

Birthing Babies

"Camp is like a delivery room at a hospital. We've been in labour with these young people for nine months. Now the birth pangs become frequent and intense. Contact work and club are happening every two minutes for six or seven days. Hopefully somewhere in the week we'll help give birth to a baby. In the meantime, we have to remember to focus and breathe."

It is possible that you will have the distinct honour while at camp of helping to birth a baby. The Holy Spirit may create new life in one of your young friends, making them a newborn in God's family. There are no ante-natal classes to prepare you for this experience, but God is sure to hold your hand and coach you from within. Following are some helpful hints, however, from people who've been there before and witnessed the miracle of spiritual birth.

1. Cabin Times

Once a day at camp, usually at night directly following club, the speaker will instruct you from up front to return to your cabin and take time to discuss what you've heard him say. We call this cabin time, and it often becomes campers' favourite part of the week. Not every day do they have the opportunity to seriously discuss, in a safe environment things that matter most in life? Here is a key principle to making it work:

Remember your role. You are here to create a safe place for young people to discuss and disclose. You are a facilitator and a friend. Remind yourself that you are not the Christ, you are not the Holy Spirit, you are not a camper. And now you can add to that list: you are not the camp speaker. It isn't your job to give the club talk a second time. Here are the responsibilities associated with your role. As friend and facilitator you:

- Help set and enforce ground rules
- Open the discussion
- Ask quality questions
- Help campers clarify their thoughts and feelings
- Draw everyone into the discussion
- Listen carefully and keep notes for future reference.

Your Responsibilities in Cabin Time

Help set and enforce ground rules. The first time you meet for cabin time, ask the group to suggest ground rules for discussion, and then fill in what is missing from this list:

- **We sit in a circle on the floor;** no lying on beds or sitting where we can't see your wonderful face.
- **Everything said here remains here.** Confidentiality is a must. However, if you disclose something that reveals a threat to your safety or well-being, it is the leader's responsibility to communicate that to someone who can help you. But you will be included in that process with utmost sensitivity to you and your situation.
- **We respect one another** by listening when others are talking and by refusing to make fun of someone else's comments or questions.

As the week progresses, you may have to remind your cabin of the cabin time ground rules. If these have been established from the beginning, and if the campers have been included in the formation of those rules, it will make it much easier to firmly enforce them as the week goes by.

A note on confidentiality: There are times when you need to discuss with another leader or the head cabin leader something that has been said in cabin time. Use caution and discretion in doing so.

Note: *Young Life Australia is a mandatory reporting agency. Therefore if a young person discloses that they have been harmed or are currently in danger you are required to report that to the head cabin leaders in order that Young Life can report to the relevant government authorities.*

- Make sure you are in a place where no campers will overhear the conversation.
- Talk about situations and not names whenever possible.
- Check your motives and make sure you are operating from a desire to serve and not a need to control. There have been instances in the past where campers have overheard leaders talking about cabin time and it has ruined the discussion for the rest of the week.

Open the discussion

It is important to break the ice, to put campers at ease. They need to know that this is a circle of friends having a discussion, not an inquisition or a time to hear the leader talk about themselves. Start with lighter questions that everyone can easily answer with some success, for example, "What surprised you most about today?" This is more critical early in the week. As the week progresses, campers will become accustomed to the deeper discussion that takes place and in fact will often be anxious to jump right into deeper waters.

Ask quality questions

Quality questions draw campers into the discussion. Here are some helpful hints:

- Ask open-ended questions. Instead of asking, "Did you have fun today?" ask, "What was the best part of today for you?"
- Set campers up for success. Ask questions they are able to answer with confidence. For example, instead of asking, "How did the speaker define sin?" ask, "After listening to the talk tonight, how would you define sin?"

A thought to keep in mind: There are three kinds of questions we can ask in cabin time. We can ask fact questions, feeling questions and faith questions. Work to include all three. Examples of them would be:

- Fact question: What jumped out at you from the talk tonight?
- Feeling question: How did it make you feel when the speaker said we were separated from God?
- Faith question: If you were at the cross when Jesus died, where would you see yourself in the picture? As a sceptical soldier, waiting for Jesus to prove himself? As a curious spectator, wondering, who is this man? As the angry thief, mad because God hasn't made things different for you? Or as the believing thief who asked Christ to remember him when He got to Heaven?

Help campers clarify their thoughts and feelings

Typically leaders talk too much in cabin time. Don't forget that God gave us two ears and one mouth, so perhaps we should listen twice as much as we talk. Helping young people clarify thoughts and feelings first requires that you listen carefully and then ask appropriate questions. Here are some principles for helping young people clarify:

- **Repeat what they've said in your own words.** "Tell me if I'm hearing you right. I hear you saying that you don't believe God exists because there is too much pain in the world. Is that right?"
- **Ask campers to tell you more.** "I think I'm with you. Tell me just a little bit more about what you felt when the speaker told that story."
- **Help identify the feelings behind the words.** "When you were talking just now, I seemed to sense you were feeling a little angry. Do you sense any of that going on inside yourself? Why do you suppose this subject makes you feel that way?"

Draw everyone into the discussion

Here are a few pointers that will help keep conversation flowing in cabin time:

- **Affirm campers constantly.** Smile, make eye contact, and nod your head as they speak. Say, "Thanks for sharing", when someone has risked difficult information. You can affirm even the most difficult camper making the most negative comment. When he or she says, "Christians are just a bunch of greedy people on TV who steal old ladies pension money," we say, "I am so glad you are part of this group. You bring up some really good issues that deserve our attention. Let's talk for a minute about what you just said."

- **Model vulnerability.** When you let down your guard, your campers will do likewise. Don't be afraid to show your humanity. Young people will feel more comfortable with a human leader than a Super Hero. Jesus brought grace and truth. The order of those gifts is worth noting. Grace precedes truth. Reveal your weaknesses and you will bring grace, then campers will be better ready to receive truth.
- **Answer questions with questions.** Don't rush in with all the information to answer campers' questions. Let them wrestle with the process of discovering truth for themselves. When you consistently give instant answers to campers' questions, the conversation begins to resemble an hour at an information booth with God. Answer questions with questions. When they say, "If God cares so much about me, then why did my parents get divorced?" we say, "That is a great question. Does anyone have thoughts they could share about that?"
- **Draw out silent types; tone down talkers.** Pay attention to who is sitting silently. Call on them occasionally by name and say, "Sam, you are looking pretty thoughtful over there. What do you think about all this stuff?" On the other hand, campers who are monopolising the time with their comments need to be gently reminded to give everyone else a turn.

When you are asking a question that you are hoping everyone will answer, one strategy that sometimes works is to have an object that is tossed around, like a stuffed animal or a pair of socks. Whoever has the object has the floor. Then that person picks the next person to speak and tosses the object to him or her. Campers always have the right to remain silent, however. They can receive the object, say "pass," and toss it to the next person to speak. That way they've had the opportunity to participate, but they haven't been forced.

- **Recruit the help of Christians in the cabin ahead of time.** If you know who the Christian campers in your cabin are, talk to them before the first cabin time and recruit their help. Give them a vision for their part in the process of birthing babies. Ask them to pray, to lead by example and to help make others in the cabin feel comfortable in cabin time (which means we resist the urge to give all the answers or to set others "straight").

Listen carefully and take notes for future use

It's worth saying again. We need to listen twice as much as we speak. And as we listen, make mental note of what campers are saying and feeling. Sometime later, you might consider jotting these notes in your journal or notebook. Later in the week, when you are having one-on-one conversations with the young people in your cabin, it will help you to recall specific comments they have made in cabin time. You can use those comments to guide the conversation and to dig deeper into issues of faith.

2. One-on-One conversations

Camp gives you enough time with young people to go deep in conversations that you might not have the opportunity to do at home. So prepare yourself to go deep. Plan on having several significant conversations with your campers during the week – on the hike, waiting your turn on the wake board or while you brush your teeth in the bathroom. Look and pray for open opportunities to ask campers about themselves. And as the week progresses, plan on having at least one significant conversation where you sit down and ask each of your young friends individually if they would like to begin a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Some leaders actually schedule 30 minute appointments with their campers at the end of the week to make sure they don't miss the opportunity to talk. If you feel comfortable with that much structure, go for it. But whatever you do, make sure you give each camper the opportunity to answer the question, "Would you like to be in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?"

Here are some sample questions to help you go deeper in your conversations with young people:

- What do you think about camp so far? What has been the biggest surprise?
- What have you learned about yourself this week?
- When in your life have you felt closest to God?

- Do you see yourself any differently here than you do at home? In what ways?
- Have you heard anything new about God this week? What did you hear and what do you think about it?
- If you could ask God one question and be guaranteed an answer, what would it be?
- Do you relate to any of the people in the dramas? Which ones and why?
- Has your view of Jesus changed at all this week? How has it changed?
- What questions do you have about what you've heard this week?
- Have you considered entering into a relationship with Jesus?
- Would you like to begin a personal relationship with Jesus?
- What is stopping you from beginning a personal relationship with Jesus?

3. Leading a friend to Christ

Be ready at all times to pray with one of your young friends to receive Christ. It doesn't have to happen at the end of the week. Ask God to give you divine sensitivity to the spirit of each young person in your cabin. When you sense someone is ready, be ready to ask the question, "Would like to begin a personal relationship with Jesus?" When your friend says, "Yes," then everything else is simply ceremony and celebration!

The ceremony: You are the most privileged person on earth. You have the incredible opportunity to lead your friend in his or her first conversation with the Heavenly Father. There are no magic words, as you know. Simply speak as the Spirit leads you and give your friend the opportunity to pray, too. Here is a sample prayer:

Father, there is someone here wanting to be introduced to you. _____, your lost child, is wanting to come home. She has decided that living life without you just isn't the way it was meant to be. She has turned around in her tracks, away from her old way of thinking and living, and started walking toward you, her Heavenly Father. Thank you for forgiving her for walking away from You in the first place to live life on her own. Thank You for now running to greet her as she turns to come home. We know that you are excited to have her want to come into a relationship with you. Thank You that _____ is your daughter and that you love her enough to send Jesus to die for her sin. Thank You that you have forgiven her completely of everything she has done wrong in her life. Father, please teach her what it means to be in a personal relationship with you. Amen.

Sometimes young people are eager to pray for themselves, which is great! If they are willing, have them add their own prayer to yours. You will usually need to pray first though, just to show them that it isn't as hard as what they may think. The previous prayer may seem more like a sermon to you. Yours doesn't need to be that long or involved. God promises to bring the words you need to speak when you need them (Luke 12:11). The above prayer simply follows the progression of the Prodigal Son story (Luke 15:11-24), using that story to summarise what has happened in the life of the new believer. Sometimes it is easier to remember a story than a list of theological points.

Be sure to take note of the Short Sheets that go with this section. One of them gives you a long list of Scripture references to use in helping a young person process the Gospel. Another gives you a list of additional possible ways to direct a camper to commitment in Christ.

4. What's Next?

After leading a friend to Christ, then what? Here is the short list of what ought to happen in the hours and days following this important first step:

- **Keep in close contact with the new believer.** Even though you are probably sharing a cabin, close contact in this case means to ask periodically, "How are you doing? How are you feeling? What are you thinking about the decision you made?"
- **Help the new believer articulate to someone else what has happened.** Find a friend, another leader, the camp speaker – someone significant the new believer would

feel comfortable sharing his or her decision with. There is something that happens inside a new believer when he or she is able to articulate faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9).

- **Talk with the new believer about the possibility of standing up at the "Say So" at the end of camp.** Often at camp, the last night the speaker provides a time when new believers can stand together to acknowledge their newfound faith. The speaker will explain the procedure to you ahead of time in the leaders' meeting. Then you can explain it to your friend. Offer to stand with him or her if it helps (Psalm 107:2)
- **Take the new believer to the "New Christians" seminar the last day of camp.** The leader of this seminar will hand out copies of the New Testament and explain what the new believer needs to do to get started in his or her journey with Jesus.
- **Give the new believer other follow-up materials.** You will find more information about this.
- **Make a plan for life back home. Inform the new believer about any planned group meetings for new Christians once you return home.** Set up a personal time to meet with him or her the first week at home to encourage them (within the first three days is best). Assure him or her that you will be in close contact and very available as he or she faces the old world with new purpose and priorities (1 Thessalonians 2:5-12).

