

# EDGE NIGHTS: WELCOMING, ENGAGING, STRUCTURED & DYNAMIC

Most middle school youth are trying to figure out if they are a kid or a “young adult.” Homework takes up more time, friends form cliques, and parents become a little more stern. Through all this and more, middle school youth are simply trying to figure out where they fit in.

When it comes to your Edge Nights, imagine that you are in middle school. Walk through your entire Edge Night from the moment you get out of your parents’ car, to the moment you get back in. As you do this, ask yourself: Is this Edge Night welcoming, engaging, structured, and dynamic?

## **WELCOMING**

Imagine that you are a youth coming to the Edge for the first time. As you get out of your mom’s car, do you know what building to go in? Perhaps you know the right building, but do you know the right door? Sometimes, church campuses are like labyrinths with endless possibilities. Choose the wrong door, and you could be walking the school hallway for days. In this hypothetical situation, did anyone greet you outside, make you feel welcome, and point you in the right direction?

## **ENGAGING**

Even after you find the right building and the right door, do you know where to go once you get inside? There could be a few meetings going on around the parish grounds. Does the Edge meeting location stick out for middle school youth? Is it obvious from the moment they arrive? Are they automatically engaged in what is going on? All of this starts off the night on the right foot. Be welcoming and engaging up front. This does not happen by accident. It is intentional, and it means the entire Core Team has to work together to welcome and engage the middle school students from the moment they arrive.

## **STRUCTURED**

A strong sense of structure at Edge Nights is essential. The four main components that make up the backbone of every Edge Night are: Gather, Proclaim, Break, and Send.

**GATHER** - The Gather welcomes the youth and introduces the night. Games or icebreakers help the youth disengage from anything going on at home or school while allowing them to focus for the Edge Night. They can also break down barriers between the youth, help to get out some of their energy, or get them thinking by doing an activity directly related to the topic.

**PROCLAIM** - The Proclaim is the teaching portion of the night. While it may be tempting to think that this means the youth minister talks from the front of the room for 15 minutes, this is not the case. There are numerous ways to present information such as a panel discussion, a teen witness, audio and video clips, or rotating sessions. It is also good to get a variety of faces up front to do teachings, including Core Members, priests, deacons, or other members of your parish community. Above all, keep teachings short and simple, and engage the youth in as many ways as possible by making it relevant to their lives. As a Core Team, constantly work on ways to present creatively so the young people will want to grasp, remember, and apply the teaching.

**BREAK** - The Break is where the rubber hits the road. The youth have heard about a truth of our faith or how to deal with an issue in our world. Now, they have the opportunity to break it open on their level. This will take many forms over the course of a year: small group discussion,

reflection sheets, personal prayer time, discussion with a partner, skit creation, poster board creation, and many more dynamic activities to help the youth understand what they learned. Most importantly, the Break is where the young people have a chance to hear from each other and express their own feelings and understandings. This is not a time for the small group leader to correct something from the Proclaim, to finish a teaching, or to give a speech of their own. Rather, the role of the small group leader is to facilitate the discussion and any other activities.

**SEND** - While the Send may begin by presenting a poster board or skit from small groups, it is ultimately a crucial opportunity for the youth to be led into a time of prayer. Take time to carefully plan the Send while leaving room for the Holy Spirit to move in their hearts. Do not sell the youth short. Help them experience the depth of prayer our Church has to offer, and do not rush this part of the night. Once the prayer experience concludes, the youth minister should challenge the young people to do something daily to remember what they learned at Edge. After this, wrap up the Edge Night with any announcements, and invite them to return next week.

Middle school youth need structure so be attentive to different ways you can help them feel more comfortable even outside the four main parts of the night. For example, many parishes will break the room into sections based on grade level. Then, in each of those sections, there is a designated space for each small group to gather and check in when they arrive. The youth may run around until the night gets started, but once it starts, they know exactly where to go. This structure creates a sense of comfort and routine while providing a quick way to start the night and gain control of the room.

### **DYNAMIC**

Once you've established a sense of welcome, engagement, and structure, now you have the fun task of making your ministry dynamic. Use the gifts of your Core Team to think "outside the box" and plan with the realities of your parish's time, space, and resources in mind. Keep your standards high and give the young people your very best!

As you go forward as a Core Team, continually walk through each Edge night as a middle school youth, from the moment you get out of your parents' car until the moment you get back in. Ask yourself if every component is welcoming, engaging, structured, and dynamic? If it's not, what can you do to improve?

God has called you and your team to this awesome ministry, and all of us here at Life Teen want to thank you for your yes. As a movement, we want to support you in your quest to lead teens closer to Christ and are honored to be working with you in this vital ministry. Know that you are not alone. We are here to pray with you, pray for you, or support you in any other way. Call, email, or reach out to us at any time. Together, we can ensure that each middle school youth encounters Jesus Christ.

