

Overcoming Fears in Contact Work

(Adapted from an article submitted by Pam Moore)

Contact work is the foundation of effective Young Life ministry. We must be willing to initiate relationships and to permeate the turf of high school young people today. We must be willing to do this with all kinds of young people, many of whom are radically different from ourselves. Often the initial reaction of our leaders to this concept is one of fear. It is a scary thing, this whole notion of contact work. We are doing cross-cultural ministry. We are crossing boundaries and breaking down walls and stereotypes. We are going into the battlefield and that is uncomfortable. We would be naive to think it would be otherwise.

But there are some tips that can help us move forward in spite of our fears in order to further the work of God's Kingdom. We must ask ourselves, what exactly are our fears and what are the steps that can help us overcome them?

1. What are our Fears in Doing Contact Work?

Some of the most common ones mentioned by leaders are as follows:

- Teens will reject us.
- We as leaders won't know how to relate or won't know what to talk about.
- Teens will think we are boring.
- We won't know how to move the conversation below the surface.
- We won't know how to be ourselves; we will feel self-conscious or try to emulate someone else (another leader).
- Teens won't notice us if we are shy
- We will make fools of ourselves or draw attention to ourselves, particularly if we are outgoing.
- We will forget names of those we have met.
- Teens will think we are weird. They will wonder why we are there. And they may even wonder why we do not hang around people our own age.

All these fears are real. And yet to raise our level of consciousness of these and any other fears we might have is the first step in being able to move forward.

2. How do we Overcome these Fears?

- We need to remind ourselves every time we step onto a campus or spend time with a young person that the reality is – *young people are dying for adult friends*. They are looking for healthy role models that they can respect, admire and confide in. *Don't underestimate your role. Don't be intimidated*. Young people desperately want your friendship. It's often with the young people you least expect that the Lord will work most dramatically.
- Have confidence in the One who calls you to those young people. Remember Christ and the reality of His presence in you, with you and for you. He will give you confidence as you trust Him and take risks regularly.

- Remember that with all of your faults and shortcomings, you are still His choice for those young people. He will show Himself through you: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not us,” 2 Corinthians 4:7.
- As for what to talk about, the key is to remember to *make them the experts*. Ask things that the teens can talk about freely (*their sports, their families, their friends*).
- Remember to be a good listener. Learn to ask leading and open-ended questions. Learn to ask about the feelings behind what they are saying. Learn to listen attentively and to show empathy and compassion.
- Demonstrate an attitude of acceptance and delight in knowing them. Practice the art of making young people feel special and loving them into their potential. That takes the touch of God's Spirit in our own lives.
- Always let young people know you are at school primarily because of *them*, not because of Young Life. We are friends, not recruiters. Be willing and available to go deeper and to be one who *challenges* kids.
- Demonstrate servanthood in practical ways by offering rides, helping with school. This communicates loudly.
- We need to individualise friendships, which means we need to limit the number of close relationships. Constantly have an attitude of going *deep* and *wide*. We go *deep* with a handful of young people and *wide* with many on campus. There are *always* new young people to meet and to befriend.
- Never forget the importance of these four aspects of contact work:
 - Regularity.
 - Visibility.
 - Availability.
 - Accountability.