

Effective Planning for a Single-Session Program

Step One: Assessing Needs and Interests

If you've followed the pattern of quarterly planning first, you may not need to do another assessment for a particular session. It may be helpful, however, to narrow the topics from broad to specific. For instance, if your quarterly planning assessment indicated that your group wanted to focus on the issue of teen suicide, what precisely are they looking for? Need/interest assessments for a single session are often best done informally and quickly. If you know next week's topic begins a series on suicide, ask each person to jot down one question they have about suicide-on a file card. Use these for the next step.

Step Two: Setting a Goal Statement

Reach your goal statement by answering the question, "When the session is over, what do I want the group members to know?" Or "When the session is over, what do I want the group members to have experienced?" Your answers are your goal statement. Pursuing the topic of teen suicide, if you want each young person to leave understanding the major causes of suicide among teenagers (such as depression, despair, conflict), that's your goal statement: "By the end of the session, each person will understand the major causes of suicide among teenagers."

Step Three: Designing the Program

After writing a clear goal statement, you're ready to design your session program. How can you achieve the goal statement? Take a moment to think of the most creative method you can use to convey the message. You may already have a set pattern for your single-session meetings.

Most successful sessions include three parts: getting started, developing the session, and concluding the session. Getting started welcomes the group members and gets them involved. It includes active games and group building. It introduces the topic for study in a new way. Developing the session is the major focus. Major information input takes place here. Discussion is often a successful part of this segment. Concluding the session leads to closure and application. Questions like "So what does this have to do with me?" and "Now what?" are answered here.

Other activities that weave around and through these parts may include such things as singing, eating a meal or snacking, or playing volleyball or basketball. Remember that every meeting, especially for young adolescents, must provide opportunities for group building and active learning. A planning worksheet for your use is included at the end of this chapter.

Step Four: Doing the Program

Follow your plan, allowing for the odd interruptions or change that is a natural part of youth ministry. Trust your reading of the group and change direction if needed. When it comes to the emotions and focus of your group, you are the expert, not this handbook or anyone else. Be flexible and patient. If something is not going the way you think it should, regroup and try again from another angle. If it still is not going well, perhaps you need to step back and let someone else try it. Again, trust your judgment.

Step Five: Evaluating the Program

The evaluation of the program can be short and simple. Ask yourself, "What went well? Why? What would you change? Why?"

How will this session affect the next one? Be honest with yourself and with others. As a planning team, it would be helpful to have a brief personal evaluation by the leader of each session on file for the quarterly and annual evaluations. Consider appointing a young person and an adult for each session to be the evaluators. They will not be evaluating the leaders as much as they are the whole group and the attainment of the goals.

Remember to pause and reflect on characteristics of relational youth ministry. Which were included? Which need more attention?

Congratulations! You have completed the five-step planning process for a single session.