

“What practices help you feel connected to God?”

“That’s a really good question. I’m not sure of the answer, but I’ll do some digging. Can we keep talking about this in the future?”

“Where did you see God this week?”

“I love watching God grow you into someone who loves Him and loves others. Right now, I can see . . .”

“One of the best things you can do for your faith is to come to small group and be connected to other people working through their faith too. I’m so glad you’re here. Who else can you talk to about your faith?”

“You’re great at _____s. What is a way you might be able to use that gift to help others?”

“Why do you think that happened? What do you think that means?”

“What you’re going through reminds me of a verse that means a lot to me: Can I send it to you?”

“How can I pray for you as you start making decisions about what’s next in your life?”

“A growing faith doesn’t mean a perfect life. You are going to mess up, and that’s okay. God always has grace, and so do I!”

A Volunteer’s Guide to . . .

Talking About Faith



with High Schoolers



How to Talk About Faith

The faith conversations during this phase are all about passion.

→ High schoolers are becoming more independent and defining their own identity more than at any other time in their lives so far. They're figuring out who they are and who they want to be—including how they understand, practice, and internalize their faith.

Teens relate to a God who guides their decisions, promotes love and forgiveness, empowers their freedom, enables them to live more fully, moves them toward a greater purpose and identity, and connects them to a bigger story.

Theologian James Fowler created a model that breaks down the different stages of faith. Part of faith maturity is progressing through stages that involve individuating from authority figures who passed faith down and questioning assumptions and inconsistencies that may show up in faith.¹ Doubt will be an essential part of their faith development.

In this Phase . . . As a volunteer, when you **mobilize their potential**, you help a high schooler keep pursuing authentic faith and discover a personal mission.

They are **motivated by freedom** and think like philosophers. Leveraging authority is often unhelpful, so allow them to learn through open debate. Help them to verbally process, wrestle with questions, and come to their own conclusions to empower them to own their own faith.

In Your Conversations . . .

BEFORE

Practice your poker face. React on the inside, not the outside. Students may ask some big questions, share some difficult experiences, or confess personal things. When you're able to stay calm, you build trust and let them know small group is a safe place.

Know what matters to them. Spend some time reminding yourself about what's going on in your students' personal worlds. Being able to connect an idea to their basketball team or the friend group they're a part of can help build trust because they feel seen.

DURING

Ask more questions than you give answers. Students in this phase want to wrestle with an idea and come to their own conclusions. By helping them verbally process and clarify their faith, you're helping them develop a faith that sticks.

Give an application. Students want more than just theory. They want to understand how their faith is relevant to their everyday lives, so giving them something to do this week will help them remember what they learned.

Honor differences. Your students may have different beliefs on a variety of topics because of different life or family experiences. Avoid talking about different beliefs in a judgmental way and instead give space for them to express differences.

AFTER

Have fun. If they shared something heavy—a doubt, or a big question—having fun together can help them feel more secure with you and more likely to continue to do so in the future.

Serve together. Help them put what they're learning into action. When you give them something to do that matters, you help them feel like they matter.

Keep your promises. If you said you'd explore a question or if they tell you about something big happening in their life, follow up. This builds trust.

Model it. Students have no tolerance for inauthenticity and can tell when someone's actions and words don't match up. That's why one of the best things you can do is model the principles you talk about in group in your real life.

¹ Janse, Ben. 2022. "Fowler's Stages of Faith Development." www.toolshero.com/. June 27, 2022.