

Free Activities for Youth Groups

by Pamela Fay

Just one large activity, like a retreat, can wipe out a youth group's treasury account. But, teen activities don't have to break the bank. With a little creativity, there are a number of free—or nearly free--activities that you and your youth group can put together with minimal stress and even fewer dollars. Before you ask parents to fork over any more money, consider these ideas.

Game Night

Nearly every family has a board game or two stashed away in the closet. Have the youth group gather up their games—Monopoly, Clue, Scrabble--and have an old fashioned game night. Everyone packs up whatever they planned to eat for dinner that evening and wears their pajamas.

Volunteer

Youth groups are welcome to help at a number of non-profit organizations. Contact local food banks, shelters, trail cleaning operations, charity walks and races, and other community events that are staffed by volunteers. Make a day of giving back.

Auction Stuff

Get the youth group together for a couple hours to auction items. Items can include their own clothing, accessories, jewelry, CDs, books, games—most anything except old term papers. Each teen is given a number of poker chips, beans, pennies--whatever you have--to start. Take turns bidding.

Recycling Challenge

Organize the youth group into teams of three to four. The challenge is to make a useful item out of trash. At the meeting prior to the challenge, each teen is asked to bring three clean articles from household trash, recycle or donation pile. The advisors can supply, for example, glue guns, craft knives, sewing needles, thread and jewelry fittings if available. Allow teams to barter and trade items.

Fashion Show Competition

Have a fashion show competition. Meet at a local thrift shop, preferably a large one. Organize into teams of four in the parking lot. Throw old magazines into a pile and let each team find a picture of an outfit they like. Now, the youth group teams have 30 minutes to put together an “interpretation” of the outfit using items they find in the thrift shop. Once they have all the items, they must take a digital picture of the original outfit and the thrift shop outfit. Ask a couple of technically competent teens to act as fashion show coordinators to create a slide show using the pictures. They will present the show at the next youth group meeting. Have fun judging the outfits using criteria like creativity, wearability and authenticity.

The Apprentice

Enlist the help of one or more advisors to be judges and create challenges for a game modeled after the television show “The Apprentice.” Use the Runway Challenge listed here and make up more of your own. For example, teams can build a tower using marshmallows and toothpicks. Organize the youth group into two or more teams that will appoint a project manager for each challenge. Depending upon how many challenges are used, the game can go on for a few weeks or a few months. Although no one is fired at the end of each round of play, the teams are numerically scored.

Cautions:

Make sure everyone has parental permission to sell items in the auction.

If you are using a business for your free activity, make every effort to be courteous and non-disruptive. Inform the business manager of your intentions in advance. If the youth group can provide volunteer services to the business, do so.

Ask permission at the thrift shop before you begin and have the group bring plenty of gently-used donations.

References

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