

planning a residential

Taking a group of young people away on a residential break is a valuable part of any youth ministry programme. It's amazing how much can be gained from a couple of nights away from the normal routine. The whole experience of a different environment can help your young people concentrate on issues about God and faith, without the usual pressures found at home. Time away can also help a new group to gel together, so why not start a term off with a residential break?

Getting started

The first thing to sort out is your timing. Check with your young people as to what else may be happening around the time you plan to go away. It's also worth finding out if your local schools are planning anything on the date you have in mind. A couple of telephone calls can help you avoid an unfortunate clash of events.

Next, you need a good venue. If you don't know of any yourself, ask your local diocesan or denominational office or Christian Camping International (CCI) will help you find a suitable location anywhere in the country, according to your needs and budget. Remember that some centres will cater for you, while others are self-catering. The latter is a cheaper option, especially if you have a good team around you to organise supplies and to cook for your group. If you are going for

the self-catering option at least one of the catering team will need to have obtained a food hygiene qualification within the last three years.

Then, there's transport to plan. If you only have a few young people it might be possible to use leaders' cars. However, you will need to check your arrangements against your insurance policy and your child protection guidelines. If you have a larger group, you will need to book a coach. Call a few companies to get some competitive quotes and don't forget to tell them you are booking for a church youth group - you may get a discount on the full cost.

Organise some publicity. It's good

to inform people of the date well in advance (at least three or four months if possible). Try to come up with a name for the event in order to give it a bit of identity. Let people know that there will be Christian teaching included in the programme and explain what people can expect from the programme.

The programme

During the course of the weekend organise a good mixture of activities. Make sure that you balance the 'spiritual sessions' with some purely social sessions and activities. Some residential centres have swimming pools and sports facilities, or you may want to take the group to a specialist activity centre. Some groups are



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really happy with a simple shopping trip in the local town. If your weekend is in exam season, why not consider offering a homework slot (entirely optional but guaranteed to provide quietness)? A bonfire and some fireworks will go down well in winter. Hot drinks and toasted marshmallows are fun evening activities too. You could organise a special themed meal on one evening, or have a posh frock dinner.

Biblical teaching

A weekend away provides a great opportunity to focus your group on some sustained Bible teaching. It can be of real value to invite somebody else in to do some talks for you (if that's the approach you want to take).

They may be the same things that you are saying week by week, but a different voice often produces a different reaction from your young people. Over the course of the weekend, a series of four talks can work well. You might choose a particular Bible character or a New Testament letter as your theme. Why not offer the group a selection of themes and ask them to choose the one they would most like to look at.

Depending on the type of group you lead, you may decide to have times of sung worship. If you have musicians in your group, you could ask them to organise this.

As you look over the plan for the weekend, also ask whether there are any parts of the weekend that the young people could be involved in planning, preparing or leading themselves.

Time tips

For 10-14s you will benefit from having a busy programme that keeps everyone occupied. Over 14s will probably appreciate more 'free' time when they can choose for themselves what to do. They will also appreciate a later bedtime. If you can have a late breakfast, you can make



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the most of a later end to the day's programme. A special midnight bedtime on one of the evenings can prove popular, but do make sure that people don't get too tired. It's bad practice to get young people over-tired and then ask them to make decisions about life and faith. It's also bad practice to have over-tired leaders responsible for a group of young people.

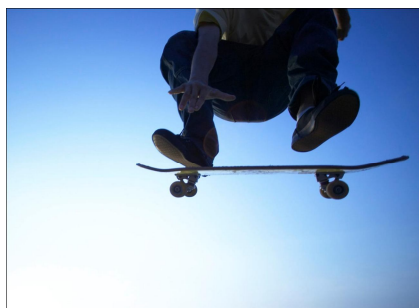
Small groups

It's helpful to have some small groups during the weekend. You might divide up the whole group into teams, each with a leader. These groups could then discuss what they have learned or

been challenged about during the programme. Teams might also compete for 'house points' over the course of the weekend. Get your leaders to encourage the members of the small groups to pray together for one another.

And finally ...

- Don't forget to buy some small gifts to thank people who have helped make it all happen.
- Ask people to pray for the weekend. Tell them your hopes and fears. You will benefit from the support of people in your church, and they will benefit from knowing what the young people are involved in.
- Take a basic first aid kit with you. If it's been around for a few years, make sure that you check it carefully before you leave.
- Take a couple of spare towels.
- Above all ... have fun!



Ensure a good mix of activities

Important things to include on your booking form:

- A request for information on individual's food requirements or allergies.
- A request for information on individual's medical needs.
- Consent slip for parents/guardians to cover outdoor/specialist activities.