have. Finish the meeting off with some good time in prayer together - plan for 10-15 minutes.

Get ready to have an awesome fall!

PREPARE

IP

V

AH

3

MAKE IT SPECIAL

Social distancing is going to be really hard for most people. God made us people that love to be close with people we have a close relationship with. That's especially true for our teens. They want to hug each other, roughhouse, squeeze as many people on a couch as they can. It's going to be awkward for them. Think middle school dance where everyone stands around on the wall. So, what can you do when you have to social distance and still feel welcoming?

Try something like glamming up the youth room! Focus on atmosphere. Think lighting - string lights, colored light bulbs, wall decor, centerpieces on the tables, welcoming music.

Create special spaces for the youth. You can call them "dugouts" or whatever other cool name you can come up with. Look at **Play #6 CUSTOM DUGOUTS** to see how to do this.

Create a running game or running gag for the fall. Hide Waldo somewhere around the room, or a cutout of your pastor. Make it a challenge that they look forward to each time they come.

PREPARE

IP

4

THEME NIGHTS

The teens are burned out on virtual things. Most of them are virtually learning for school. They associate Zoom calls and Google Meets with school teachers. It's your job to set this apart and make it special. It's going to be awkward for them and for you. It'll be especially challenging to get them talking. Here are some ideas to engage them in conversation with you and each other.

Be silly.
Be creative.
Be funny.

Have the teens dress up a certain way.
Host a "black tie" night or Oscars night.
Do a beach theme or western day.

Whatever it is, YOU go all out. Wear funny hats, face paint, crazy outfits.

If you are bored and boring, your teens will be bored.

PREPARE

V

AH

5

SEND INVITATIONS

Make this a big deal! Send out personal invitations in the mail. Blow up your social media accounts. The more you are excited and your volunteers are excited about it, the more your teens will be excited about it! Some ideas are:

Hand drawn cards.

The silliest “you’re invited” party invitations.

Origami cranes or other animals.

If you’re allowed to by your diocese, send a Marco Polo to your teens and invite them to come!

Drive around to each house and flock them with the invitation written on the flamingos!

Custom made fortune cookies - “September 7th is going to be the best night of your life!”

Send invitations to all the teens registered at your parish, not just the ones who used to come! You can still grow your ministry during this time. Reach out to as many people as you can!

PREPARE

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6

CUSTOM DUGOUTS

During this time where you are supposed to make sure everyone is 6 feet away from each other, it can feel very cold, isolated, and lame. But you can think outside the box and let them create their own room away from their room with

CUSTOM DUGOUTS!

Tape off 4x4 squares on the floor and invite the teens to customize them. They can bring a throw ruG, bean bag, decorative lamps, fun things like that.

If you don't have a dedicated youth space, tell your teens to create a “dugout bag”. Give them suggestions like a large blanket, pillows, bean bag chair, anything that makes their space feel special and comfortable.

PREPARE

IP

7

USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Take advantage of your need to be digital. Use social media to engage with them outside of your weekly gathering. If your church or youth group doesn't have an Instagram account, go create one. Most diocese have the policy that says you can't use your personal social media accounts to interact, but you can have a group page or ministry account. You actually have the ability to stay in touch with your teens more than just once a week! Try these things:

Create weekly challenges: Keep the conversation going. Create challenges like "go find 3 new places to pray this week and post a picture of where you are with **#STYGprayerchallenge**. (Use your own parish or youth group name in the hashtag). The challenges can be silly, get-to-know-you kind of posts, and faith based. Get your teens involved and ask them for questions for the challenges!

Use stories to communicate: It's really easy to record a 30 second Instagram story to check in, tell a personal Jesus moment, share life.

Connect with the parents on social media: Most parents are on Facebook and Instagram. Tag them in posts. Interact with them, get conversation going. This is especially important for your teens that don't have their own phones and social media accounts.

PREPARE

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8

PRACTICE LISTENING

A good rule of thumb is to strive for the **80/20 Rule**: Youth should be talking 80% of the small group and you should be talking 20% of the time. Notice we said, *strive*. It is rare for this to be the case in your first small group meeting, but it is a good goal. It is also important to note that the goal is not 99/1. Your insight and truth you have to share are invaluable. They are necessary. A small group leader is not just a passive "Question Asker."

There is a well-worn adage, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," and one of the best ways to demonstrate this care is by active listening.

Go to the Appendix **BE A GOOD LISTENER** to learn or refresh yourself on how to be a good listener. These tips may seem simple, even too simple, but being intentional about implementing them can make the world of difference to a teenager.

PREPARE

IP

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9

BYOF

Families always share a meal. Some of the best stories are shared over food. Just because your church may not be allowing outside food for everyone right now, you can still promote a feeling of hospitality by telling them to bring their own meal! Set a theme for the night - Italian, fast food, sandwiches, all the food starts with a particular letter of the alphabet. Be creative and think outside the box.

Share a virtual meal: Your focus this semester is on community and hospitality. Sharing a meal is sharing a meal. Or a snack. Or a favorite beverage. This sparks some great conversation about favorite foods and drinks. Themes can work great here too. Shoot for things that are more general and add in snack categories - bring your favorite chips, candy, side dish, vegetable, weirdest food item you keep in the house. You can also drop off care packages with your teens' favorite candy and drinks or have pizza delivered to their house!

Also, by encouraging them to have food and drink with them, it gives them the chance to have something else to focus on besides the camera. It takes away some of the awkwardness of just sitting there and staring at each other. Do a Chopped kind of night where you drop off a box of ingredients and instructions at each house. Make it online together and everyone eat together.

SMALL GROUPS

IP

V

AH

10

TALK ABOUT LIFE

Don't just jump into small group discussion questions.

Let your teens talk. They will literally talk about anything as long as you show interest.

And don't forget to share about your life too! Be prepared to answer whatever questions you are asking them about their lives - likes, dislikes, current happenings, etc.

Remember that your focus is **relational ministry**.

SMALL GROUPS

IP

V

AH

11

REAL CONVERSATIONS

Your teens have been dealing with a pandemic for the last 6 months. They may not be as solid in their faith as they were back in February.

They may have questions.

They may have doubt.

Let them lead the conversation. Steer it back when it gets too far off track or becomes disrespectful, but allow them to share what's on their hearts.

You may not get to the small group discussion questions, or even the video content for the night and **that's ok!** We all have those nights where we just need to talk, be supported, let off steam, or just hang out.

You need to share honestly too. It doesn't help them if you aren't your authentic self.

CULTURE

IP

V

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RELATIONSHIPS OVER CONTENT

This may not be popular opinion, but you shouldn't be worrying about making sure they get formation or learning Church history or things like that. Give yourself permission to take this fall and rebuild relationships with your teens. If you don't get to content every week or at all because they just want to talk or need an outlet to be goofy, give it to them. Your teens are going to be mentally exhausted and just over virtual schooling and the pandemic. They will need a place to escape to and blow off steam. They want to talk to other people besides the people they live with. If all you do is worry about forcing content, you'll lose them.

This goes the same for your volunteers and your parents.

Yes, you do need to train your volunteers and help them develop the skills you need them to have, but also, you need to connect with them as people. Burnout is a real thing and once you lose a volunteer to burnout, getting them back is almost never going to happen.

Your regular communication with your parents should not just be passing on information or something they need to read to learn. It's just as important to build strong, trusting relationships with the parents in your ministry as your teens.

Check in with them, give them a phone call or text once a week.

CULTURE

IP

V

AH

13

GO OUTSIDE

This is a pretty self-explanatory play, but go outside! If your church campus has an outside seating space, meet there! If you don't, look at your budget or talk to your pastor about using money from the groundskeeping budget to make a little outdoor oasis.

Being outside makes having to social distance much less awkward. Those who want to sit can sit and chat, those more active people can get up and run around and play games and sports with each other.

Take advantage of the end of the summer and beginning of the fall, if you live in a place that freezes and snows during the winter.

Some easy outside ideas are:

1. Bring your own s'mores ingredients
2. Soccer
3. Human foosball - find it on Pinterest. It's easy to make with PVC pipe
4. Corn hole - spray the beanbags with disinfectant in between sets of people playing, if you'd feel better doing that.
5. Draw, paint, sculpt - nature is the best inspiration for art.

CULTURE

IP

14

MEET WEEKLY

Your teens need youth ministry. Sending them the videos to watch at home alone is not youth ministry. **They need to see you, and the other trusted adult volunteers in their lives.**

No matter how you have to do ministry this year, take this as an exciting opportunity to create a culture of weekly small groups. Let the groups get to know each other, spend time talking with each other, building trust and community.

Don't do content. If the time comes later when a group asks to go deeper, that's so awesome. Guide them through prayer experiences, create small group questions that invite deeper conversation. If a small group approaches you and asks to do a bible study or a book study, let them! Just let the students get what they need from the small group.

SMALL GROUPS

V

AH

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PARENT/VOLUNTEER SMALL GROUPS

These vital members of your ministry need guidance, accompaniment, and fellowship too. It's up to you if you want to lead these or discern who from the parents and volunteers groups the Holy Spirit wants to empower.

Steer away from training and professional development in your volunteer small groups. Their small group should involve prayer and discussion like your teen small groups.

Same goes for your parents. Find 6-8 moms and 6-8 dads that are interested in being in a small group. Don't give up on the idea if you not every parent in your ministry wants to be in a small group. The idea is to start small - just 1 dad group and 1 mom group. The awesomeness of it will spread by word of mouth and you will get requests for more group to start.

Start off the semester with questions like:

"How's your relationship with God right now?"

"What has your prayer life looked like lately?"

"What are good things that are going on in your life right now?"

"What are the struggles you are dealing with right now?"

"What would you like to get out of being in a small group this year?"

SMALL GROUPS

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DAY/TIME OPTIONS

It's better to let people join small group that meets at a time that they're available, rather than ask them to try to move their schedules around and meet when you can.

Offer a variety of times and days - 7:00 am Tuesdays, 4:00 pm Mondays, 6:30 pm Fridays, etc - so that there's something for everyone.

Keep it consistent. Changing the day or time every week starts to get confusing and people won't know when to come. If you have to make a change because the majority of the group can't make it - ie finals, holidays - communicate the new date and time right away.

SMALL GROUPS

IP

V

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17

PERSONAL INVITATIONS

Personally ask potential adult leaders.

Putting out a blanket ask of “if anyone wants to be a small group leader, let me know!” doesn’t work.

Personally invite adults that you think would be good SGL and ask them. Tell them about the qualities you see in them that make them a good SGL and that you would love to have them on your team.

Or even better, ask your existing volunteers to go ask someone they think that would be a good SGL. Help them with their ask. They should share what being a small group leader has been like, why they have said “yes” to this call, and why they think this person would be a good fit for the team.

This is going to be a weird time to be a small group leader and a volunteer, especially if you can't meet in person right now. When you are inviting new people, be upfront with them about it. And be clear that their role is to develop relationships with the teens because that’s what you need in your ministry right now.

SMALL GROUPS

IP

V

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18

FORMING GROUPS

Let friends be with friends.

This is not a class project where the teacher tries to pair up complementary skill sets and intelligence.

This is a small group of teens that are going to do life together, accompany each other on their faith journey, experience Christ together, and be vulnerable together. Let them be with whom they are comfortable with.

If there’s a toxic situation or relationship, then break that up, but you don't have to keep best friends or friend groups apart.

Stick to same gender and grade groups. If you have a smaller group, grouping by middle school and high school boy and girl groups work fine too.

If you have teens in your group that don't have their own devices and need to use a parent’s device, plan around that. Have groups that meet when it's convenient for the parents too, so stay away from middle of the work day meeting times.

Creating small groups with mixed platforms - some *in person* teens and some teens who are *virtual* - won't work. The bonds will strengthen more between the ones who can be together and the teens who have to dial in won't feel like they are part of the group. If you have teens that switch how they can meet during the semester, let them continue to meet with their small group they way they were - virtually or in person.

SMALL GROUPS

IP

V

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USE TEXTING

Use the chat function of your meeting platform.

To start a conversation, put a “would you rather” question in the chat. Or a link to a funny meme, YouTube video, or appropriate Reddit subthread to get conversation started.

Most likely, your teens have to sit in on Zoom calls for school most of the day. They sit there and listen to the teacher talk, so when it’s time to get on with you, they will sit there and wait for you to talk. Give them the option to talk, text, or both!

While you’re checking in with them, ask a question in the chat. Participate in both vocal conversation and the chat at the same time.

Have them all turn on the captions as well. You’d be surprised at some of the hilarious things that the captions think you said.

***Make sure what you stay within the guidelines of your parish and diocese for social media and internet use.*

SMALL GROUPS

V

AH

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SEND CARE PACKAGES

Once a month, or a semester, depending on your budget, put together care packages for the teens in your group that you have to meet with virtually. Include things like their favorite snack or treat, something that reminds you of them, maybe a prayer card, Saint medal, or cool rosary, and a wacky kind of gag gift you can pick up at the Dollar Store. This doesn't have to be expensive. It's the extra time and thought you put into it that will mean a lot to your teens and feel like you are making an effort and care about them.

Item suggestions:

M&Ms

Takis

Cheetos

Smelly playdoh or silly putty

Sticky hands

Plastic dinosaurs

Funny Hat

Anything that represents an inside joke

2 cents

Dollar flipflops

SMALL GROUPS

V

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ALPHA YOUTH

The Alpha Youth Series is designed to engage students in conversations about life, faith and Jesus. Discussion time is interspersed throughout the short talks to make it simpler for them to share their thoughts and questions. The talks are designed to engage and inspire conversation. Each talk is around thirty minutes long and played as a video. They explore the big issues of faith and unpack the basics of Christianity, addressing questions like: *Who is Jesus? How can we have faith? Why and how do I pray? How does God guide us?*

One of the most important parts of any youth gathering – the chance to share thoughts and ideas on the topic, and discuss in a small group. There’s no obligation to say anything and there’s nothing you can’t say. It’s an opportunity to hear from others and contribute your own perspective in an honest, friendly and open environment.

Alpha comes with everything you need to get started:

- Downloadable videos
- Leader training
- Team guide
- Context specific tips and tools.

GET YOUR FREE ALPHA CONTENT AND TRAINING RESOURCES:

[PROYM.COM/ALPHA](https://proym.com/alpha)

CONTENT

IP

V

AH

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YDISCIPLINE

“The Invitation” is YDisciple’s foundational series on Discipleship, designed to help Catholic teenagers in small groups wrestle with important questions like:

- *What does it mean to follow Jesus?*
- *What is the Gospel?*
- *Why do I need community?*

This 4-part series is intended to be first study completed by every small group before they move on to deeper content such as **Never Alone: Life with the Holy Spirit**.

“The Invitation” resource comes with:

- 4 video sessions
- Corresponding Leader Guides for middle school and high school*
- Participant Guides for each session
- Parent Sheets in English and Spanish
- Access to streaming of Introduction to YDisciple training videos for leaders

GET YOUR FREE YDISCIPLINE CONTENT AND TRAINING RESOURCES:

[PROYM.COM/YDISCIPLINE](https://proym.com/ydisciple)

CONTENT

IP

V

AH

23

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Meet monthly with your volunteers. If you didn't do that on a regular basis before, start now. You are all learning how to do ministry together in this new kind of world. Meet to train, form, fellowship, and pray together.

There are great volunteer training resources available through ProjectYM, Alpha, and YDisciple. Send the resources out ahead of time and have them come ready to process together. Here's an example of the a volunteer meeting night, whether you are virtual or in person.

- 6:00 Gather and eat together (BYOF)
Catch up with each other on your week, your highs/lows, funny stories, etc.
- 6:20 Discuss the Last Month
Share wins, needs, concerns from over the last month
- 6:50 Process the Training
Spend time talking about the training session you watched earlier that month - encourage open and honest discussion.
- 7:10 Information and News
- 7:15 Prayer
- 7:30 Close

VOLUNTEERS

IP

V

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TRAINING AND FORMATION

Your volunteers still need formation! In addition to offering them a small group, use the volunteer training resources from Alpha, ProjectYM, and YDisciple.

Take the time to find out where your group spiritually is at. This is a great time to find different prayer practices. Look at the book "Reimagining the Ignatian Examen" by Fr. Mark Thibodeaux. There's also an app for it. Introduce your volunteers to different litanies, such as Litany of Trust, Litany of the Holy Spirit, Litany of Humility.

Even if you have to meet virtually and it seems weird, still take the time to pray! You'll all get used to it soon.

GET FREE TRAINING CONTENT:

[PROYM.COM/TRAINING](https://proym.com/training)

VOLUNTEERS

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CREATE NEW POSITIONS

You aren't going to need all of the same volunteer positions that you used to, and you may find you need volunteers for things you never thought of! Look at what your ministry is doing to decide what you need and what you don't need. Instead of trying to add onto an existing volunteer position, create a new one. This will also help you reduce the chance of burnout among your volunteers. Some new positions could be:

- Care package shopper
- Treat deliverer
- Meme creator
- Room Sanitizer
- Supply sanitizer
- "Dugout" marker
- Outdoor monitor (If you're meeting outdoors, you'll need extra eyes to watch for wanderers) This is a great position for the volunteers who want to volunteer, but don't really feel comfortable interacting with teens.

VOLUNTEERS

IP

V

26

EXPECT TURNOVER

You're probably going to lose people.

There will be volunteers who just hate virtual meetings, aren't really needed because you can't offer food, so they don't have anything to set up and put away, or even are just so overwhelmed themselves with the changes that have happened in their lives, that they can't commit anymore.

And that's ok.

Tell them you'll pray for them.

Offer to let them come back if they want to in the future.

Ask what you can do to help them.

Stay in touch with the ones that want to.

But most importantly, **don't take it personally!** This won't be about you. Continue to pray for God to send you the people you and your teens need. He's got you.

VOLUNTEERS

IP

V

27

DO THE EXTRA

This is especially for the people that have to meet virtually. It's hard to foster community and tight relationships when you can't meet in person.

What you do for your teens, do for your volunteers. Drop them a handwritten note of affirmation, love, and thanks.

Send them a \$5 Starbucks gift card right from your phone. Yes, you can do that now. It's super easy.

Make the effort to stay in touch with them at least once a week.

Make them feel like they are part of the team regardless of how you can meet.

VOLUNTEERS

V



28

AFFIRMATION

Trying to figure out how to juggle life online has been and is a challenge for many parents, especially when they have multiple children.

They may be struggling right now with feeling like they are dropping the ball or worried that they will drop the ball and screw up their kid's entire year.

Stay away from the guilt trip. Offer your resources to them, but stay away from *due dates* and *deadlines*.

Check in with the parents weekly. Offer your love and support. Do things like:

- Send birthday, anniversary, congratulations cards
- Drop off a meal during a challenging time, tragedy, or if in need
- Send a quick text asking how you can pray for them
- Send off a handwritten card

PARENTS

IP

V

AH

29

BE AN ALLY

Your job is not to get the teens to chose *you* over their parents, it's not going to happen, in most cases. Rather, it's your job to walk with the parents and encourage them as they walk alongside their teen on their faith journey. The key to doing that effectively is build real relationships based on trust and love with the parents.

Here's some ideas on how to do this:

- Get to know the family - meet the family members, talk with the parents/caregivers about special things you should know, things that make their family unique, likes and dislikes, etc.
- Ask what you can do to support them - you may get a lot of "I don't even know"s at first because you caught them off guard. But the more you are actively engaged in relationship with them, the easier it will be for the parents to answer that question
- Listen - this is an important one. Most of us are problem solvers, but that's not what people need most of the time. They need to feel heard, listened to. It's ok to say "I hear what you are saying and I need some time to think about it". Or even something like "I'm really sorry, that does suck."

PARENTS

IP

V

AH

30

MONTHLY PARENT MEETING

This is not the same as your parent small groups. This is your monthly parent meeting to check in, promote community and fellowship, even virtually, pass on information, and pray together.

Remember your goal is to build relationships. Your parent meetings should break down something like this:

30% Hospitality

30% Fellowship

10% informational

30% Prayer

Tell them to BYOF and beverages. Give them time to get to know each other. Play games! Teens aren't the only ones that like to get silly.

PARENTS

IP

V

AH

31

EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE

Up your communication game with your parents when you are doing virtual or at home ministry. Make sure they also have the meeting links, know important dates, and what they need to do.

Be extra intentional about communicating *in advance*. It's not as easy to rearrange lives and commitments like it used to be.

Create a Google Voice number that you can be reached at if you are not working at your office and you can't/don't want to give out your cell number. You can also send and receive texts from that number.

If you don't have one already, create a response policy and communicate that policy - *"I will respond to all emails within 24 hours and texts within an hour."* Or whatever is appropriate to you and your ministry.

Effectively communicate your boundaries. When are you available, when are you not, etc.

PARENTS

V

AH

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USE SCREEN GAMES

Events are going to look very different this year. We usually base our success off of our numbers, but with the current situation, gathering in large numbers, overnight events, and other events we used to do is not a good idea. We just have to be creative this semester!

As part of this Fall Playbook, you get 5 free screen games you can use in any kind of situation. The games are fun, simple, and require little to no supplies. Use the coupon code **FALLPLAYBOOK** at projectymgames.com and pick your games!

These are some of the games are really good for **both** middle school and high school:

- Sequenced
- Spellcheck
- You Sang Doo Doo
- Monkey Snake Dragon See
- Is it a Fish?
- Doodle Roulette
- Grammed
- One vs Many
- Onomatopoeia

There are many, many more! Check out the whole store!

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INDIVIDUAL GAMES

There are quite a few games that individuals can play either in person or on zoom. If you are meeting virtually, create a game supply box that you bring to each family that contains all the items they need to be able to play the game.

These are just a few ideas. Create more yourself or look them up online:

- M&M Machine
- Post-it Note Face
- Sugar Packet Catch
- Balloon Antlers

**The directions for these games are in the Appendix

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ALPHA TIME AWAY

One of the best parts of the year is the retreat. Everyone gets to take a break, get away, focus on fun, relationships, community, and the Holy Spirit.

You may be able to gather and go away on a retreat, you may not be able to. Regardless of what your meeting situation is, use **Alpha Time Away**. Time Away focuses on fun, relationships, and prayer.

Alpha Time Away works just as well in person as it does as a virtual retreat. The resource includes training resources for your leaders, video talks, discussion questions, guides for your leaders.

If you're worried that it won't be relevant to where your group is at, stop worrying about that! The talk sessions and questions are designed to get conversation flowing wherever the participants are currently coming from. Your teens will definitely get something out of it, and you may too!

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OUTSIDE EVENTS

Being outside is great to invite families together and be in a more relaxed atmosphere. It's not as awkward to be sitting in a big room 6 feet apart from each other.

Here are some ideas for an outdoor kickoff or summer bash:

- Host a "drive in movie" in a field where each family brings a blanket as their "car".
- Host a massive water gun fight to kick off your school year or welcome in the summer.
- If you have money in the budget for it, buy some sets of laser tag and have a game night.

For more details and ideas for outdoor gatherings, see **Play 13**.

EVENTS

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SHORTEN YOUTH NIGHT

You know yourself it's hard to sit still for a long period of time.

Your youth nights in the past have been able to be 2 hours or so because you're doing different things - socializing, eating, playing games, moving around, interacting with each other.

Consider shortening youth night to an hour. Invite them another night during the week to virtually meet again for a fun "event" or activity. If that's still too long, adjust it so that you are meeting the needs and the attention span of your youth but don't go less than 45 minutes.

EVENTS

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HOST WATCH PARTIES

Host Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon watch parties!

Each site walks you through how to do it, all you have to do is set it up! This is a great way to promote family time.

Make sure they are age and content appropriate movies. Be sure to check what your parish guidelines are for allowed ratings.

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BALLOON ANTLERS

Items needed per student:

- 1 pack of balloons
- 1 pair of nylons, any hue

How to play:

Give each student a pack of balloons and a pair of pantyhose. Have everyone put the pantyhose on their heads. When you say "GO", everyone rips open their bag of balloons and starts blowing them up one at a time. Stuff the balloons into the pantyhose on your head, creating "antlers", as they get bigger and bigger.

2 ways you can play:

- Have a time keeper and see who's antlers are the biggest when time's up
- Whomever finishes their pack of balloons first, wins!

GAMES

IP

V

AH

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SUGAR PATCH CATCH

Items needed per student:

- 1 baseball hat
- 2 sugar packets
- 2 pieces of string

How to play:

Each teen will tape 1 piece of string to 1 sugar packet. Then tape the strings to either side of the baseball hat brim. The goal of this game is to flip both sugar packets up to land on top of the brim of the hat. First player to do that, wins!

Alternatives:

You can use anything that is in a packet - ketchup, mustard, salt. You can even try coffee pods. The harder the item, the more points!

GAMES

IP

V

AH

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M&M MACHINE

Items needed per student:

- 1 bag of plain M&Ms
- 1 pencil with flat sides - like your old school yellow #2 pencil
- 1 yard of twine

How to play:

Cut the yard of twine into 2 equal pieces. Tie the twine onto the ends of the pencil. Line up 3 M&Ms on the pencil, hook the twine around your ears, and pull the pencil up to your face to eat the M&Ms. If they fall off, start over!

Ways to play:

- The first one to eat all 3 M&Ms wins!
- The first one to eat the whole bag of M&Ms wins!
- The first one to eat a predetermined amount of M&Ms wins!

GAMES

IP

V

AH

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POST-IT NOTE FACE

Items needed per student:

- 1-5 packs of Post-It Notes, depending on size of stack

How to play:

Set a timer. At "GO!", everyone puts Post-It Notes one at a time on their faces.

Ways to play:

- First one to run out of Post-Its wins!
- Player with the most Post-Its on their face at the end of time wins!

GAMES

IP

V

AH

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ONLINE BOARD GAMES

Online gaming is a big thing even when there's *not* a pandemic going on. Teens are talking and playing games with others from every where. This is a fantastic time and new way to evangelize and reach teens you haven't before!

Play games online with each other on sites like boardgamearena.com and jackboxgames.com. Encourage them to invite their friends to virtual game night. It can be anyone, even friends that never have come to anything before.

GAMES

V

AH

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MICRO CONTENT

This Fall, we really want your main focus to be on conversations and relationships. One of the ways to do that is by focusing the bulk of your youth nights on providing opportunities for discussion.

To accomplish that, we suggest using a short, 3-5 minute video as part of a "30 Minute Youth Night" (A3).

Though you can download free videos at the link below, you can also enlist your volunteers and teen leaders to create their own micro content videos as well!

GET YOUR FREE MICRO CONTENT VIDEOS:

PROYM.COM/VIDEOS

CONTENT

V

A1

SCHEDULE: IN-PERSON YOUTH NIGHT

- 6:00 - Doors open/check in
- 6:30 - Welcome!
- 6:35 - Set up spaces and small groups
- 6:30 - Talk and eat with small group
- 7:00 - Game Time: Screen Games or Individual Games
- 7:20 - Video content if desired
- 7:40 - Conversation in small groups
- 7:55 - Prayer
- 8:00 - End of night

APPENDIX

IP

A2

SCHEDULE: VIRTUAL YOUTH NIGHT

- 6:30 - Virtual rooms opens!
- 6:35 - Conversation starting questions/eat
- 6:45 - Game: Screen Game or Individual Games
- 6:55 - Video content if desired
- 7:15 - Conversation in small groups
- 7:25 - Prayer
- 7:30 - End of night

APPENDIX

V

A3

SCHEDULE: 30 MINUTE YOUTH NIGHT

- 7:00 - Check In
- 7:10 - Micro Content Video
- 7:15 - Discussion
- 7:25 - Prayer
- 7:30 - Closing Challenge

APPENDIX

IP

V

A4

GROUP INVENTORY

Take time with your volunteer team, virtually or in person, and discern where your group is at mentally, spiritually, and physically over this next semester. Discuss the questions below:

1. How are we meeting this year?
2. Where did we end last year?
3. Have we been actively engaging our teens over the last summer? The last 6 months?
4. How are we (the adult team) spiritually feeling right now?
5. How are our teens spiritually feeling this year?
6. Are there any special circumstances, big events, or changes we need to accommodate for?
7. Where do we need to ask the Holy Spirit to move in our ministry this year?
8. What does God want for our ministry this year?
9. What do our teens need from us this year?
10. What do we need from God to help us have a successful fall semester? Year?
11. What kind of content does our group need most this year?
12. What kind of content track are we going to do this year?
13. How can we best support the families?
14. How does the adult (core/volunteer) team need to be supported this year?
15. How can the team support the youth minister this year?

APPENDIX

A4 TIPS

Best Practices for Adapting YDisciple for Middle School:

Take it slow.

To better suit middle schoolers' attention span, leaders are splitting each YD session in two. For example, instead of covering Session 1 of a particular video series in one week, leaders spread it out over two weeks. Or, you can choose just one or two scenes from the videos to show each week, instead of the whole lesson.

Stick to the concrete.

Adapt the reflection and discussion questions to be more concrete than abstract. 7th graders are just starting to use abstract thinking, and are more likely to learn from and maintain steady discussion on topics and examples that are present in their lives.

A4

Make it personal.

Take time before any content or discussion to check-in concerning their personal lives. Make it a regular practice to share highs and lows since the last gathering. Middle schoolers are developing a need for peer approval and giving them this opportunity to be open and vulnerable helps them grow in self-awareness.

Guide them in expressing their faith.

Learning to talk about faith is a skill. Help them hone this skill by asking consistent questions every week aimed at recognizing and articulating encounters with God. For example: "Where did you see God in your life this week?"

Add more activity.

Doing an activity in the middle of a meeting can help burn energy and refocus students. Additionally, if you complete a full YDisciple study, don't move into the next one immediately. Take a break the next week break to do a different sort of activity together, such as a service project or social event. For ideas, you can check out our library of one-off activity sessions.

A5 TIPS

4 Foundational Values OF ALPHA

Alpha has the most impact when these four foundational values are woven into the very fabric of the course, influencing the way it is run and shaping the experience of the guests. In this article, we'll explain each value and highlight its importance to create a meaningful Alpha experience. The Four Foundational Values are also explained in depth in the team training sessions.

Be Real

Our first value at Alpha is being real. Being real refers to two things: being real ourselves and presenting the real message of Jesus. First, let's look at being real ourselves. More than ever our culture is searching for authenticity. People are looking for:

Real love. Real hope. Real vulnerability. And real friends.

On Alpha, this all starts with your team being themselves. Every week the Alpha talks present different elements of the Christian faith and then during small group time, people share with one another. When the small group hosts open up about their joys and struggles, doubts and fears, they model authenticity and give other people in the group the opportunity to follow their example.

APPENDIX

IP

V

A5

People may admire confidence and strength, but they connect deeply around openness and honesty. Being vulnerable can lower their defenses and give them permission to share freely about where they're at—both in life and in their relationship with God. Often this is how genuine friendships are formed on Alpha which leads us to our next value, being relational.

Be Relational

The most effective Alphas are always built on genuine friendships. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Saint Paul writes to people in Thessalonica, "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well."

Saint Paul didn't just share a meal and a message with these people. He opened up his heart to them, leading to caring, long-standing relationships with the church. In a similar manner, as small group hosts open up their hearts and lives to their groups, deep and genuine friendships are formed.

It's been said that "Alpha is designed to fail unless God shows up!" This reflects our third foundational value at Alpha — reliance on the Holy Spirit.

APPENDIX

A5 TIPS

Rely on the Holy Spirit

There are two key areas in Alpha where relying on the Holy Spirit is crucial. The first is during the prayer ministry times on the Alpha weekend (or day away) and after the session on healing. As people are prayed for during these sessions, we ask God to touch them with His love and power, and we trust in His perfect timing to move in their lives.

The second scenario is week to week in the small group discussion times. One distinctive of an Alpha small group is that we allow guests to disagree and encourage hosts not to correct them. This demonstrates that the host values the guests' contributions without being dismissive, even if the host disagrees with their viewpoint. It gives the host the opportunity to depend on the Holy Spirit to be the one to change hearts rather than relying on their own persuasiveness.

In the letter 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, Saint Paul wrote these words:

"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power."

Our hope and prayer at Alpha is that when people come to faith, their newfound belief would rest on God's power, not just on persuasive words or human wisdom. Thankfully, God uses imperfect people to be a part of what He is doing!

APPENDIX

IP

V

A5

Reproduce by Empowering Others

One of the common concerns that church leaders express is that there are rarely enough lay leaders to do the work of ministry. Churches struggle at times to develop new leaders for their various projects and new initiatives. This is a valid concern and a big challenge which the last foundational value at Alpha addresses—to develop and reproduce leaders.

As you run Alpha on a continuous basis as part of your church's DNA, momentum builds up over time. More and more people are included and empowered along the way. Leaders are developed and reproduced who then serve the church and impact the world—all as friends continue to invite friends to encounter the love of Jesus.

Be real.

Be relational.

Rely on the Holy Spirit.

Reproduce by empowering others.

When churches embrace the values at the heart of Alpha, there is a shift in church culture and slowly, these values become reflected in other areas of ministry—authentic relationships, welcoming communities, leadership development.

APPENDIX

A6

BE A GOOD LISTENER

A good rule of thumb is to strive for the 80/20 Rule: Youth should be talking 80% of the small group and you should be talking 20% of the time. Notice we said, strive. It is rare for this to be the case in your first small group meeting, but it is a good goal. It is also important to note that the goal is not 99/1. Your insight and truth you have to share are invaluable. They are necessary. A small group leader is not just a passive "Question Asker."

There is a well-worn adage, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," and one of the best ways to demonstrate this care is by active listening.

One way to teach listening is to MODEL **Active Listening**:

- **Put your phone on silent and out of view.**
- **Limit how often you look at your watch or a clock.**
- **Make eye contact with whoever is speaking.**
- **Nod occasionally.**
- **Don't interrupt.**
- **Listen to listen, not to respond.**
- **Reflect back what they are saying so they know you have heard them**

A6

Use verbal cues. Short verbal cues like "Yes" "Uh-huh" tell the speaker that you are interested and they should keep talking. But don't make your reactions too strong. This puts the attention back on you.

Avoid asking Yes or No questions. Open-ended questions are the key to get sharing rolling.

Pay attention to *your* body language. Lean in, Eye contact, visual acknowledgment.

Pay attention to *their* body language. Closed or open body position, leaning in or away from the speaker, etc.

Do your best to remain neutral and listen to what the other is saying. Often as Youth Ministers, we want to take what they say and baptize it and sometimes spend our 'listening' time preparing a response. Simply listen and reflect back what we are hearing with short statements.