



# The Three Rs for Youth Leaders

During the past few years, there has been a lot of confusion about the law and its effect on the youth leader's role in campus ministry. Thanks to the "separation of church and state" mentality in our country, many youth leaders have taken a hands-off approach to campus ministry. They have passed that responsibility entirely to the Christian students on campus.

Remember that a campus club must be student-initiated and student-led. When it comes to the campus club itself, your role should be behind the scenes. Help your students follow the steps outlined in the student section—How to Start a Campus Club—as they begin and lead their club. You can be actively involved in challenging, training, and encouraging your students.

That does not mean that you have to avoid the campus. There are things you can do on campus that can actually strengthen the work your students are trying to accomplish. To have an effective campus ministry as a youth leader, focus on the "Three Rs": rights, relationships, and responsibilities.

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Youth leaders have no special legal rights on the campus, but they also have no special restrictions. They have the same rights and restrictions as any other citizen in the community.

That means that when the campus is open to the public, it is open to you. Attending events, such as art shows and musical and drama productions, in which your students are involved is a great way to show support for the students and the school. It is also a way to meet other students and parents, as well as coaches, teachers, and other school staff.

While you may not have unlimited access to the campus, you can still have a campus ministry. The biblical term *minister* means 'to serve'. Therefore, campus ministry can be defined as any form of service offered to students on the school campus. Youth leaders can, and should, offer their services to their schools on the basis of concern—not church duty.

Also be aware of the rights that students have on campus. Become familiar with *The Equal Access Act*. This federal law allows for student-led, student-initiated clubs on campus if other non-curriculum-related clubs are allowed to meet.

*The Students' Bill of Rights on the School Campus*, though not a legal document, clearly summarizes how students may express their faith on campus.

*Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools* was prepared by the US Department of Education to help school administrators understand the "principles that distinguish impermissible governmental religious speech from the constitutionally protected private religious speech of students."

*Inside the Schoolhouse Gates*, prepared by The Rutherford Institute, is a brief overview of the law and court cases that relate to the rights of students on campus.



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## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Every effective campus ministry hinges on relationships. It has been well stated, “It’s not *what* you know that counts; it’s *who* you know.” This is certainly true when it comes to campus ministry. One of the best ways to get involved on the campus is to build quality relationships with the people who are already there.

### STUDENTS IN YOUR YOUTH GROUP

#### *Help Them Start a Campus Club*

Students are in the best possible position to do campus ministry. The first Amendment guarantees students the right to “free exercise” of religious expression. Although it has been challenged, students in public secondary schools can—

- start a Bible club on campus;
- pray privately and in groups;
- read the Bible on school property;
- talk about religious issues;
- pass out religious literature; and
- express religious beliefs.

The *Equal Access Act* and the Supreme Court have overwhelmingly affirmed students’ religious rights on the public middle school and high school campus. No one has more opportunity to be a Christian on the public campus than the student. Therefore Christian students need to be taught how they can be effective in their role as campus missionaries.

#### *Lunch with Students*

Consider having lunch with your students and their friends. Many school policies allow for a student to have lunch with a pre-approved adult.

#### *Speak at Campus Club Meeting*

On a limited basis, your students may arrange to invite you to speak at a campus club meeting. They will, of course, need to get permission ahead of time.

#### *Classroom Speaking*

Your students may also be able to have you speak in one or more of their classes on specific topics. You could speak about a Christian perspective on just about any topic, such as sexuality, politics, war, the origins of man and the universe, or death. You may also speak on a non-religious topic in a field in which you have some expertise, like writing, mechanics, and business. Through your students, you can become a valuable outside resource person.



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## **PRE-EXISTING CAMPUS MINISTRIES**

Many schools already have some form of evangelical ministry available to its students. Sometimes this is an off-campus meeting under the direction of a parachurch organization, such as Youth for Christ or Young Life. These ministries frequently can use more adult leadership. This is an excellent opportunity to minister to students.

Arrange to meet with the area director(s) of the organization. Express your desire to be involved in campus ministry and your willingness to work with them in an effort to touch the lives of students. Explain to them that you would like to attend their meetings and just hang out with the students, not as a local youth pastor, but as a friend and concerned adult. If you have any students attending their meetings, tell the leaders who they are. This will give you an inroad to the meetings and a better chance to be accepted.

Remember, these men and women are co-workers. Try to develop a team approach to high school ministry.

## **SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION**

Getting to know those in authority on campus can be your ticket to campus ministry. This usually begins with the principal, but may also include the superintendent and school board members. The objective is to move from being a total stranger to being a familiar face.

Start by making an appointment to meet with the principal at his convenience. After introducing yourself, express your desire to be available to him and the school. Assure him that you care very deeply about students, and that is why you are visiting him. Keep your initial meeting brief and to the point.

Afterwards, write a letter to the principal, thanking him for taking time out of his busy schedule to meet with you and, again, stating your willingness to be available. You have now begun to build a bridge to the campus.

One meeting, though, is not enough to become a familiar face. Other meetings should be arranged, such as lunch appointments on or off campus. Topics for discussion may include: student problems on the campus, current youth trends, and personal challenges. This not only gives you a fresh perspective on student ministry, but gives him an opportunity to talk with someone who is interested in listening.

From time to time, ask about students from your church and how they are doing in school. Ask for specific ways you can help them. As you show genuine concern for your students, principals will often feel more at ease around you.

Remember, the goal is not to butter up the administration so that you are given official access to the campus. Rather, it should be to make yourself available to the school administrator as a servant. Therefore, keep these suggestions in mind when meeting with school administrators:

- Don't be pushy or persistent.



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- Don't approach with a know-it-all attitude, but rather with a how-can-I-help attitude.
- Don't be preachy.

Building relationships will build bridges to the campus and will provide you with opportunities to minister to students.

## TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

With every right and privilege comes responsibility. When involved in on-campus ministry of any type, always follow these six simple guidelines:

- Be structured in your approach to campus ministry.
- Be sensible in your manners and actions while on campus.
- Be submissive to school authority and those in charge.
- Be supportive of school programs and school policy.
- Be serious about your ministry, whatever form it takes.
- Be sensitive to those who may not approve of your presence on their campus.

After you have established yourself as a reputable individual, you are ready to offer your ministry to the school. The number of ways a youth leader can have an influence on the campus depends on the prayerful creativity of each individual. Our creative God has some creative ideas for campus ministry.

### ***Youth Counselor***

School administrators are always looking for help with troubled students. Offer your services as a youth counselor. If you have specialized training in this field, it will certainly help, but it is often not necessary. The fact that you have chosen to work with students may be enough to get them to accept your voluntary assistance. Be available to counsel students who are having personal problems and find it difficult to keep out of trouble. A school tragedy can also be an opportune time for you to offer your help.

### ***Assistant Coach***

Many youth leaders have a special interest in some sort of sport. Schools generally hire teachers for the head coaching job, but may be searching for an assistant coach or two to help students with practice and training. Consider applying and offering your expertise to student athletes. This will give you a great opportunity to interact with the campus athletes and may open the door to more formal campus ministry.

### ***Athletic Chaplain***

If coaching is not your thing, what about serving as chaplain for your favorite sport? Express your interest in the particular sport and make yourself available to serve the team as a non-denominational chaplain. Explain that you are not trying to get students converted to religion, but simply want to offer athletes the spiritual aspect of their total development. If you have students on the team, it will help if they request a chaplain.