

HOW TO LOVE YOUTH IN A PANDEMIC

LAUREN VAN DER MERWE

Adolescence can be hard enough, let alone going through puberty in the midst of a pandemic. Young people will have a variety of responses to Covid-19; some will not be concerned about it and others will be experiencing deep bouts of anxiety. It is important as parents, youth leaders, teachers and other influential adults that we are caring for our young people in ways that will help them flourish and grow into healthy disciples of Christ. I am around young people all of the time but the Covid-19 pandemic has added a whole new complexity to loving our youth. I thought I would take this opportunity to share with you some things I think we can do to help continue to love our young people.

1. Talk to them about Covid-19

There has been a lot of coverage on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Your teen's feed will have been infiltrated with stats, scenarios, opinions and news coverage. They will know more about the virus than you may think. Ask them what they know about it and how they are feeling. Some youth will be experiencing heightened anxiety. Beyond Blue tells us that almost 20% of young people experience psychological distress over a 12 month period. Only 31% of females and 13% of males¹ ask for help during this experience. This means that as stable adults in their lives, we need to ask them how they are going.

Other youth might not be anxious at all about the virus and they might actually wonder what all the fuss is about. Adolescents typically only think about the present and not the domino effect that may happen as a result of a situation. Some youth won't understand what the big deal is and why social distancing is so important. Talk to them in real scenarios as to why it's important they practice social distancing. i.e. if grandma/pa gets the virus then that would be critical for their health. Have a conversation with them, see what they think, and try to understand their thoughts whilst pointing them in the right direction.

2. Church isn't meeting together; but this shouldn't effect the discipleship of your young person

As parents, one of your primary responsibilities is to grow your youth into healthy disciples of Christ. The discipleship of your children can be assisted by youth leaders but parents should be doing the main form of discipleship. Anglicare released a research paper in 2011² about the influences on young people becoming Christians.

¹Beyond Blue *Beyond Blue Support Service: Statistics* <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/statistics>

² Becoming a Christian: A report from 2011 NCLS Survey <http://www.effectiveministry.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Youthworks-Becoming-a-Christian.pdf> Prepared by: Anglican Youthworks, July 2013

The paper concluded that the highest influencer was parents. What you do as a parent is crucial to the discipleship of your young person. They are watching your daily habits and routines. Growing up in a Christian home myself, one of the greatest things I think my parents did discipling me was having their own personal Bible readings and prayer times every morning. I learnt from the display of their faith that spending time with God was a spiritual discipline that all Christians should do.

Other things you can do to help point your young person to Christ is asking them what God is teaching them, praying with them regularly and equipping them with resources to help them grow in their relationship with him. There are some great online resources out there to assist Bible Reading. I often point our young people to an app called 'He/She Reads Truth' which has hundreds of daily Bible Reading plans. Passion Conference also has some great online talks to help spur youth on.

3. Encourage them to exercise regularly and get a breath of fresh air

It would be easy for our teens to spend their days on social media and gaming. Teens are still learning what they need and how to look after their own mental health. Encourage them to spend some time outside and exercise. This could be asking them take the dog for a walk or it might be having a family exercise competition. In my family, we are having a skipping challenge with daily and weekly prizes! Many youth like to be competitive so try and use this to your advantage.

4. Give them a whole lot of grace...!

Youth have a lot going on for them without a pandemic. Their bodies are changing, their emotions fluctuate, they are often navigating friendships, homework and many other challenges. For some of them, the thought of staying at home indefinitely may be very depressing. They will push your buttons, be ungracious with you and may be tricky members of the family to deal with. As much as you can, be gracious as Christ has been gracious with you. Set a Godly example for them to follow and in the hard moments run to God in prayer, grab a piece of chocolate and take a breather!

You can do it!

