

Transition A Students Prospective

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My name is Sydney Penner and today I am going to be sharing some tips on transitioning, but more precisely what students and leaders need during this process. Jesse has so kindly asked me to come on board Fresh Ministry Consulting to give my perspective as a student and leader in youth ministry, and hopefully give you a better view from the other side of the camp. My years of experience are few and my qualifications ever fewer, but I have a heart and a passion for youth ministry and know exactly the difference it can make in the lives of students. The family dynamic in a youth program can be hard to achieve and even harder to make last, but here are my 10 transitioning tips to help maintain a safe environment during times of transitioning.

#1 Keep Students/Leaders informed

Church transitioning is often difficult with a lot of different emotions involved. Keeping students and leaders up to date, when beneficial, helps communicate that you recognize the importance of their role in the program. Nobody likes to feel in the dark, so do your best to keep them in the loop on the important stuff like:

- transitioning timeframe
- key leadership changes
- program logistics

Make it clear that the students are seen throughout the process, because for many of them youth group is like a second family. Keep in mind that this transition may be equally as trying in their world as it is for you.

#2 Keep the conversation open

Similar to my first point, it is important to not only keep the students informed, but to also hear them out. Keep in mind that as a student an important part of development is recognizing and thinking through thoughts and emotions. Students will have questions, comments and concerns and it is essential that they are respected and valued. This doesn't mean being a yes man or a passive leader, but only that you are helping create a space of mutual respect and cooperation.

#3 Keep the focus on the students and the ministry

Naturally, along with transitioning within a church comes a lot of questions and conversations. At the end of the day, youth ministry exists to impact YOUTH with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Keep them informed, and leave room for questions, but recognize when it's time for a subject change. Don't stop asking about their big game coming up, or that boy they have a crush on, but make it known that you are still there for them. Leave out any church politics, and keep the spotlight on them. Sometimes it's best to take a step back and look at the wider view. At the end of the day one's experiences throughout adolescence can have lifetime affect, so make sure that students aren't slipping through the cracks.

#4 Rally the Troops

This tip is directed primarily to any leaders involved in the youth program, but can be applicable to students as well. A change in leadership, however graceful, will come with bumps along the road and will require some extra hands. As leader's, you are the first person a student will look to, and more than likely they will follow your example. It is helpful to get all leaders on the same page about the reality of the transition, but also the necessary steps moving forward. This may mean stepping into a new role you weren't expecting or taking on some new responsibilities in order to keep the ship running smoothly. Regardless, it is incredibly important to remind your students that the ship is not sinking only changing captains. Leaders are the hands and the feet of the operation and have the most direct influence on the students. They will look to you in how to respond. What will they see?

#5 Keep it about JESUS

For emphatic purposes I was tempted to put this tip as point one because it is 100% the most important. If youth ministry serves any purpose at all it is to direct in any way possible, all attention to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In times of transitioning, this foundational statement, should not waver. If anything there is no better a time to teach about the eternal hope of our saviour. Part of the package will be emotions like doubt, confusion, fear, and anticipation and in times like these the solution must always be to look past the situation and up to God. If we truly believe Christ should be in control of our lives no matter the circumstance, times of transitioning should be no exception. This is the perfect opportunity to not only teach but live it out in our actions.

#6 Keep it fun

transitioning can be difficult, which in many cases increases the necessity of a safe place to unwind and let loose. When the future seems unsure, remind the group what it means to have fun as a family. Remind them of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ through laughter and fellowship. Tough times can be when we need fun the most, so take the deep stuff seriously, but don't underestimate the value of a wicked game of ultimate Frisbee.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Philippians 4:4

Paul leaves little room for excuses here, and I don't think he ever intended to. We are called to always look for an opportunity to praise God for his faithfulness and provision. So although our circumstances may be unclear, find peace in looking past ourselves to the most amazing heavenly Father

#7 Spontaneous check backs

So much of youth ministry has to do with relationships, and it is crucial that they are taken for account during a transition. It is inevitable that the relationships you've built throughout the time spent in a particular program won't look the same after you've left, but they can still exist in other mediums. Spontaneous messages or hangouts can remind your students that although you moved on to a different church you still cherish the time spent together. Of course, it is impossible to stay connected with every student you interacted with, but for those you built relationships with it can mean the world. Even if that only means checking in once a month, sometimes all a student needs is knowing that they are in your thoughts.

#8 Change can be positive

Very few people are naturally drawn to change. Regardless, change in itself is not always something negative. It's important to remind your students and leaders that along with transitioning, naturally comes change. Once a leader leaves and new one takes his/her place, it can be tempting to want to keep everything the same or to replicate exactly what worked in the past. However, being opposed to change can make it difficult to thrive in times of transitioning. Not every program at any given time will fit the same model. In fact, when we give God room to create something new, it's always infinitely better than we could have ever dreamt up ourselves. We must look back in appreciation of how God has blessed the church, but also look forward in anticipation of what He will do next.

#9 Allow time to bring clarity

It can be tempting to want all the answers and a clear path immediately, but that is rarely how God works. Once a major leadership change has taken place, remind your students and leaders that complete clarity only comes with time. I find most often in my life, that it is not until I'm looking back on a situation that I see how God has been present and working all along. Of course, like I said previously, answer the tough questions and keep the conversation open, but also make it clear that ultimately God is in control and it is our job to wait on him. Transitioning can be messy and overwhelming, but only time will bring a clearer view of the whole picture.

#10 Bring back the classics

Transitioning can be tricky, but it doesn't last forever. Once you're in a place where emotions have settled and moving pieces have slowed, it may be time to open the floor for recommendations. After a transition, it is inevitable that some things will have changed, but in time leave room for feedback and suggestions. This might look like switching up your small group routine, or bringing back that classic game that has slipped through the cracks. Regardless, the key point is that you are hearing what's being said and responding. One of the most fun parts of transitioning is carving out your own path as a group and figuring out what works best for where you're at.