

Covenants

Why do we covenant?

Working together to create a covenant is one of the more important tasks your group will undertake before leaving for an offsite church experience. A covenant is an agreement, promise, or contract between people. Covenants describe behaviors of Christian witness, mutual expectations, relationships, responsibilities, safety concerns. Covenants establish guidelines and boundaries for living in Christian community in ways that contribute to everyone having a positive, safe, meaningful experience.

Consider creating and discussing a covenant with your group. Begin the conversation early in your planning and keep the discussion open while, at the same time, working toward clarity about witness, behavior, expectations, responsibilities, and safety. The process of creating covenants involves honest, caring discussions and building trust over time as a community -- whether you are a group of 2 or 200.

Negotiable and non-negotiable issues

As you work with your group to develop a covenant, remember some issues or agreements are negotiable and some may be non-negotiable from a congregation's perspective. Clearly state the non-negotiables up-front. Share these issues in a way that communicates their importance from a faith, safety, health, or community wellbeing perspective.

Examples of non-negotiable issues may include:

- No use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs.
- No inappropriate touch or sexual activity.
- Seat belts must be worn while traveling.
- The group gathers and checks in at set times each day (specify times).
- Anything that is required by congregational or insurance Best Practices.
- Etc.

Examples of negotiable items may include:

- Ways to help and care for one another.
- Ideas for sharing your experience when you return.
- Appropriate clothing guidelines.
- Etc.

Don't forget to include identifying the positive things you can do to help each other get the most out of the Gathering experience. These may include:

- Meeting each day at a particular time to talk about your experiences.

- Setting aside time for daily prayer, prayer partners, or the processing of each day
- Identifying specific ways to care for and affirm each other.
- Etc.

Make copies of your covenant(s)

When you've reached agreement as to the contents of your group's covenant, print three copies for each participant (youth and adult) to read, sign, and date. One copy is given to the participant's parents/guardians to keep, one copy stays with the individual, and a copy is returned to the Primary Leader.

If a problem occurs

All situations that require discipline or intervention are to be first addressed between the congregational group's adult leaders and youth. Have at least two adults present when intervening. Carefully word your questions. Do not be accusatory. Be patient. Act---Do Not React. In the most serious cases, a group or individual may be sent home, at their own expense.

It's all for good!

Throughout the covenanting process, remember that it is for the benefit and wellbeing of the individuals and the community. It's a way of working toward a positive, growth-filled, rich experience with everyone -- youth and adults. Even when problems occur, community covenants will help guide everyone to move and respond in ways that reflect compassion, justice, and concern for each other.