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## Try improvising *on purpose*

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*"Improvise in youth ministry," you ask? "That's all I do!"*

No, this is not about improvising at the last minute when four young people show up instead of 40. Or when no one brought the nosh and you make do with the stale crackers in the church kitchen.

This Help Sheet is about intentional improvisation in youth ministry. It's about tapping into the creative, playful, even profound ideas, emotions and words that run deep in young people. Improvisation is about being comfortable with a blank sheet and letting young people write it. It's about entertainment, but it's also participatory. Improvisation involves everyone and is fun.

In a more professional vein, improvisation is a theater experience in which participants set out to solve a problem with no preconception as to how to do it.

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### Why use improv?

- People, especially youth, learn from experience.
  - When improvising situations, players get a chance to practice how they'll react, making them more prepared if the situation arises.
  - Improvisation works on an intellectual, physical and intuitive level.
  - Because there are no right or wrong answers in improvisation, youth are more willing to participate and experiment.
  - Improvisation lends itself to self discovery.
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### Getting Started

1. *Set up guidelines to follow*

- Don't make fun of the players.
- It's OK to react to what you're watching as long as your reactions are genuine.
- Believe what is happening in the scene and react accordingly.
- No physical violence during the scenes.

### 2. Remember these things

- In improvisation, the process is more important than the product.
- If a scene isn't working, end it, change circumstances and start over.
- It's helpful to discuss scenes that are improvised.
- Not everyone likes to be in front of a group. Don't force youth into it.

### 3. Choose the situation

- Pick players for the roles, remembering that gender doesn't always matter in improvisation.
- Make sure players understand their objectives.
- After the scene, ask players about the choices they made.
- Allow them to replay the situation, making different choices.

## Situations for using improvisation

### 1. Dealing with difficult people

#### A. Familiar people

Set up situations involving people with whom young people must deal on a daily basis, such as friends, family and school faculty.

- Your friends are pressuring you into drugs, alcohol or sex.
- A girlfriend/boyfriend is angry with the way you're treating her or him.
- Your parent is angry at you for dating someone of a different race.
- A sibling is angry with you for borrowing stuff.
- The principal confronts you about skipping class.
- A teacher wrongfully accuses you of cheating on a test.

#### B. Strangers

People we don't know can be the most difficult. Design situations that involve strangers, such as:

- A store clerk is having a bad day and is taking it out on you.
- Another driver cuts you off.
- Someone is trying to start a fight with you.
- A police officer confronts you because of the way you look.

## 2. Communicating your feelings

Saying what we really want to communicate is one of the hardest things for us. Practicing situations like these may make it easier if it ever happens.

- Approaching a teacher about his/her unfair treatment of someone in your class.
- Confronting a parent about a strict rule.
- Telling someone you're pregnant.
- Confronting an abusive partner.
- Telling someone you're gay.

## 3. What would Jesus do/say?

Ask one player (male or female) to play the role of Jesus. Choose another to approach Jesus for advice on a problem (without telling Jesus the problem in advance). Use the same situation more than once to see how different youth think Jesus would react.

## 4. Improvise scripture

After reading and discussing a scripture text, invite players to act it out, using their own words and as if the situation were happening today.

## 5. Talk show

Choose a Bible story in which two groups confront one another. Pick a talk show host and a few members of the group to be guests on either side of the confrontation. Ask the rest of the group to be the studio audience. The host asks guests their side of the story and fields questions from the studio audience.

## 6. One-liner discussions

Ask two volunteers to invent their own character (age, occupation, characteristics). Whisper the scene's opening line into the ear of one player, who then says it. The second character responds and the scene continues from there. Yell "curtain" when it seems over. Try these lines for starters:

- "Is God real?"
- "Jesus did not wear boxers!"
- "I think Jesus liked fish more than chicken."
- "Lord Have Mercy!"
- "You did WHAT?"
- "Would you like to start the prayer?"

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