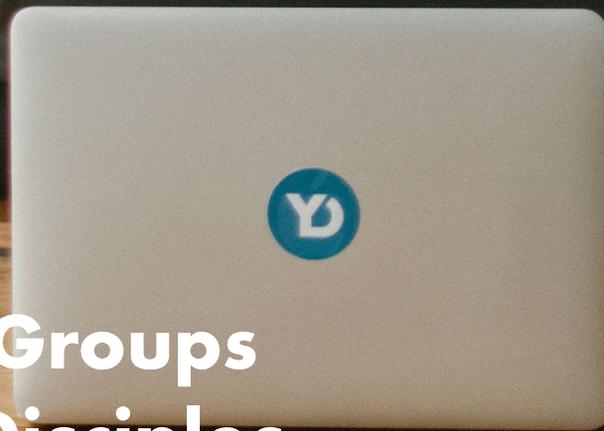




YDISCIPLINE HANDBOOK

**Train Adults
Launch Small Groups
Make Young Disciples**





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What is YDisciple?

YDisciple is a toolbox of training resources for adults and teaching resources for teens specifically designed with small groups in mind. And because YDisciple is largely digital it can work whether your small groups meet **in person or online**.

These resources include not only the highest caliber **videos for young people** but also **leader guides** to help adults facilitate meaningful discussion, participant guides to help teens grasp key concepts, and **parent resources (in English & Spanish)** to encourage parents to stay engaged.

YDisciple isn't just another video resource. We understand that programs don't make disciples. Only a disciple can. That's why YDisciple couples video resources with extensive training and support for leaders.

YDisciple is faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The Problem

A vast majority of Catholic youth are disconnecting from the Church during their teenage years. The fastest-growing religious group in the country is “Nones,” as in no religious affiliation (Religious Landscape Study, Pew Research Forum, 2014).

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The median age people disaffiliate from the Church.*

85%

of Catholic youth will have left the faith by age 17.**

52%

of Catholic youth report little to no trust in organized religion.***

According to The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, teenagers are asking the Church for a reimagining of faith formation and Confirmation away from a classroom model, greater intergenerational support, dialogue, and mentorship, and more youth ministry programming (National Dialogue Report, NFCYM, 2021). Teenagers **want** caring adults.

* Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics, St. Mary's Press, 2018

** Dynamic Catholic, 2015

***The State of Religion & Young People, Springtide Research Institute, 2020

When the fundamental, psychological needs of teenagers are not being met, the pressures they face can become overwhelming and as a result cliques, masks, rebellion, bullying, addiction, violence, and so many other things can take over their lives. And when the fundamental needs of teenagers are not being met by the Church, they leave it.

So, what do teenagers need to thrive? Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology that proposes that people are motivated to meet their basic needs like air, food, shelter, and safety before they seek to meet their growth needs - like love, affection, self-respect, and personal fulfillment. For example, if someone is hungry and without shelter they will try to meet those needs before considering their social-life or fitness goals.

When it comes to teenagers, they have needs they are motivated to meet before higher growth needs like understanding and living their faith.

The Five Needs of Teenagers

THE NEED TO BE UNDERSTOOD

The need to be understood is a great psychological need for us as human beings. Unfortunately, the majority of teenagers do not believe that adults understand them. In a recent report, only 20% of teenagers experience feeling "seen" on a regular basis (GenZ, Barna Research, 2020). When an adult takes a genuine interest in a teenager and seeks first to understand, that adult earns the right to be heard. If adults want to hand on the faith to teenagers, they must seek first to understand what is going on in their minds and hearts. Teenagers don't care how much we know until they know how much we care.

THE NEED TO BELONG

Teenagers are driven to meet the "need to belong" before higher growth needs like understanding and living the Christian faith. Belonging is such a powerful need that most young people identify it as essential to religious practice. It is often the case that teenagers will compromise the morals in which they have been raised in order to belong somewhere. Why do teens go to parties where questionable activities are taking place? Because they find belonging there. Why do teens overcommit themselves to extracurriculars? Because they find belonging there.

Why do teens not want to come to church? While this answer is complex, one of the main reasons is that they don't feel like they belong there. If adults don't help teenagers build healthy, life-giving relationships with one another, then teens will find a way to meet that need themselves. On the other hand, if adults create an environment where teens are known, loved, and cared for, they create an ideal environment for discipleship.

THE NEED TO BE TRANSPARENT

Teenagers rarely have the freedom to be transparent today, especially with one another. It is too dangerous to be vulnerable in a youth culture where anything you say can and will be used against you on someone's social media feed. Teens long for the opportunity to be transparent about their doubts, concerns, fears, insecurities, hopes, and dreams, and to have the confidence of knowing they will not be judged, but loved and supported. In fact, this is necessary in order for them to grow in self-awareness and self-esteem. A small group where trust has been established creates an environment where transparency can take place.

THE NEED TO ENGAGE IN CRITICAL THINKING REGARDING FAITH & LIFE

Teens are transitioning from concrete thinking to abstract thinking and are able to conceptualize ideas such as love, justice, fairness, and truth. They are also capable of pondering the big questions in life such as: Is there a God? Do I need religion? Can I know God's plan for my life? And they need a safe space to express doubt. Dr. Kara Powell often says, "The enemy to faith is not doubt, but silence." They need to be honest, transparent, about their beliefs. They need to be heard and received in love.

In addition, they are in the process of establishing independence and becoming their own person. Deep down they desire to be treated as adults and no longer want to be told what to do or what to believe. They are critically evaluating what they have been raised to believe and are not that interested in answers to questions they are not asking. Thought-provoking questions, lively discussion, dialogue, and freedom of expression engage teenagers in critical thinking.

THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE

Teenagers need dialogue, collaboration, and friendship with adults in order to become adults themselves. Relationships with adults help them answer deep fundamental questions like: Am I lovable? Am I capable? What difference does my life make? They are naturally idealistic and desire to be challenged to greatness through the direction, encouragement, and support of caring adults. It is a well-known educational principle that young people will rise to the level of our expectations of them. Teenagers will give their lives to Jesus through the witness and encouragement of loving, faith-filled adults.

SO, HOW DO WE MEET THESE NEEDS?

We meet the five needs of teenagers through three key influences:

- 1. Good communication and encouragement from their parents.**
- 2. A group of peers who accept and love them as they are.**
- 3. A caring adult mentor.**

These three key influences help meet the fundamental needs of teens. Like a three-legged stool, one can't stand without the others. YDisciple was created to bring these key influences into their lives and help you to meet the needs of the young people you serve through small group discipleship.

At YDisciple, We Understand...

PROGRAMS DON'T MAKE DISCIPLES, DISCIPLES DO

A robust library of training content ranging from practical to spiritual skills helps train faithful adults to be more than instructors, but disciple-makers.

AUTHENTICITY IS KING

With adolescents, you need to earn the right to be heard. Our video resources for teens center around personal testimony in order to communicate theological truth and are never filmed in a studio but in real life.

TEENS NEED TO BELONG IN ORDER TO BELIEVE

YDisciple gives you tools to create small group environments where teens are known, loved, and cared for.

FAMILIES ARE BUSY

A streaming platform allows groups access anytime and anywhere, working with families' schedules.

MIDDLE SCHOOLERS ARE UNIQUE

An ever-growing number of YDisciple studies have guides with activities and questions specifically designed for middle school students alongside the standard guides for high school students.

PARENTS MATTER

Study after study shows that no one has more influence on a teenager than his or her parents. YDisciple provides strategies for engaging parents and parent resources (in English and Spanish) to help parents engage their teens in meaningful conversation.

NO TWO PARISHES ARE THE SAME

Whether you have ten young people in your parish or 1,000 (or 1,000 teens but only ten who are involved), small group discipleship can be scaled to fit your parish's needs. Our scalable structure allows you to start a single small group or launch a movement.

Our goal is to help you best meet the needs of the young people you serve through a small group discipleship model by training adults, launching small groups, and making young disciples.

The Solution

What is Small Group Discipleship?



Teens need to belong in order to believe. YDisciple gives you tools to create small group environments where teens are known, loved, and cared for. Small groups have been proven to work in parishes of every size and demographic with and without a youth ministry staff.

Small group discipleship, for our purposes, is that process of young people becoming more deeply committed followers of Jesus and is guided in that process by a mentor in a small group environment. This allows the mentor to focus on the needs of a few particular young people, provides a space for those young people to dialogue about the faith, and provides the community that is essential to the life of a disciple.

SMALL GROUP INGREDIENTS

- **4-8 teen participants**
- **1-2 adult mentors**
- **Comfortable meeting space**
- **Solid content like YDisciple series**
- **A commitment to grow in faith and community**

Let's be clear: YDisciple is not a discipleship program. Discipleship is not a program; it's an apprenticeship in the Christian life. You can get a group of teens together and show them a video, but even the best video in the world can only help. It is only a tool. Show them a video, ask great questions. This could be a good small group. But what makes it a discipleship group is intentionality.

It is the mentor’s personal witness of a lived faith, a lived relationship with God. It is the known and owned intention of the group members themselves to grow in their faith and its application to life. It is the acknowledgment that you are following not an ideology but a person, Jesus Christ.

Roles & Responsibilities

PARISH COORDINATOR

A Parish Coordinator assists in recruiting, managing, and supporting parents and mentors. They ensure that each small group is set up for success. It is recommended that Parish Coordinators lead a small group themselves so that they can develop expertise in this model of youth outreach. The time commitment for a Parish Coordinator varies, depending on the number of small groups and mentors being managed. If your parish doesn’t have a youth minister, director of religious education, or another staff member who’s able to act as parish coordinator, that’s okay! YDisciple can be run successfully with parish staff acting as the parish coordinator, but many parishes have also been successful with a volunteer serving as the parish coordinator.

When starting new discipleship groups, it’s helpful to find a Lead Parent (see description below).

“The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ, full and sincere adherence to his person and the decision to walk in his footsteps. Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ making, of oneself a disciple of him. This demands a permanent commitment to think like him, to judge like him and to live as he lived. In this way the believer unites himself to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church.”

-General Directory for Catechesis, 53

What context do I want to use YDisciple in? Middle school? Confirmation? High School?

"Beyond regular one-on-one check-ins, I would host a dinner every 6 weeks to check in with leaders, do some ongoing training, and take time to grow in our own faith. The group of leaders has become a discipleship group in its own right."

-John, CO

Once a Lead Parent has helped to establish a small group of teens with mentors, the Parish Coordinator ensures that all mentors go through the introductory training videos. They should ensure that all mentors, and potentially parents, go through the diocesan Safe Environment training specific to your diocese. After groups are started, Parish Coordinators simply need to follow up with their mentors periodically to encourage them and to offer any support they may need.

ADULT MENTOR(S)

First and foremost, an adult mentor must be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Beyond that, the role of the Adult Mentor is to facilitate small group meetings and foster an environment for discussion. The mentor should take time to prepare before each session by reviewing the Leader Guides and videos (if using a video study) for the session. Adult Mentors are also responsible for communicating with the parents of the teens in their group and sending them the Parent Sheets for each session. Further explanation of the role of the Adult Mentor can be found in the "Expectations of an Adult Mentor" handout, found in the Additional Materials folder.

What parents do you know who would be good Lead Parents?

LEAD PARENT (OPTIONAL)

Many of the parishes that have been most successful in small group discipleship have engaged what we call a Lead Parent. The Lead Parent is not the mentor. A Lead Parent is the point person for an individual small group. This parent is the mover and shaker-type, working with the parish to get a small group off the ground, inviting teens, and engaging other parents in the process.

The Lead Parent helps organize a small group, which includes their teen and their teen's friends.

They can also help to identify and invite potential Adult Mentors for their teen's group. Once the small group is established, the Lead Parent can assist the mentor in creating the schedule and location of future small group meetings. Since they know their teen's schedule best and are often friends with the other parents in the group, this allows them to leverage their access and influence and increase the reach of the small group. See the "Parent to Parent Invitation" handout, found in the Additional Materials folder.

PARTICIPANTS

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

Participants in a small group should be approximately the same age. What 7th graders need and 11th graders need are vastly different. That said, it is more important that they are in a similar place in their spiritual maturity than in the same grade.

SAME-GENDER

We have found it to be a best practice among parishes with successful small group ministries that small groups are divided by gender with a leader of the same gender. Typically, teens share more honestly when in groups of the same gender.

AFFINITY

Consider leveraging natural relationships when forming groups. Another word for these natural relationships is affinity. When we work with these natural relationships, rather than ignoring or working against them, common tensions in small group dynamics all but disappear. Openness already exists with friends.

"Most parents will not step up unless you present a need and ask them directly. Simply asking parents to host, to reach out to other parents, or help me with things has been crucial."

-Josie, FL

HOW TO LEVERAGE AFFINITY

When a parent or teen expresses interest in being in a discipleship group, ask them, "If you could have any other guys/girls in your group, who would you ask?" Then reach out to those families. Not only will this create groups that already get along, but it will also give the teens a sense of ownership to have been directly a part of the process. You may also be surprised to find that this method of invitation identifies teens and families who are disengaged from the parish.

Some parishes that use this "affinity method" ask teens to write down a friend that they want in their group, and the parish leaders keep these requests in mind while assigning the groups. This version of the method shows the teens that the adults value and respect their wishes, but affords the parish leaders license to make strategic decisions about group members when necessary.

You don't have to worry about them gelling, because that work was done long before you formed a discipleship group. Affinity groups can be found in a variety of places:

- Students who went to the same grade school and are now spread out at different high schools.
- Students who met and/or bonded at a large event like a conference, pilgrimage, or mission trip.
- Students who are on the same sports team.
- Students who are already friends.

Now let's break down how to successfully run a small group discipleship model by training adults, launching small groups, and making young disciples.

Train Adults

According to the Springtide Research Institute, 24% of young people who have no adult mentors *never* feel like their life has meaning and purpose. But just one adult relationship reduces that percentage to just 6% (The State of Young People and Religion, Springtide Research Institute, 2020).

Your parish may have a youth minister or maybe even two. Your parish may have no youth minister at all or a person who wears multiple hats, youth ministry being just one. But even a full-time youth minister cannot adequately meet the needs of all the teens in his or her parish boundaries. Think of it this way: your parish doesn't need a youth minister. Your parish needs 5 or 10 or 50.

YDisciple gives you the tools you need to "multiply" the youth minister, equipping other caring adults in the parish to become, in a sense, co-youth ministers, focused on the needs and customizing the formation of the handful of teens in their group.

WHY WE USE THE WORD 'MENTOR'

Discipleship is fundamentally different from classroom-style catechesis. While there will certainly be a prominent element of learning about the Faith in Discipleship Groups, small group discipleship should model the relationship of an apprentice to his or her mentor rather than a student to a teacher. A mentor is focused on the needs of a few students and accompanies them in their journey of faith. A mentor does not just give information to pupils but customizes the information based on the needs of the individuals. A mentor listens and asks questions.

FINDING ADULT MENTORS

What qualities make a good small group mentor?

You may be familiar with the old acronym "F.A.T.", leaders that are Faithful, Available, and Teachable. With YDisciple, we recommend expanding that acronym to G.R.A.F.T.

GENEROUS

Mentoring teenagers requires a giving, servant-hearted person. That generosity applies to more than their time, but how they spend their time with teenagers. You want leaders who are generous listeners, not just teachers.

RELIABLE

The young people in your ministry need consistency if they are going to form trust, transparency, and community in their small groups. Mentors need to be reliable in their attendance. Parish leaders also need mentors who will reliably hold up Church teaching.

AVAILABLE

There are probably a lot of amazing adults in your parish, but a lot of them are committed to many different ministries and activities. Ask yourself, "Do they have the bandwidth for mentoring teens?"

Simply pray, "Come, Holy Spirit" and write down the first names that pop into your mind as potential mentors.

FAITHFUL

Programs don't make disciples, only disciples can make other disciples. Your mentors need to be committed to prayer and the sacraments in order to lead teens well. Teenagers can smell a "fake" from a mile away!

TEACHABLE

Moving into a small group discipleship model often requires a big mental shift for adults. Ask yourself, "Is this person open to learning new methods?"

There is this persistent myth that you have to be young to do youth ministry. This simply isn't true. You don't have to be young; you have to love Jesus. You have to be sincere. You have to care about teenagers. Some of your best small group leaders may be empty-nesters and retirees.

TIPS FOR FINDING ADULT MENTORS

- **Ask teens who in the parish they want as a mentor.**
- **Ask parents of teens who they would like as their son's/daughter's mentors.**
- **Ask to make a short presentation at the Men's Club, Knights of Columbus, Council of Catholic Women, etc.**
- **Recruit adult participants from other small group ministries like Alpha or Christ Life.**
- **Invite current catechists to shift their role from teacher to mentor.**
- **Connect with your local young adults group.**
- **Pray the Novena to the Holy Spirit with the intention of recruiting adult mentors.**

"I stopped using the word 'volunteer' when recruiting. That word comes with a lot of baggage, essentially being asked to be a warm body with a text book in a classroom. Instead, I ask them to be a 'mentor.' This helps shift their mindset right from the beginning."

-Bobby, OH

A word on parents as mentors: Generally speaking, we recommend that the mentor not be a parent of any of the group members. Teens need other adults to invest in their faith and lives. Additionally, parents need other adults to reinforce their values with their teens. This is not a hard and fast rule but should be discerned on a case-by-case basis.

Once you have a prospective leader, you can send them, "Expectations of an Adult Mentor," a document we've created for you to share to help you clarify what their responsibilities will be. You can find this document in the Additional Materials folder.

Always make sure you are in compliance with your local Safe Environment policies.

GET ACCESS

	YDISCIPLINE.TV SUBSCRIPTION	YDISCIPLINE ON FORMED
Video Studies for Teens	✓	✓
Basic Training Videos	✓	✓
Quick Tips for Leaders Videos	✓	✗
Long-form Training Courses	✓	✗
Bible Studies & Activity Guides	✓	✗
Offline Playback	✓	✗
YD Specific Apps (iOS, Android, Roku)	✓	✗

First, you'll need to make sure your adult mentors have access to YDisciple's resources. If you don't already have FORMED or a YDisciple.tv subscription, you can purchase one at [YDisciple.shop](https://ydisciple.shop). There are two YDisciple.tv subscription options available: YD Basic and YD Plus.

YD Basic comes with one login and gives you access to all of YDisciple's studies for teens, as well as our complete library of leader training videos. This option is great if you only have a few leaders and are okay with sharing one login for all of your leaders and groups. With YD Plus, though, you can create unlimited logins so each individual leader, teen, and parent can have their own account. The subscription holder will also receive usage reports detailing usage for each account in their group.

TRAIN ADULTS

Once you have a leader on board, you can share our “Welcome to YDisciple” leader training video series with them to get them on board with the vision. This series covers how to understand teenagers, what small group discipleship is, how to lead a small group, and some of our biggest secrets to success in discipleship.

After a leader has watched this introductory series, encourage them to explore the subscription platform a little bit more. The YDisciple.tv subscription is full of additional training materials. High-level training like “Discipleship 101 with Jim Beckman” can help them dive deeper into understanding discipleship from the heart of the Church.

But we’ve also created a library of short, practical training videos to help you help them gain really important concepts in pastoral ministry. Topics include:

- Setting Expectations for Your Group
 - Discipline and Correction
 - Setting the Right Environment
 - Hacks to Keep Conversation Moving
 - New videos are added monthly
-

In many ways, when you begin focusing on small groups, the adults are going to become the primary focus of your ministry. Equipping and supporting them goes well beyond sharing some videos with them.

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR MENTORS

- **Connect one-on-one with your mentors regularly, ask them how it’s going and how you can help.**
- **Go through the YDisciple Quick Tips for Leaders collection and send them a video you find pertinent at least once a month.**
- **Consider hosting dinners for mentors at least once a semester to build community, go over any business, and pray together.**
- **Watch and discuss “Discipleship 101 with Jim Beckman” together.**
- **Call them and ask how you can pray for them.**

We also recommend that the parish coordinator lead a small group themselves. This puts you in the trenches with your leaders and helps you be aware of that lived reality - its joys as well as its pitfalls.

Launch Small Groups

Now that you have your adult mentors trained and ready to go, it's time to launch small groups. To start, have teens commit to just five sessions to begin with, enough time to go through YDisciple's introductory study, *The Invitation*, and do an activity together. Once the five weeks are up, invite them to continue with the group and become disciples. At every turn of the process, think about how to encourage ownership of the small group by the teens who are in it. Ask them who they want in their small group. Ask them what content they want to discuss instead of following a linear curriculum. Encourage them to take responsibility by participating actively in the group and agreeing to be held accountable according to the standards for accountability outlined in Session 4 of *The Invitation*.

LAUNCH A SMALL GROUP

YDisciple is scalable. Whether you have a thriving youth group at your parish or you are a small parish with only a handful of teens, we recommend that you start just one or two small groups.

If a small number of groups get off the ground well, expect organic growth. Teens will start talking. Parents will start talking. Others will want to start groups not because of a flyer, but because of word-of-mouth. Don't try to start a movement. Just start a small group, and watch it grow. Think mustard seed to movement (Matthew 13:31-32). You can also check out the YDisciple blog for Spotlight articles on how other parishes have done this.

HOW TO START YOUR FIRST SMALL GROUP

- 1. Parish Coordinator or Lead Parent identifies one or more teens who are hungry for "something more."**
- 2. Parents and teens work together to identify other teens to invite into a group.**
- 3. Teens are invited through their parents to be a part of a small group for just 5 weeks.**

4. **Teens and parents identify and invite a faithful adult to be the mentor.**
5. **Mentors are trained with introductory training videos provided by YDisciple.**
6. **Mentors go through necessary background checks and training required of your local diocese.**
7. **Families are invited to host their teen’s small group in their home (if permitted) or in another comfortable environment at the parish or local coffee shop.**
8. **The group meets 4 weeks in a row, ideally, to do the introductory study, *The Invitation*, together.**
9. **After completing *The Invitation*, the group gets together to do an activity such as going to adoration, doing a service project, or simply socializing.**
10. **Once the initial 5 weeks are over, teens are invited to continue with the group and are challenged to become disciples.**
11. **Group continues to meet at least twice a month.**

Do you have questions about how to make meetings in homes work? Check out the “Guide for Off-Campus Small Groups” in the Additional Materials folder.

Make Young Disciples

Now that we’ve covered how to get a small group off the ground, let’s talk about what actually happens in a YDisciple small group and the nuts and bolts of leading.

FACILITATING A SMALL GROUP

Each YDisciple study has between four and seven sessions, and each session takes around 90 minutes to complete. There are three sections in each study session: Connect, Discuss, and Commit.

CONNECT

This section gives teens a chance to connect with one another and with the Lord. It is a time to build community with conversation and activities. This generally includes some optional activities as well as an opening prayer with Scripture.

DISCUSS

This section includes the video presentation of the content for the session along with well-crafted discussion questions. It helps teens engage in critical thinking and discussion around the topic of study. It is best not to rush through discussion just to get through the videos if you're using a video study. The discussion around the topic engages critical thinking and is most helpful for teens to take ownership of their faith.

We've worked hard to write questions that will help engage teens in a discussion. Questions are open-ended, not yes or no to help them process the material and apply it to their lives. But these questions are just a jumping-off point to start a conversation. A good rule of thumb to strive for in conversation is what we call the 80/20 Rule. The goal is for your teens to be talking 80% of the time and you 20%. It will take time to get here, but strive for it.

COMMIT

This section helps encourage teens to apply the content of the session to their lives and asks them to commit to specific actions connected with the topic. It is a moment to summarize, pray together, and encourage accountability.

You can think of the "Commit" section as the bridge between meetings. At the end of one session, you make a commitment to do something practical like read the Bible for 5 minutes, for example. Then, the next time you meet, make sure to revisit that commitment. Ask how that commitment went for them. What was difficult about keeping that commitment? What did they gain from it? Remember, small groups are meant to be small communities, places where teens are encouraged to grow in their faith but also free to fail, knowing they will still be loved and still be encouraged to keep growing.

This time closes with prayer. Praying together demonstrates to them how important prayer is. It also demonstrates that everything you just discussed is not theory or mere theology, but that it all comes back to Jesus and a living relationship with him.

OVERVIEW OF MATERIALS

- **LEADER GUIDE:** This step-by-step guide is for the Adult Mentor to use to facilitate each session.
- **PARTICIPANT GUIDE:** This take-home reminder covers the main points, the theme bible verse, and has space for taking notes. Print one for each teen in advance and distribute it at your session. It's also downloadable for emailing.
- **PARENT SHEET:** This follow-up resource for parents (available in both English and Spanish) provides a summary of the session along with conversation starters for parents and teens. Print and distribute this, or send it as an email.

STUDY SEQUENCE

We recommend that every small group begin with our foundational study, *The Invitation*. This study lays out what it means to be a disciple, to follow Jesus, and lays out some basic things they can expect from a small group like intentional, faithful friendships, and accountability. It is designed to establish trust, encourage open communication, and help teens (and their parents) to understand the value and the cost of making a commitment to follow Jesus. You'll be asking them to commit to these first 5 sessions (4 for the study, 1 for an activity)—for themselves and for each other.

After you've finished *The Invitation* and your group has committed to continuing to meet, ask them what they want to talk about. We have many options for you and you'll find that we often recommend resources that aren't YDisciple at all. It's you and the intentionality of the group that makes it a discipleship group, not YDisciple.

Options for things to do after *The Invitation* include YDisciple video studies, like *Never Alone: Life with the Holy Spirit* and *Known: Experiencing God in Daily Prayer*. We also have print Bible studies, like our Confirmation Bible Study that serves as a companion to *Never Alone*. Finally, at the end of every study, there is a list of recommended outside resources. You can read a book together, do service projects together, or even just share a meal.

HOW TO CUSTOMIZE FORMATION USING YDISCIPLE

YDisciple is not a linear, but a modular curriculum. Discipleship, by its very nature, is focused on the needs of a few and formation should, therefore, be customizable. Here's how:

YDISCIPLE VIDEO SERIES

Professionally produced, story-driven videos with Leader Guides to facilitate meaningful conversation about a variety of topics. Each series is 3-7 sessions long.

The Invitation: 4-Part Series on Discipleship

Never Alone: Life with the Holy Spirit

Known: Experiencing God in Prayer

In Pursuit: Seeking the Moral Life

*This list is just a sample of the many series YDisciple offers. Find the full list at YDisciple.tv/catalog

YD NON-VIDEO ACTIVITIES AND BIBLE STUDIES

These included detailed guides on teaching about things like the Rosary and simple suggestions like playing a sport or going out to dinner together.

OTHER RECOMMENDED CONTENT

There is a glut of great content for Catholic Christian teens these days. We strongly recommend using some of these great resources in the context of a small discipleship group. Here are just a few of our favorites:

VIDEO: [Alpha Youth](#), [Ascension Presents \(YouTube\)](#), [FORMED](#)

NON-VIDEO: [Life Teen](#), [FOCUS Bible Studies](#), Catholic Podcasts, Book study with classics like "[Mere Christianity](#)" by C.S. Lewis

SAMPLE STUDY SEQUENCES

SAMPLE 1

- *The Invitation*
- Ultimate Frisbee game in local park
- *Known*
- Discuss 30-Day Walk with Jesus in [Prayer Journal](#)
- Do a guided Rosary
- Rake leaves at elderly parishioner's home
- *In Pursuit*
- Go to Daily Mass together
- Acension Presents' videos

SAMPLE 2

- *The Invitation*
- Go out to dinner
- *Never Alone*
- Confirmation Bible Study
- The FOUR
- Street Evangelization in local park

SAMPLE 3

- Youth Alpha
- *The Invitation*
- FOCUS Bible Study
- *Known*
- Teens help run Youth Alpha

THE PROPER ROLE OF VIDEOS IN MINISTRY

We at YDisciple are committed to giving you the highest quality, most relevant video tools we can create, but we are also deeply aware that they are only ever that: a tool. There is no such thing as a "plug and play" ministry. Ministry can only be done by people. Consider the following when using videos in your small group ministry:

DO:

- Allow the videos to be watched in small groups instead of in a large group. This allows for more organic conversation.
- Give leaders permission to not "get through" all the content in a given session. Encourage them to not push on to the next video segment if the conversation is focused and fruitful.
- Be mindful of the video quality. Teenagers are the most media-savvy generation ever. Even if the video content is good, if the video itself is dated, the teenagers are likely to not hear the message.

DO NOT:

- Do not show more than 7 minutes of video without a break for discussion. Attention spans are ever-diminishing and we cannot expect teens to have a meaningful conversation about something that was said in minute 2 of a 30-minute video.
- Do not only use video resources. After finishing a YDisciple video series, do at least one session with no videos at all before moving on to the next video series.
- Do not rely only on videos for teaching content. Over time, mentors should be empowered to lead conversation without the aid of a video.

20 NON-VIDEO IDEAS FOR SMALL GROUPS

- Go out to dinner
- MAKE and eat dinner together
- Share lifelines (See "Shating Lifelines" in the Additional Materials folder)
- Go bowling (We'd be a bad youth ministry blog if we didn't mention bowling!)
- Play ultimate frisbee or touch football or any sport together
- Go to adoration
- Help an elderly parishioner with some housework
- Meet up for daily Mass (those little old ladies will plotz to see all those youngins at daily mass!)
- Go out for coffee and just share highs and lows from the week
- Go to one of your group members' events, like a game, choir concert, play etc.
- Spend a whole session just doing lectio divina together
- Build something
- Make fleece blankets for a local homeless shelter or crisis pregnancy center
- Make dinner for a family in the parish who has recently experienced a birth, illness, or death in the family
- Color
- Have a board game night
- Allow them to make a list of their burning questions about faith and life – then come back to them over the next several weeks, one at a time
- Have your priest come to hear confessions
- Go to a grocery store and help people carry their groceries to their cars
- Have a musically inclined group? Have a jam session or a praise and worship session

A Day in the Life

It's small group day! Alan has been leading a small group of freshman boys for a few months now. They've gone through a YDisciple study called *The Invitation* on what it means to be a disciple and done a service project together. Today, they're starting their next study on the Holy Spirit, *Never Alone*.

In the morning, Alan wakes up a half hour early to prepare for small group that evening. He logs into the YDisciple app on his phone and downloads the leader guide for Session 1 of *Never Alone*. He takes a moment to pray for the Holy Spirit's inspiration, then goes through the Leader Guide, watching the corresponding video at the appropriate times in the guide. He marks the questions he think the guys will dig into the most, so he can be sure to prioritize them later. Then, thinking back to how rowdy the boys got during one of their previous meetings, Alan downloads a quick leader training video on discipline and correction so he can listen on his commute to work. A half hour later, he's prepped and ready for small group.

That evening, Alan arrives to the home of one of his small groups members whose parents have offered to host the group for that week. He gets there a bit early to set up the space and help the hosts prepare snacks for the group. Then, the guys arrive.

Alan chats with them and spends the first part of small group checking how they've been the past week. They play a short game, just to get out some extra energy, then open in prayer with the theme Bible verse for the session.

Now, they dive in, watching segments of the video and discussing questions following Alan's Leader Guide, but also letting conversation flow naturally. The boys also ask questions and answer them for one another, occasionally looking to Alan for input as well. They close their time together by committing to a challenge for the week that they'll check in about at their next meeting, and then end in a prayer. Some of the guys stay to chat for a bit and help reset the space they met in, and then small group is over.

Alan thanks the host, and sends off a quick email to them and the other parents, attaching the video the small group watched along with a parent letter he downloaded from the *Never Alone* session materials. He makes sure to send the Spanish version as well for the parents of one of his small group members who primarily speak Spanish. This way, the parents can follow up with their sons about what they talked about in small group and continue the discussion at home.

As time goes on, Alan's small group will continue to grow closer to one another and take ownership of their faith, knowing that they have parents who are invested in their faith, a community of peers that supports them, and an adult mentor who is willing to listen and guide them.

PARTNERING WITH PARENTS IS CRITICAL TO MAKING YOUNG DISCIPLES

PARTNER WITH PARENTS

Why do we talk so much about parents?

Study after study shows that parents are the primary influencer of teenagers' faith lives. University of Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith has conducted multiple studies on young people and religion. When he began his studies, he predicted that the role of parents in a young person's religious thought and practice would diminish as the young person got older. But he actually found the opposite. The more parents are engaged in talking about the faith with their teenagers; the more engaged their teenagers are in the faith.

Let's be clear. This isn't some sort of magic formula. Dr. Smith's research does not claim that strenuous effort from parents will always result in children who have internalized faith. Rather, he states his findings in the negative. He says: "American youth who have grown up to be religiously committed almost always had parents who were very religiously committed. Successfully passing on faith is by no means guaranteed. Outcomes vary widely. Children choose their own lives. But setting aside exceptional cases, what is nearly guaranteed is that American parents who are not especially committed, attentive, and intentional in passing on their faith will produce children who are less religious than they are, if they are religious at all."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is clear about parents: It states, "The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to find an adequate substitute." (CCC 2221). At YDisciple, we recommend partnering with parents from the very beginning of launching small groups to help form the group, host the group in their homes (where Safe Environment policies permit), and sustain the group as it grows. Give them "A Guide to Discipleship for Parents" from the Additional Materials folder.

Ask parents to invite other families personally. People might delete your emails, but they don't delete their friends' emails. This also helps parents take ownership of the group, which can be just as important as the participants taking ownership. See the "Parent to Parent Invitation" handout, found in the Additional Materials folder.

The simplest, most straightforward way to involve parents, however, is to share the content you covered in your small group. If you are using a YDisciple study, share the videos. We've also provided a downloadable "Parent Sheet" in both English and Spanish with all of our studies. Attach these when you email parents. A lot of parents want to share faith with their families but are at a loss when it comes to where to start. Sharing the content you're covering gives them a jumping-off point. Small groups should not be self-contained but will hopefully be springboards for sharing faith in the home as well. Many parents will admit that they feel like they just don't know enough about the faith to talk about it with their kids. By sharing the videos with them, you can teach the parents right alongside their children.

Beyond just sharing content, a trusted adult mentor can provide a bridge of communication between parents and young people.

Frequently Asked Questions

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO START A SMALL GROUP?

YDisciple is not a program; it is a process. The online platform allows a parish to train new Adult Mentors and start new groups at any time during the year. The parable of the mustard seed is the model for starting small groups—plant a seed and watch it multiply. In other words, it is better to launch small groups one at a time than to have a large-scale launch of groups. If you launch a group successfully, with the right teens and mentors and with parent support, they will become the catalyst for the multiplication of groups. A new small group could form over the summer, in the fall, or mid-year and with YDisciple, it is easy to train the mentor, launch them using *The Invitation* at any time.

WHERE IS THE BEST PLACE TO MEET?

The best place to meet is what works for you, your groups, your parish culture, and your policies. Meeting as a group in homes with Safe Environment trained mentors and the hospitality of parents creates an environment conducive to meeting the fundamental needs of teenagers. However, this may not conform to the Safe Environment policies of every diocese. In this case, small groups should meet in the parish, school, or public setting. We just suggest you avoid meeting in a classroom with the desks set up in rows facing a chalkboard. If classrooms are all that are available, build in extra time to prepare the environment.



WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO MEET?

Although you could have all of your small groups meet at the same time (e.g. all on Wednesday night), we recommend that you allow each group to schedule a time to meet weekly that works best for them. This way, fewer teens are likely to have to miss multiple meetings and parents can weigh in on a time that works for them to potentially host the group as well if you're meeting in homes.

ARE SMALL GROUPS INCOMPATIBLE WITH LARGE GROUP YOUTH MINISTRY?

Absolutely not! Large group events can be a very fruitful part of your ministry. Large group ministry events can be a great way to draw all the small groups together and engage teens who are not in small groups. We recommend having a large event 2 times a semester where in some cases, parishes are running both large group and small group ministries.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YDISCIPLE.TV AND FORMED?

If your parish already uses FORMED, you can find YDisciple's video studies for teens and introductory leader training videos there, along with all of the corresponding guides. With YDisciple.tv, however, you get all of the content that can be found on FORMED along with exclusive content and additional features. YDisciple.tv has our entire library of quick tips for leaders, as well as our long-form leader training courses and all of our print bible studies. YDisciple.tv also offers offline playback for videos (so you don't have to worry about WiFi), free iOS, Android, and Roku apps, and premier access to new studies for teens. (See chart on page 17).

YDisciple & NET Ministries

A vast majority of Catholic youth are disconnecting from the Church during their teenage years. To reawaken their faith, NET Ministries trains teams of young adults and sends them to minister in parishes and schools across the United States.

Every August, over 150 young Catholics aged 18-28 leave behind their jobs, school, family, and friends to devote nine months to serving with the National Evangelization Teams (NET). Divided into teams, they travel across the U.S. for nine months to share the Gospel with young people and their families. Since 1981, NET teams have led over 32,000 retreats and ministered to more than 2 million young Catholics.

NET is making a transformational difference in parishes and schools by inspiring young people to pursue a deeper relationship with Christ and by increasing their connection to the Catholic Church.

NET acquired YDisciple from the Augustine Institute in 2019 and is now applying its 4 decades of experience in youth evangelization to YDisciple to bring you more training and resources to reach young people. It operates under the ecclesiastical vigilance of the Archbishop of St. Paul & Minneapolis. Learn more at NETUSA.org