

## *How to Encourage Trust and Offer Guidance when Working with Young People*

**Topic:** Good Practice

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### **Biography:**

Lorna is originally from, arguably the best place in the UK - the West Country, and has been the Youth Minister at St Andrew's Histon for the past 4 years, previously having worked in youth projects in Cambridge, Swansea and South East London.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In preparation, I asked a group of young people 'How do you encourage trust and offer guidance when working with your age group?' One response was: "Bribery usually helps."

I of course don't think Bribery is the most effective way that we can encourage trust and guidance when working with young people and have found that mostly in my years of youth work that these things happen through **presence, consistency and authenticity**.

Although there have been a few times over the years where young people have sought guidance from me because of a particular situation; For example, a talk where I spoke about my insecurities as a teenager meant a young person shared some things with me she hadn't shared before. It is often because of being present, consistent, and authentic, that young people can see us as a role model and someone that can be trusted to input into their lives and help them navigate the confusing world that is adolescence.

This was particularly important to me as a young person when looking at the youth leaders in my youth groups and deciding whether I could trust them to speak into my life.

### **THEOLOGY**

One of the young people I asked about developing trust and guidance said: "I need the smaller things to help me understand who they are. I might know someone well, but I need to know I can trust them."

Although Jesus could be confusing and mysterious when walking around Israel with his ragtag bunch of disciples, he had a demonstrable authenticity about him that massively impacted people's lives. He had come to bring the good news of the kingdom, the freedom and restoration that that brings and point people towards the father. This authentic message that was in everything that Jesus did was the reason that often, when a person came across Jesus, whether he spent a lot of time with that person or very little, their lives were changed.

When we see Jesus come across Andrew and Peter fishing, in the book of Luke, Jesus had

already begun making a name for himself with his Kingdom message. So when he says 'follow me' They don't blindly follow a stranger, but drop their nets for a man who they have been watching make an impact in their community and was demonstrably authentic and someone they could trust with their lives.

## PRACTICALITIES

### Presence

Something that comes up time and time again with young people is the need for someone to be present. Really, the time spent with young people is only a few hours a week, so it can take time to form relationships that are long lasting and beyond superficial. If young people never know if we're going to be at a group, they probably won't know for certain that we're going to be there for them.

### Consistency

It is also vital that we are consistent in **who we are, what we believe and how we act**. It is difficult to trust someone where you don't know how they might react to you or your life situation. This is even more important for young people who may not have consistency in their home or social lives. If we can provide a few hours a week of consistent regularity, this can have more impact than we think.

### Authenticity

Young people have a canny gift of seeing through falseness. I have spoken to many young people who say: 'Don't try to be cool if you're not cool or don't try to be loud if you're not loud. Just be who you are.' Authenticity is important to young people who are trying to work out who they are – It is vital that they see what living an authentic life looks like, particularly when it comes to coming to us for guidance or listening to us as we run sessions about life and faith.

## REFLECTION & LEARNING

The same applies to us. Our job, in youth ministry is to bring the good news of the kingdom, with the freedom and restoration that that brings and point people towards the Father. This looks different depending on what we're doing. However, if we model Jesus and be demonstrably authentic, consistent and present, young people will see the kingdom through our lives and see that we can be trusted and feel safe to come to us for guidance.

Whether that is through a game of table tennis at the youth club, on the beach at a residential, picking up litter, running a discussion group, praying, doing the register, running the tuck shop, disciplining someone, sharing something about ourselves, having a quick chat about the football scores or having a serious one-2-one or all the other 101 things we do in youth ministry!

## DEVELOPING PRACTICE

All of these activities are important, none more so than the other. It can be surprising what it is we do that demonstrates to a person that we are someone to be trusted.

We can't force young people to trust us or come to us for guidance, but we can foster an environment that means they could feel comfortable to do so.