

PLANNING FOR AN ENCOUNTER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITH GROUPS

Why should I do multi-faith youth work?

In today's climate, where groups so easily become polarised, it is vital that our young people are given the skills to proactively build bridges with peers from different groups. Unless we actively seek to befriend and get to know peers from another group, our country will increasingly become a nation of many insolated groups. To live together in peace, it is not enough to tolerate one another. To live together in peace we need to learn to appreciate, value and live well with difference.

Is it safe?

In our experience, enabling young people to engage well with one another tends to strengthen their identity, their self-awareness and their own faith. It is in engaging well with "the other" that we learn to articulate who we are and what we stand for. Overwhelmingly, the feedback we have had from young people is, that as a result of building bridges towards peers from a different faith or culture, they are more resilient, more confident and less fearful.

What is the best way of getting my young people involved?

1. Prepare them. Talk to them about why you are inviting them to engage with peers from a different faith.

The Feast, in partnership with The Methodist Circuit, is developing a youth group resource called "Building Bridges" that helps unpack some of the aspect of engaging well with those from a different faith or culture.

Email contact@thefeast.org.uk to find out more.

2. Find a group to connect with. This may well be the hardest part of the process and may need time. If you don't know anyone from another faith community, especially someone who also has the charge of young people, you may need to start by building relationships with them e.g. a local mosque or a nearby madrassa, a local Hindu mandir or the Afro-Caribbean youth club down the road.

You may need the help of others who already have those relationships in order to help you connect with a different group.

Certainly The Feast will be able to give you some guidance in this. Do give us a ring!

3. Plan an event together.

Approach a potential group and talk with the leader of the other group about your idea for a youth encounter. Ideally you would plan the encounter together:

- a) determine the activity you want to do together. We think it should be something fun, something the young people will enjoy doing, perhaps something they wouldn't normally get the chance to do.

- b) think about your participants. You may need to consider if your event will be open to boys and girls or if it is better to be a just boys / just girls event.
- c) plan your event well. How will you break the ice between the young people who may well feel a bit awkward towards each other? How will you get them to learn each other's names? Where will you eat? Will you need to build in time for prayer, especially if you are meeting with a Muslim group. Don't assume this – just ask.
- d) try to meet in a neutral venue. If your activities are team games and pizza, your church hall may not be the most accessible to your Muslim guests. Equally, they may not mind at all. But do have that conversation. If a space is required for prayer time, where will this be?
- e) work out how you are going to fund it. If you don't have your own youth budget you may wish to apply for funding from community funders such as Near Neighbours in order to be able to offer the activity for free.
- f) discuss logistics such as transport and the place where you will do the dialogue part of the encounter. We have used greasy diners before!
- g) plan the dialogue part of the encounter well. How will you introduce the guidelines for dialogue? What size groups do you want the young people to discuss in? What topic of conversation do you want them to talk about? How will you ensure the dialogue is interactive?
- h) plan for some good food! Don't assume the young people will want food from their own culture. It doesn't always have to be pizza – though pizza always works.

4. Evaluate the encounter with your young people.

What went well? What would have made it better? What were the constraints you had? Ask the young people what they honestly thought about the encounter and give them plenty of space for feedback.

And they are going to talk?!

Yes! Young people do like to talk about stuff that concerns them.

Giving them the chance to talk on a deeper level with one another enables them to explore their own beliefs as well as be open towards the beliefs of others. The skill of being able to dialogue well, even when there are differences, is what equips our young people to be peace makers.

A note about the dialogue part of an encounter:

- This is not about right or wrong answers. This is about dialogue.
- So avoid talking at the young people. Avoid correcting their "theology". Allow the young people to express themselves and say what they want to say.
- You may wish to give them some questions as a springboard to their discussion. It is not about completing all the questions – it is about allowing them time to discuss and talk with one another in a quality way! We want them to genuinely connect with one another as they talk.
- Nor is it about forcing discussion. If they have had enough, then leave it for now and maybe plan a follow-up encounter!