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## **Guidelines for a code of conduct for youth groups**

### **Why have one?**

- Because where two or three are gathered in my name, there will be trouble!
- Seriously, in the best of youth groups there will be occasions when one or more of the members behave in a way that makes others feel uneasy or places them at risk. To have clear guidelines in place allows peers and adult leaders to deal quickly and effectively with any problems and for the resolution of them to be a good experience for the group
- The presence of a group contract or code of conduct helps young people to learn about respect for each other and skills in negotiation and conflict resolution. It allows all the members to have a sense of ownership of the group.

### **Don't**

- Think that a group contract is unnecessary. Most of the time it will be, but when it is needed and you haven't got one to refer to, life suddenly becomes more difficult than it should be.
- Write it yourself. It must be written by the young people and adult leaders together so that everyone agrees to it.
- Just leave it on a wall and let it go dog-eared. Use it in sessions, focus on one agreed aspect in prayer time, refer to it when trying to resolve a problem .....
- Apply it inconsistently. If a young person gets the feeling that they are being treated unfairly, they will rightly get annoyed. That doesn't mean that everyone is treated the same, but simply that everyone is treated justly.
- Be afraid to put your suggestions into the mix. As a leader, you will have expectations of how the young people should behave and it is far better that you are open and honest about these, giving your reasons why.

### **Do**

- Ask the group members to work on this. Be creative ..... one idea is to set up a large graffiti wall and ask everyone to put up their suggestions and then ask them to work in small groups to hone these down. See how the different groups agree and work towards some common ground.
- Ask a small group of young people to be the design group so that the finished code of conduct is well presented and looks important and permanent.
- Ask every member of the group – including anyone joining the group – to sign this as a group contract ..... then hold them to their signature!