

## Personal conversations & sensitive issues

Adults are invited to be their true selves with children and youth, but are asked to be careful about how much they self-disclose, or share of their personal lives with them. This means that they may be honest with them, but **if personal questions are asked do your best to redirect those questions.** (An example of redirecting might be, "it sounds like you're curious about me, but that's a very personal question that I'm not comfortable answering.").

If a child/youth reports allegations of abuse and neglect you must report it. Please see the section on "ACTION TO BE TAKEN TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT" in the category of Child Protection in this manual. If you are ever confused or question what you should do, speak to the Program Director or Rector of the parish.

**Sensitive Issues** are those social issues that may evoke a variety of strong feelings from different people. Sensitive issues may include, but are not limited, to: smoking, drugs, tattoos, body piercing, sexuality, sex, abuse, self-harm, dating, divorce, etc, and the personal lives of other adults. Adults are encouraged not to discuss sensitive issues with children, or encourage children to discuss these with you or amongst themselves. Sensitive issues also mean talking about former abuse, neglect, or family secrets.

- **If a child or youth starts talking about these issues, ask if you can talk about these things later.**
  - "It sounds like this is something really important to you. Is it alright if we talk about this later and go on now?"
  - Make sure you follow up and do talk to them
- **If children begin talking about these issues** with each other, it is appropriate for the adult to stop these conversations. (An example of redirecting this conversation might be, "people come into this community with different backgrounds & that's alright," or "this really sounds more like a personal conversation.") and redirect (think of a different activity or conversation topic or move on to the next person, restating the original question).
- **Before adults share a sensitive issue,** think about the following things
  - Think another adult what effect it would have on the children. Ask yourself "Could this open up wounds that I might not be aware of?"
  - Think about what the purpose of the conversation is, and ask yourself if there's a different way you could reach the same goal. For instance
    - If you want people to become closer, ask them to think of a time in school when they were scared and overcame it.
    - If you want to empathize, say in general "I've been hurt – everyone is hurt at some time."
    - If you ever have a question or have a topic of conversation that might be "heavy" for the children, make sure you discuss it with the Camp Director first.
  - **Remember,** we are only with these a few hours each week. We are not their primary supports & will not be with them if something were to "open up." It is our job to encourage & invite them into a closer relationship with God, not with us, and not to force them into something they may not be ready for.

**Personal conversations** are discussions with groups or individuals that go a little deeper than average. These are what many youth programs are based on, as when people get to know each other they can share more. That's wonderful! But there's no need to force them.

- **With groups, be careful how you word things, and do not encourage children to share secrets.**
  - For instance, instead of saying "tell the group something about you that no one else knows," say "tell us something fun that we don't yet know about you" and then use an example like you can parallel park really well.
- **With individuals, make sure your discussion has a beginning, middle, and end.**
  - If a child/youth wants to talk to you about something important or personal, it's best if you invite another adult to have the discussion with you (say "it sounds like this is really important, can I invite *this person* to join with us so we can both feel supported"). Never promise that you won't share something (that's not a promise you can keep).
  - Don't "me too." If a young person tells you a story of their drinking, don't tell them one of yours. That isn't a way to connect and make them feel better. Listen – just listen! Say "that's sounds difficult" and things like that.
  - Wrap the conversation up quickly, and have an ending.
    - If it's a problem, bring it to the person that can fix it (don't talk about it with the rest of the staff)

- If it's difficulty with a third person, set up a time for the two of them to talk with a third person
  - If it's an issue they want to talk about, end in prayer.
- Most staff people are not trained counselors/therapists. Keep the discussion short – don't ask questions or encourage them to talk more. You don't know how to do it correctly or handle it. If you are a trained counselor/therapist, this child is not your client. Use your training, but do not go into a "session."
- **Programmatically, use care when you tell personal stories that may be sensitive or traumatic**
  - Don't surprise with trauma. Make sure young people and their parents know what you're going to talk about. They need to be given the choice of whether or not they want to hear the story. And tell them ahead of time that the story might be difficult to hear. They can step out, or have someone to talk to if they need it (and tell them where that person is).
  - Don't have the trauma be the main part of the story. When you have a huge build up and then tell about the trauma, that's done to elicit a response in the hearer of the story. And so the entire story becomes that. The reasons should be things like redemption, or reconciliation, or strengthen in God. You quickly tell what happened and then spend the majority of the time talking about the effects.
  - You will never be fully aware of the lives or inner workings of each person be in that room. What you may think of as something minor may seem HUGE for someone else.
  - Know the reason you are using a story of trauma, and question if there is a better way to tell the story or get your point across.
  - It is not our job to open up wounds so that they can get healed. That is between the individual, God and his/her therapist. Walls are up for a reason – we don't have to knock them down, we can simply knock and see if they're ready to remove one brick.