Ministry with Youth During the Time of COVID-19

Trainers for the Youth Mission Study *Managing Anxiety* along with several United Methodist Women national office staff recently hosted conversations on “Youth and Anxiety in the Time of COVID-19: Can We Talk?” Those who participated in the conversations included youth ministers, clergy, parents, grandparents and others from across the country.

Many insights were shared during these conversations and one that emerged was the incredible creativity of those in youth ministry during these trying times to continue to engage youth in fun and interactive ways, as well as ways of letting youth know they are there for them and are available to talk about struggles they are having during these challenging times. Below are some of the ideas that surface during these conversations:

**Fun and Creative Ways to Engage Youth During Social Distancing**

- Quarantine Goodie Bags
- Nerf Gun Capture the Prize—Hide prizes in your yard (gift cards, candy). Youth can attempt to sneak into your yard to look for prizes. If they can grab one before being hit by a nerf gun it’s theirs to keep. If they get tagged by a nerf gun, they can’t return to try again until the following day.
- Video Devotions on Youtube
- Service bingo—A card full of acts of service that families can work to complete throughout the summer (with prizes)
- Mission boxes—Supplies and instructions to engage in a missional project, e.g. making cards for elderly members
- Any kind of physically-distant outdoor gathering (car picnics, drive-by curriculum pickup).
- Send postcards
- Send cartoons with a message of encouragement or an opportunity to laugh
- Prepare a meal or a food snack bag that is dropped off to each youth’s home
- Home-based games: Scavenger Hunt (find 10 items) and link them to a Biblical principle or affirmation
- Share lessons and videos found on YouTube prepared by other churches and youth leaders
- Send lesson outline in advance, especially for building crafts (example: make a boat, have a bowl of water, see how long each person’s boat will float)
- Identify scriptures that show how people in the Bible dealt with frustrating and dangerous situations (i.e. disciples in boat crossing the lake while Jesus was asleep; Peter walking on water)
● Organize a car caravan for youth to visit senior members of the church
● Hold a social distance walk with masks—Side by side and 6 feet apart, pause to pray, pause to share, then keep walking. Teach breathing exercises and other means to reduce stress—build them into the youth meeting.
● Use a text messaging app to keep in touch, such as Google Hangouts.

Ideas for Creating Space for Youth to Open Up About How They Are Managing

● Share your cell number and tell youth they can text or call if they need to chat one on one.
● Hold programs on difficult subjects to let them know it's OK to talk about these things (anxiety, depression, suicide).
● Make it clear in group discussions you are available to talk one on one (letting it be known that youth can ask for an individual call in the chat box, for example).
● Work with families to foster independence, choices, and fun—youth are already struggling with external factors, parents can either create environments that help youth to cope or environments that cause them to struggle more. If youth want to do something that is silly but safe, encourage it!
● “Pow and Wow” moments at the beginning of each virtual youth meeting.
● Provide option to ‘opt out’ of a meeting or discussion while affirming that youth’s value to the group.
● Send an affirming email each week.
● Set aside times to hear from youth via text, email or cell phone.
● Ask youth to write and post devotionals in a shared, private space which allows them to say what is on their heart and mind.
● Encourage them to journal (recommend online resources where they can capture their thoughts and keep them private until they are ready to share).