

Problems??  
A problem shared is a problem halved

These activities are designed to allow young people to share any challenges (problems) that they might have in their life. These activities provide others with the opportunity to share their experience and ideas for how challenges can be resolved. These activities work best with groups that know each other reasonably well already. It is important to create a “safe environment” before starting. Ask participants to respect privacy of others.

**Agony Aunt**

This is a method of group problem solving. You can ask group members to write anonymous 'agony aunt' letters, you can make up some letters about issues that you know are pertinent to your group or you can collect together problem pages from magazines that would be relevant to your group. Asking the group to write their own letters is appropriate for a more mature group that you know will respect one another. Writing scenarios for the group may work better for a younger group, or where you feel specific issues need to be addressed. Some of the types of problems with your group might want to consider are: family relationships, boy/girl partnerships, sex, honesty, personal integrity, guilt etc.

Divide into groups. According to how your young people relate to each other, you may consider it appropriate to have groups of four or larger, or indeed to stay in one group.

*Working in small groups:*

Where working in smaller groups, give each group three problem letters. You can give each group the same letters or different ones. If you have taken letters from a magazine do not give them the answers – only the questions. Ask each group to discuss what advice they would give in answer to each problem. Allow around 15 minutes (5 minutes per question).

Bring everyone together and ask each group to read out one of their problems and the advice they would give. Then open the issue up for discussion generally. You may like to draw together the salient points and mention any distinctive Christian understanding of the problem. Then it may be appropriate to read out and discuss the answer published in the magazine.

Go through the three problems of each group, or if time is short, take just one problem from each group.

*Working in a larger group*

If working in one large group put the letters in a bowl in the centre and produce a hat. Explain that group members are going to take it in turn to give advice to the people who have written the letters. Invite a member to read out one of the letters and ask if anyone has some advice to give. The person giving advice should wear the hat while they give their opinion. If anyone else has something to add, they should put their hand up and take their turn wearing the hat. As a leader, feel free to add your advice too (as long as you are wearing the hat). This activity encourages lots of people to take part, and to realise that they have skills and experiences that are worth sharing.

If you have a pastoral worker or a priest with responsibility for youth ministry you may like to ask them to join you for this activity or you might want to encourage any youth with larger problems to make a time for a one-on-one discussion with a relevant person.

End with a time of prayer for the group. You could ask members to reflect quietly on one or two problems that have been raised. You might invite them to think about what their response is and whether they are being called to take further action.

Give thanks for the friendship circle that exists in your group and pray for friendships to be strengthened, both within the group and outside it.

Conclusion

It is helpful for teenagers to appreciate the various perspectives on their own and other people’s personal problems. This activity will encourage them to talk frankly and openly about sensitive topics. It should also be an opportunity to do some teaching on Christian ethics.

Some of the issues may strike an emotional chord, so be sensitive to provide opportunity for personal conversation with individuals when the main session is over.

**Problem Hotline**

Invite the group to sit in a circle with two chairs back to back in the centre. Choose two people, one to be the hotline worker and the other to be a caller with a problem. The “worker” leaves the room while the group leader assigns a problem to the caller. When the worker returns, the caller pretends to call the worker and explain his or her problem.

It is important that the worker and caller remain back to back. The group leader is responsible for cutting off the mock call at the proper time and leading a discussion among the rest of the group as to how the problem might be solved.

We recommend you prepare your own questions on issues relevant to your group or ask members to give you questions that they would like discussed. Here are some examples problems to get you started and to give you an indication of the amount of detail required (not a lot!):

1. I am not very attractive. People avoid me and I can tell that most people I know of make fun of me behind my back. I know I am ugly and so does everyone else so what can I do?
2. My parents make me go to church. I like the youth programme but the Mass is a drag. The sermons our priest gives to us aren’t relevant to somebody my age and I get really bored. What should I do?
3. My mother is dying of cancer. Every day I am faced with cancer’s ugly and depressing toll on my Mum. I am forced to accept more and more responsibilities at home but I really want to go out with my friends. When I do go out with my friends I feel guilty but if I stay home I get angry and frustrated. What’s the answer?
4. I have always been told that kids who do drugs or drink really don’t enjoy it. I have refrained from doing those things, partly because I believe that and partly because I don’t think it is the Christian thing to do. I was at a party recently and I tried them and I felt really good. I had a great time at the party – more fun than ever before. How can something that good be bad?
5. People in my school call me names and send me nasty messages on my mobile and on Facebook. This really upsets me. What should I do?