THE
ESSENTIALS
IN WORSHIP
TOOLKIT



4 BEST PRACTICES FOR LEADING WORSHIP FOR YOUTH

worshiptraining

INTRODUCTION

How do we go about leading youth in worship?

There are particular dynamics that come into play when leading worship in a youth setting that we should be aware of as worship leaders. You may be asked to lead worship for youth on a regular basis, or you may be asked to lead youth in worship as a one-off request.

In our day, some of the worship expressions that are the norm in local church services are very similar to what may be happening in the youth expressions of worship in that same local church.

However, there are some key differences in how we should think about designing a unique youth worship environment in order to maximize the impact of the teenage worship and discipleship experience.

INTRODUCTION

1. What are the sounds of the day?
2. Know their stage of development.
3. Age matters.
4. Be in their life.



PRACTICE 1 - WHAT ARE THE SOUNDS OF THE DAY?

What are the sounds of the day?

We must first remember that the 1970s were almost 50 years ago! The 1980s? Almost 40 years ago. The 1990s? Almost 30 years ago! It's important to understand this when we think about the styles and sounds that connect with this current generation.

The musical palette of today's youth is often complex and diverse. Although the music we choose could draw on some degree of older content, there is a large body of new, contemporary songs and styles of which we should become aware.

Music styles actually do matter in worship. Sometimes it's been said that anyone should be able to connect with God through whatever is presented to them – regardless of musical style. Most of those who say those things are typically the ones determining the style of worship in their own environment!

Human beings don't work that way. The sound matters. So do the songs. We need to get familiar with the musical affinities of those youth we will be leading in our church – and head that direction. However, a 50 year old playing a song that is distinctly designed for a 20 year old is also not the answer. We want to be authentic to who we are, while being aware of the sounds and styles that move that particular youth congregation.

PRACTICE 2 - KNOW THEIR STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

Know their stage of development.

The teen years can be very emotional for young people (and their parents!). Teenagers are doing what psychologists call 'individuating' – working out who they are within their families and the world around them.

They're figuring out who the 'I' is that's inside of them, and are searching for an accepting tribe – the 'we' – around them. We want to do things that serve and connect with the emotions that come with this process, while not simply feeding an emotionally-based spirituality in our young people.

Emotions are a wonderful gateway for youth to connect with God (and music can create a very emotional experience), but we can't just leave them there. We all know that an emotionally based faith only holds up until the first crisis hits.

Reiterate to your teens, even as you lead, that emotions are a wonderful servant, but a terrible master. We want to develop them as disciples who are learning how to have a conversation with God through music, expressing their emotions to Him, and allowing Him to express His love to them. Then, connect them in ways musically that unify them (songs they know together) and bind them together (big choruses they all will sing).

PRACTICE 3 - AGE MATTERS

To some degree, the age of the worship leader matters.

It's often good to have a worship leader that is near to the age of the youth they are leading. In the teenage years, a worship leader in his/her twenties is someone the youth can look up to, and see as a role model.

There might be someone their own age who is growing as a worship leader. That works for them, too. There is a sense of permission, a sense of connectedness, a sense of ownership of the worship experience that happens when someone our own age is leading worship.

At the same time, don't let that hinder you. If this is where God is calling you to be, don't let your age hold you back. Lead with passion. Do your best to care about the needs of the youth. Make sure you're staying authentic to who you are. Lead with a sense of integrity.

Being who you are is more meaningful in worship leadership than you trying to mimic the sounds that they love – especially when they don't connect deeply with you.

PRACTICE 4 - BE IN THEIR LIFE

To successfully lead, the worship leader must be in their life.

Your leadership must extend beyond the musical moment. Yes, you're planning a set, you're welcoming them in, you're giving them songs to sing, and you're giving them opportunities to respond to God in a musical environment – but those teenagers need to feel like you're connected to their lives.

Be in their story. Be part of their overall youth experience. Encourage their development in all aspects of life. Then, in that worship moment, they are more ready to give their hearts to it. Why? Because they feel safe with you, they feel known by you, they feel like they trust you – and they feel like you have taken the time to see life from their perspective.

This brings a sweetness – a sense of shared connectedness to God – in those gathered youth worship settings. That connectedness affects worship even before a note of music is played.

ACTION STEPS

> Try at least one idea for the next time you lead.

Make an effort to connect with the youth outside of the musical moment. Be aware of their stage of development. Nurture their interaction with God by focusing on music they can engage with in the worship setting.

And, of course, have fun with it. This generation of youth is the Church of today, and we are building and encouraging them to be disciples who disciple others into their twilight years – building the Church of tomorrow.

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