

Addressing AIDS with kids.

OVERVIEW

LEADER PREPARATION

- * The youth leader should obtain facts on the following:
 - o Where and how AIDS began.
 - o How exactly it spread and continues to spread.
 - o In which socioeconomic, cultural, behavioral and other groups the disease is found to be concentrated.
 - o Within what groups AIDS is presently growing fastest.
 - o The difference between HIV-positive and AIDS diagnoses.
 - o How the disease is treated.
 - o The latest scientific findings concerning treatment.
 - o Possible cure.
 - o How many cases there are worldwide, and in the country, state, and town you in which you live.
- * Gather information from this Encyclopedia and or the mass media: movies (i.e., "Philadelphia"), television (i.e., "And the Band Played On"), periodicals, books, etc.
- * Contact the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia for the most current research and advice.
- * Have lunch in the hospital with a doctor who is a local AIDS specialist; learn about the disease from his or her perspective.
- * If possible, chat with an AIDS patient. This is a real possibility in most places, especially in metropolitan areas. Local AIDS organizations can help you find a patient willing to share his or her story.
- * Spend an afternoon observing, or better yet, volunteer at a local AIDS organization site.

EDUCATE YOUR LEADERS ABOUT THE DISEASE

- * Devote a leadership meeting to discuss your response to the youth group. Don't assume that your youth leaders know any more about AIDS than the kids. Encourage the leadership group to share personal experiences, opinions, biases, and prejudices. Share the information you gathered from the suggested sources.

- * Invite someone who is an AIDS counselor to share with the leadership team how best to counsel those with AIDS or those who know someone with AIDS.

GROUP BUILDING

- * Give your kids an anonymous questionnaire asking them basic and specific questions about AIDS.
- * After you collect the questionnaires, briefly chat with the kids about how they felt while they were responding to the questions.
- * Chat with them about any personal AIDS experiences they may have had in their schools, homes, hospitals, etc.
- * Carefully give the group the correct answers. Take note of any interesting observations and conversation starters.

GROUP PRESENTATION

- * Hold an AIDS forum for the youth group and their parents. If you live in a smaller town, host it for the entire church youth community.
- * Secure a panel of experts who can add interesting, significant information to the group. Invite your area's best known doctor from his or her hospital's infectious disease clinic or a doctor known to be an AIDS specialist, a social worker, a school counselor, and, if possible and permitted by all involved, someone who has AIDS.
- * Open the forum by showing a video you have found, or put together yourself, on the subject of AIDS. Although some may disagree, finding a compelling video that includes footage of an AIDS patient in later stages helps kids see the reality of the disease.
- * Although the panel may share, they should primarily be there for questions and answers. Encourage kids to ask questions (maybe have them write some questions out and put them in a hat), and also have your leaders primed to pose some key questions. Use the questionnaires previously given to the kids as a reference for issues and questions needing clarification.
- * Remember that the forum is informational, not theological—don't feel driven to resolution.
- * Upon conclusion of the forum, give kids and parents handouts composed of conversation starters for further discussion at home.

FOLLOW-UP

- * At your next youth group meeting, ask the kids
 - o What were their reactions? What did they learn?

- o What are some common attitudes which their peers have of AIDS?
 - o In their conversations they had with their parents from the handout, what were some attitudes which their parents have about AIDS?
 - o How has their attitude about life and death changed?
 - o What prejudices have they had to deal with when thinking about AIDS? How would you handle a student with AIDS in your school?
- * If you have a video camera, go to a local high school (not necessarily the one your group attends, as they may take this exercise more seriously if they don't know the kids they will see on camera). Go after school at a time when a lot of kids will be outside (spring is great—track, baseball and tennis practice, etc.). Take several posters, each with one of the following words printed: DATING, GIRLS, GUYS, AIDS, TEACHERS, DRUGS, SEX, MUSIC, SCHOOL, DAD, MOM, WORKING.
 - * Interview one kid at a time, holding up posters one-by-one, and ask them to respond with whatever comes to mind as you flash each word. Then, use the AIDS responses in this meeting to incite discussion about typical youth reaction to the topic. You can also use the responses to the other words in subsequent meetings.
 - * Be attentive to the need for further, or repeat, discussion.

FINAL NOTES

Make sure that you have personally dealt with the homosexual/homophobia issue before you enter into any of these situations. It will invariably emerge. Also, it is a good idea obtain some books, usually written by fundamentalists or those of similar theological perspectives, who claim to know "The Truth About AIDS," or have titles such as, "What The Experts Don't Tell You About AIDS". Read them, get other diverse opinions, and prepare to defend or question them in these meetings if someone brings one to your attention.

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