

...walk with me...

The World of Middle School Kids



...walk with me...

TRAINING MANUAL



The World of Middle School Kids

Focus

Teachers will learn some of the developmental changes that middle school students are going through and how to minister to these students effectively.

Time

50 minutes

Audience

Teachers, parents, grandparents and other leaders who work with middle school kids.

Room Setup

In preparation for this presentation you'll need the following:

- Computer for PowerPoint presentation and a screen (or overhead projector and transparencies made from PP slides)
- Nametags
- Paper and pens
- Photocopies of handout "Sample Session," one per participant
- Newsprint, markers
- This workshop guide

Room setup is easy. If space allows, place tables and chairs so that participants can interact with each other and with you, while also permitting everyone to see the PowerPoint presentation. Encourage participants to sit in groups of four to six at each table.

Preparation

- Invite participants—teachers, parents, grandparents and other leaders who work with middle school kids—at least two weeks in advance.
- Ask a volunteer to provide and set up some light refreshments for the event.
- Preview the PowerPoint presentation. Read through this workshop guide several times to catch the flow. Highlight key words and phrases to help you during your presentation.
- Note that we've included many stories about middle school children in this presentation to illustrate the ideas presented. You're welcome to use these stories, of course, but we encourage you to replace them with stories from your own experiences. Doing so will make the presentation come alive—both for you and for participants.
- Supply pens and paper for the participants to take notes as desired.

Session Planner

| | |
|---|------------|
| Hello <i>Brainstorm words or phrases that describe middle school students.</i> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Welcome | 5 minutes |
| Know <i>Understand the physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and faith changes that middle schoolers experience.</i> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes, Changes | 20 minutes |
| Grow <i>Understand the need for authoritative communities and how the church can be such a community for middle schoolers.</i> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What Is Our Role? | 10 minutes |
| Show <i>Apply the things we learned about middle schoolers and authoritative communities to church ministry.</i> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enriching the Lives of Middle Schoolers | 15 minutes |

1

HELLO

Welcome

Time

5 minutes

Goal

Brainstorm words or phrases that describe middle school students.

Materials

- PowerPoint slides 1-3
- Newsprint/board and markers/chalk, optional
- Nametags and pens, optional

Before you begin, have PP slide 1 showing on the screen.



Greet participants as they arrive. If your participants do not know each other, provide nametags and pens. Welcome everyone and briefly introduce yourself; then take a few minutes to have everyone introduce themselves. If the group is large, make sure that people at least get to meet the others at their table.

Say, **Welcome! We're going to spend some time together thinking about the world of middle school kids. Middle schoolers are not little children. They are not adults. They are not even really adolescents. They're somewhere in the middle. Middle schoolers are a wonderful mix of child and adult—sometimes all in the same five minutes. They can make you smile and drive you crazy. They can be the most fun group of kids you've ever been with, and they can make you pull your hair out!**

Ask everyone to suggest a word or phrase that comes to mind when they hear the term "middle schooler." To maximize participation, have participants answer the question at their tables first so everyone gets a chance to give an answer, then ask them to call out their answers for everyone to hear. You may want to list them on your board or newsprint.

Thank the group for all their answers, and comment that these already give us some insight into the mystery that is the middle school student. These kids can be complex, acting silly one minute and then asking serious questions the next.

Show PP slides 2-3 and read the text below:



Slide 2

Yet during this time of great growth and change, middle school students also have questions about faith.

This is Lynnae. She is 12 years old. Lynnae's 83-year-old grandfather fell recently and broke his hip. He had been slipping a bit mentally over the past year, and the family was becoming concerned. After surgery to repair his hip, Lynnae's grandpa was sent to a nursing home so that he could get the kind of care he needed. When he first got to the nursing home, the family noticed a sharp decrease in his cognitive skills. There were a number of things that he seemed unable to understand. For instance, he wasn't able to remember that he shouldn't get up and walk. He also didn't understand why he had to stay at this nursing home. He wanted to go home and asked anyone and everyone if they would help him get out of that place. As the family was discussing this at the dinner table one night, Lynnae asked a very good question: "What if Grandpa forgets about God?"



Slide 3

Gloria Stronks tells this story in *The Christian Middle School: An Ethos of Caring*.

"Ask her yourself."

"No, you ask her. She's your mom."

I was working in the kitchen when I heard raised voices from the group of six junior high boys who had been talking in our family room. Sensing a problem, I walked in and sat down with them, asking what was going on.

Joey began the explanation. "We were talking about George. You know, he's the kid who was killed in the accident last week." George was from another town and I hadn't known him, but they had told me about the accident earlier. "What we want to know is this. Is George in heaven or in hell now? And if he's in hell it must be God's fault."

I tried not to show how shocked I felt because I knew they were very serious in their concern. "You'll have to explain your reasoning to me before I can answer."

The boys were uneasy but finally my son, Bill, said, "We don't think you know how bad George really was. He was nice to his parents and then did exactly the opposite of what they said. He swore a lot when there weren't any parents around."

"He was even worse than us, Mrs. Stronks," said Jerry. For some reason, that remark gave me very little comfort. "We think he was too bad to go to heaven. And if he didn't, we think it was God's fault."

"You'll have to explain that to me."

"Well, you know lots of boys our age get into some kind of trouble. But then they grow up and just before they get married they make profession of faith. And after that they have children and pretty soon they become deacons and then elders in church. It will happen to us too. And it would have happened to George, if God had let him live long enough. But God let him die now before he was old enough to change. That's why we think it's God's fault."

As you can see, both those boys in Gloria Stronks' family room and Lynnae had good questions about faith. They're typical of middle school children. Let's spend a little bit of time thinking together about what makes them unique and what that means when they're in our church and in our church school classroom.

2

KNOW

Changes, Changes

Time

20 minutes

Goal

Understand the physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and faith changes that middle schoolers experience.

Materials

■ PowerPoint slides 4-9

Say, Let's take a few minutes to think about some things that we can learn about human development and how that relates to middle school students.

Show slides 4-9 and read the text below. Feel free to replace the many stories about middle school children you'll find included in this presentation with your own. This will make the presentation come alive—both for you and for participants.

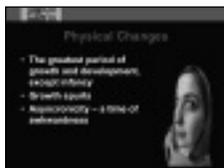


Middle school is a time of great change. Significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes happen within a relatively short period of time.

The diversity in the areas of human development during the middle school years is more significant than those in either the elementary or high schools. That means you'll have a wider range of development sitting in your middle school rooms than in almost any other room in your church.

These changes are all interconnected. Think of a school orchestra during a rehearsal. The different instruments all play separately, but they are all interconnected and they play, mostly, at the same time. Sometimes they're out of tune. You can't just think of physical changes without considering how those affect emotional changes, and so on.

Note that the changes that we will be mentioning over the next part of this hour are not restricted to *just* middle school. People continue to change throughout their lives; some of the things we discuss with regard to middle school will remain true for some people for much longer. These things all either *begin* to happen in middle school or else they become significant in the lives of these children at this time.



Physical Changes

- Middle school is the time in which the human body experiences the greatest period of growth and development, with the exception of the period of infancy. The students who come to your classes at the beginning of sixth or seventh grade are a lot different from those who leave as eighth graders. Compare a middle school yearbook with the high school year book, looking at the same kids. The physical changes are obvious.
- Many middle schoolers have growth spurts and shoot up in height practically overnight. Growth spurts normally last for two years. On average, girls enter the period of intense growth two years before boys. This means that there is a time in which girls are sometimes considerably taller than their male classmates.

Story

Clint and Nancy are twins. Even though Clint weighed slightly more than Nancy when they were born, by the time they were ten days old Nancy had caught up to Clint and was taller than him for the next seventeen years. Sometimes the difference was quite marked. In sixth grade Clint was 4'11" while his twin sister, Nancy, was 5'8". Clint started growing in high school, but he was in twelfth grade before he became taller than Nancy, something that meant a lot to him.

- **Growth can also be the cause of some restlessness. During these years, boys and girls aren't just wiggly in their seats—they're a little uncomfortable in their skin too. They don't know what to do with their changing body.**
- **Typical rates of growth over the course of middle school can be up to 9-10 inches for boys and up to 7 inches for girls. While this accelerated growth is going on, some body parts grow at different rates. This is called *asynchronicity*, a time of awkwardness. Such rapid growth can actually be painful for some children.**

Story

Before ninth grade Dave was always the shortest person in his class. In ninth grade Dave grew nine inches. While his mother complained that his pants were always short, Dave complained that his knees hurt all the time. He continued to have knee problems for about ten years.



Social Changes

All these physical changes are accompanied by social changes as well.

- **While parents remain very important in middle schoolers' lives, there is a shift away from dependence on parents and an increased reliance on the peer group. Friends provide these students with an opportunity to compare families and values, take risks, and get reactions to things like dress, jokes, areas of interest, and appearance.**

Story

Mindy's parents always made a point of making sure that Mindy was picked up on time. They sometimes didn't let her do things that other kids' parents let them do, such as walk around the mall alone, because they wanted to make sure that Mindy wasn't put in an unsafe situation. Once, in talking to her parents, Mindy noted that other children's parents don't always pick up their kids on time. She was astonished and wondered how those families could take risks like that. Before middle school these sorts of thoughts hadn't occurred to her.

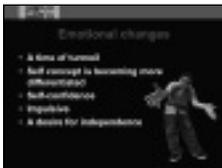
- **Early middle school students generally spend time with same-gender groups who have interests like theirs and enjoy the same sorts of activities. As they get a bit older, these students begin to experiment with mixed-gender groups. These interactions are fraught with issues of romantic interest, which sometimes ends up with teasing, resulting in feelings of awkwardness.**

- Peer pressure reaches a peak around this time. The question is not “Is there peer pressure?” but rather “How much peer pressure is there, and where is it coming from?” Peer expectations push the child one way; adult expectations push another way. Middle schoolers find themselves caught between these two groups. Decision-making then becomes a balancing act; kids realize that no matter what path they choose, some group will express disappointment. A school dress code is one example of an area in which this happens. Peers and parents often have significantly different ideas of what looks good and what is appropriate. Parents may have to send their children back to “put on something decent” before they leave the house.
- This age group has grown up with technology and the Internet: they use blogs, Myspace, Facebook, and cell phones to communicate with each other. Kids typically use e-mail just to communicate with adults. They often use public forums such as their Facebook wall, which anyone can see, for semi-private conversations.

Story

Evan made arrangements with his friends to meet on Facebook. He put a note on their wall and they responded back on his. Often the friends use cell phones to communicate: “Hey, I am at the football game. Where are you?” Technology has allowed Evan and his friends to be more spontaneous and to plan ahead less often.

- Because the world is changing so fast, many of these students view the wisdom of previous generations as antique and not useful. They depend more on their peer group for wisdom because they think these other students know more about the world they are facing than their parents do. Even though they view parents as role models, they sometimes view their parents as a bit clueless. They don’t really expect them, or other adults, to know much about certain things.



Emotional Changes

Emotional changes are happening for middle school kids too.

- There can be a significant amount of emotional turmoil for students at this age. For example, perfectly acceptable displays of affection between middle schoolers and family members can mean total mortification if peers are present.

Story

When Frank was in third grade, Mom could kiss him goodbye as she dropped him off at school. Now that he’s in sixth grade, there’s no way Frank would allow this to happen.

- **Self concept is in the process of being divided into increasingly specialized areas. Young children think of themselves in more global terms such as “I am good at everything.” Middle schoolers can differentiate things like athletic ability, academic ability, and social skills.**

Story

When Ginger entered middle school, she was quite confident that she was good at sports. She was on the tennis team in seventh grade and played 11th doubles position—on her middle school tennis team, she was the 24th-best person on the team. Ginger was quite disgusted with the girls who, in her opinion, were only there because of the cute tennis outfits. She assured her parents that she was there “for the love of tennis.” As she grew older, Ginger figured out that she was not a particularly gifted athlete. Instead, her strengths were in other areas. She was good at academic work and was also a good writer and musician. In fact, Ginger so came to embrace her new self-image that when she had completed all her high school P.E. requirements, she celebrated by writing a poem.

- **Most middle school students can be easily discouraged and lose self-confidence. Often they try to cover it up with an air of pseudo-sophistication. They seek attention yet don’t want to stand out.**

Story

Ron, an eighth-grade boy, decided sometime over the past two years that he does not like having his picture taken. When the extended family gets together for holidays, Ron’s hand is in front of his face on many of the pictures. His attempt at not wanting to stand out actually gets him more attention, not less. He stands out by being adamant about not standing out.

- **Middle schoolers can be impulsive, not really thinking through what they are going to say or do.**
- **They want independence but don’t always know what to do with it.**

Story

Jack was going to mow the lawn for the first time all by himself. His father had worked with him for weeks, teaching him about the power mower and talking about how to do a good job. Jack’s dad gave Jack a ten-minute talk on how to run the lawn mower and the dangers involved. After watching Jack mow for a few minutes, his father was satisfied that Jack could handle the job and went inside the house. When Jack’s father glanced out the window a little later, he saw Jack standing on the deck of the mower, leaning back and trying to hold the handle in order to keep it running. Jack wanted the responsibility but couldn’t resist the impulse to try something different.

Story

Matt was in seventh grade. A young couple from church had been asked to stay with Matt and his brother and sister while their parents were away on a trip. Matt eagerly showed them how to light the grill at his home. He did a great job, showing lots of responsibility and a good sense of being careful with the grill. A few moments later, he was walking around the house with a pillow on his head. Matt went from being a responsible young adult to a big kid in a matter of moments.

- They demand fairness and consistency from others but not from themselves.

Story

Any middle school teacher knows that students are willing to argue the fine points with regard to school rules or any particular decision made by the teacher. For example, when one person gets a detention for something and someone else doesn't, others are quick to argue that things just aren't "fair." But these same students who demand fairness and accountability may hand in papers late, expecting special consideration for themselves.

Story

At a recent family gathering, four middle school kids were playing table tennis. There was a disagreement about the rules. One of the boys got out the official table tennis rules and read the pertinent parts aloud to the whole family to prove his point, showing a finely honed sense of what was right and proper. Later, when he was asked to move the chairs into the dining room, his sense of rightness must have left him because he ignored the request.

- They want to be unique but don't know how. Many middle school students will glibly say "Yeah, I'm weird" to explain their behavior, especially with a group of friends. Ironically, their insistence that they are weird and strange reflects their desire to be "one of the group" by showing how independent they are.



Cognitive Changes

- Most kids enter middle school as concrete thinkers with limited ability to think logically and abstractly. But as they develop abstract thinking processes, they begin to see other points of view, experience empathy, and demonstrate reflective thinking or "thinking about thinking." That means, for instance, that in English class students can better consider what is happening in the story from different characters' perspective. In math class, the abstract part of algebra begins to take on meaning.
- This ability to see from another perspective has significant implications for the self image of middle schoolers.
- Young adolescents think others are paying as much attention to them as they are to themselves—an imaginary audience. They think, for instance, that *everyone* is noticing the ugly shoes their mom made them wear. This is called *adolescent egocentrism*. Psychologist William James coined the phrase "the looking glass self" more than a century ago. He suggested that each of us builds our self concept in large part through imagining what others think of us. The hallway of a middle school is like a Hall of Mirrors for these students, as every person they see is a potential mirror for themselves.
- The personal fable: Middle schoolers believe that their experience is unique and that no one has ever felt the way they do.

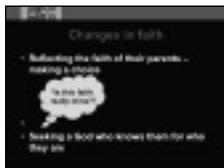
Story

As a middle school teacher I was often faced with a situation where one of my girl students was crying in the girls' bathroom with a few of her closest friends. The emotional impact of all these changes is sometimes overwhelming for students, and helping a friend deal with these issues becomes an exercise in empathy.

- Middle schoolers can be inquisitive and curious about many things. Early adolescents begin to conjure up imaginary situations or hypothetical events and will try to reason logically about them. As they do this they sometimes identify inconsistencies they see in their parents and teachers and are ready to point them out, just to be helpful.

Story

Olivia will often over-generalize with statements such as “Why do all car commercials have the same guy on them?” or, more personally, “Why does everybody else go out and buy the same thing I buy?”



Changes in Faith

What about faith? Again, middle school is a time of change.

- Parental faith is still the big influence. Before middle school, a child’s faith is basically a reflection of the faith of her parents. Middle school children *choose* the faith of their parents. It may not seem like much of a difference, but it reflects these children’s personal interest in that faith. The seat of authority still lies with their parents, so middle schoolers’ faith is basically their parents’ faith; they have not really examined it yet. Research indicates that even in high school, the majority of teens tend to be quite like their parents when it comes to religion. But by the time they get to college, most people begin to take on responsibility for their own faith. This process begins in middle school when children decide to follow the faith of their parents.

Story

When Patti was a child and was sick on a school day, she did what every child does: she told her parents. Her parents then decided for Patti whether or not she should stay home from school. Early in Patti’s freshman year at college, she Instant Messaged her father to help her decide whether she should cut class because she was sick. Her father helped her work through the issue (by telling her that she should go to class if at all possible). By the end of the year, Patti wasn’t calling home for such things any more, not because she didn’t like her father’s answer, but because she was becoming more comfortable making these kinds of decisions on her own. In other words, she was taking on more self-authority. The same is true for matters of faith.

- As the locus of authority shifts, teens begin to wonder whether this faith that they have just accepted is really theirs.
- Because they are trying to figure out who they are, middle schoolers tend to look for a God who takes personal interest in them as individuals. They often choose songs for worship that reflect the personal attachment that they feel for God.

Encourage those in your group who have worked with middle school students to give concrete examples of these changes. Spending time thinking about these examples will help the group be more attuned to seeing how these things play out with real kids.

3

GROW

What Is Our Role?

Time

10 minutes

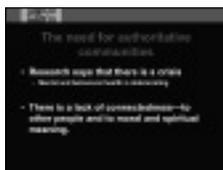
Goal

Understand the need for authoritative communities and how the church can be such a community for middle school students.

Materials

- PowerPoint slides 10-11

Show PP slides 10 and 11, and read the text below.



- Research indicates a crisis in North America: the mental and behavioral health of children is deteriorating. The number of children being treated for maladies in these areas is growing. Medication and psychotherapy, which are often used to treat children with these maladies, are not enough.
- According to the Commission for Children at Risk, the cause of this problem is a lack of connectedness—to *other people* and to *moral and spiritual meaning*. Traditionally this connectedness came from social institutions. In recent decades, however, these institutions have gotten significantly weaker. This weakening is a major cause of the current mental and behavioral health crisis among children. To address this problem the commission stresses the importance of *authoritative* communities in the life of young people.

—Commission for Children at Risk. *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*. New York: Institute for American Values, 2003.



Here are a few noteworthy characteristics of such communities (note that there are many more that are not included in this list):

An authoritative community

- is a social institution that includes children and youth.
- is warm and nurturing.
- is a place where rules matter—but so do closer relationships.
- is a place where close relationships matter—but so do rules and expectations.
- is multigenerational.
- encourages spiritual and religious development.

Even though the group conducting this research is not a church-related group (the study was funded by YMCA, Dartmouth Medical School, and the Institute for American Values) this definition nicely fits the church. Children need the presence of the church in their lives.

4

SHOW

Enriching the Lives of Middle Schoolers

Time

15 minutes

Goal

Apply the things we learned about middle schoolers and authoritative communities to church ministry.

Materials

- PowerPoint slides 12-13
- Handout: Sample Session
- Newsprint and markers for each table

Show PP slides 12 and 13, and read the text below.



In your church school ministry with middle schoolers, keep in mind the following:

- Emphasize that God knows them and loves them for who they are, and that the church family also knows and loves them.
- Recognize that they need the influence of Christian adults other than their parents.
- Recognize that although they naturally see friends and younger adults as more relevant for talking to about some issues, they need the experience and wisdom of older adults. A church school teacher who talks with kids and listens to them can become such a person for them.
- Avoid putting them in a position where they lose face in front of their peers.



- Use their means of communication sometimes. Form a class blog!
- Give kids as much independence as they can handle; treating them like older kids usually (but not always) pays off.
- Encourage thinking from other points of view. Work on issues of empathy and understanding other people's feelings. Focus on the thoughts and feelings of the characters in Bible stories.
- The goal is to make sure that middle schoolers have a faith that will stand up to questions. Some kids will be asking these questions; others won't. Give real, honest answers, even if the answer is, "I don't know that, but I'll try to find out."
- Above all, remember to have fun! We have a great opportunity to work with these kids. Even the best school experiences will end. But churches get to be part of a child for a lifetime.

Then ask your group to brainstorm ways that middle school students can be given authentic tasks in your church. Distribute the handout “Sample Session.” Ask participants to think together about how they could encourage middle schoolers to use their gifts in your church, perhaps even looking for ways to encourage students to lead parts of the session instead of being led by the teacher. Give participants a few minutes to look at the sample session and list their ideas on a board or newsprint. Then have each table share their ideas with the others.

Thank everyone for their participation in this workshop, and close with prayer, giving special thanks for middle schoolers and those who have the privilege of working with them in your church school.



Using Our Gifts

Scripture

Romans 12:1-8

Memory Challenge

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Focus

God wants us to use our gifts for the good of God's family.

WORDSEARCH

Think About It

You've helped your kids to know what spiritual gifts are, how they function in our everyday lives, and which ones they might

possess. In this session you'll want to give your class some energy to put these gifts into service. Let's circle back to where we started in session 1, taking a closer look at the opening verses of Romans 12.

Pray About It

Only God's Spirit can implant the desire in your group to make full use of their God-given gifts. Pray that the Spirit will use this session to inspire them to do so.

Paul puts our real motivation right up front: "Therefore, I urge you, . . . in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices. . . ." (v. 1). Did you catch that? We don't offer ourselves to God out of guilt feelings, or an attempt to earn our own salvation, or just because we *have* to. We give back to God "in view of God's mercy," because God has given us so much more than we deserve: forgiveness, redemption, restoration, eternal life. Our Lord even gave himself up for us and filled us with his Spirit. That's why we *want* to offer ourselves back to him. We

love him because he loved us first.

Jesus sacrificed himself by dying for us. But Paul urges us to sacrifice ourselves by *living* for him: "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (v. 1). It's our everyday, flesh-and-blood existence that makes up our "spiritual act of worship" (v. 1). Our "liturgy," our service to God, is not just what we do in church on Sundays. It's also everything we do Monday through Saturday.

How do we make our daily living a pleasing sacrifice? Paul answers: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (v. 2). We must stop living the way the world lives—using our resources selfishly to get ahead and seeking our own happiness. What we need to do is to "be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind" (v. 2). We need to allow the mind of Christ to give us a whole new slant on our life. When we think like Jesus, then we will know and want to follow God's "good, pleasing and perfect will" (v. 2).

What is God's will? Paul responds that it's using our gifts for the good of the body (vv. 3-8). He lists a number of gifts to show

Session Planner

Hello *Sense that the church needs the gifts of all members.*

- Sit and Stand 5-8 minutes
- Option: Puzzle Pieces 5-8 minutes
- Option: Week in Review 5-8 minutes

Know *Identify specific places and ways in which we can use our gifts.*

- Gifted for Service 25-30 minutes
- Option: Plan a Group Project 25-30 minutes

Grow *Be excited about using our gifts to benefit God's family.*

- Living Sacrifices 5-8 minutes

Show *Commit to using one of our gifts during the coming week*

- Business Cards 10-12 minutes

Overtime

- Memory Challenge 5 minutes
- Posting the Business Cards 5 minutes

Tell About It

Keep the positive front and center. Sharing our God-given gifts is challenging work, but it's work we *love* to do. "Try it," urges Paul, "you'll like it." Give examples from your own life that show that's true.

what he means. And in the last three he challenges us to use our gifts with real enthusiasm: “If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give *generously*; if it is leadership, let him govern *diligently*; if it is showing mercy, let him do it *cheerfully* (v. 8). God wasn’t stingy in pouring out his gifts on us. We should be equally generous in using them for the good of others. A Christ-like mind guiding a heart bursting with God’s love can’t do less.



HELLO

Sit and Stand

Number Smart
Body Smart

People Smart

Goal

Sense that the church needs the gifts of all members.

Time

5-8 minutes

Materials

None needed

Clear or find an open space and have kids stand there. Tell students to form a group of the number you call out. (If you have an uneven number of kids, give the group size as three or four, or four or five, to make sure no one is left out.) Once the groups are formed, kids should sit on the floor in a circle facing outward (or back-to-back, if it’s a group of two). When all the groups are formed and sitting on the floor, have group members link arms and try to stand.

Play a few rounds as you have time, telling group members to find new partners each time. Then make a transition into the rest of the session by asking something like this: **How was this activity similar to the idea of the church as a body with many parts?** (All the group members had to work together to stand up; in the church, all the members have to use their gifts to do the work God gives them.)

Explain that today we’ll focus on how to be a church that “stands together” by using our gifts for the good of God’s family.



Because steps 2 and 3 require students to stay seated and focused on discussion, this Hello activity is intentionally active. If it doesn’t work for your class because of limited space, disabilities, or girls in short skirts, use one of the options for step 1.

ion option option option

Puzzle Pieces

Picture Smart

Number Smart

Body Smart

People Smart

Time

5-8 minutes

Materials

■ Mini-puzzle (20 pieces or fewer)

As each student arrives, give him or her some of the puzzle pieces. Invite group members to assemble the puzzle. They may start right away; they don’t have to wait until everyone is present (but of course they won’t have all the pieces yet).

When the puzzle is assembled, ask these questions:

- **How was this activity similar to the idea of the church as a body with many members and different gifts?**



It would send the wrong message for someone to arrive and discover that all the puzzle pieces had already been given out, and there were none left for him or her! So hold a piece or two in reserve; you can always put them in the assembled puzzle yourself.

Option to
step 1

- What would have happened if somebody decided not to use his or her puzzle piece(s)?

Tell students that, just as you wanted every class member to use his or her puzzle pieces for the good of the whole group, so too God wants us to use our gifts for the good of God's family.

Week in Review Word Smart Self Smart

| | |
|------------------|-------------|
| Time | 5-8 minutes |
| Materials | None needed |

If you have a fairly thoughtful class, you can simply open this week's session by asking students to share any experiences they had that confirmed their gifts or that gave them an opportunity to use their gifts over the past week. If your group is large, you may want to divide into smaller groups of three or four people for this sharing exercise.

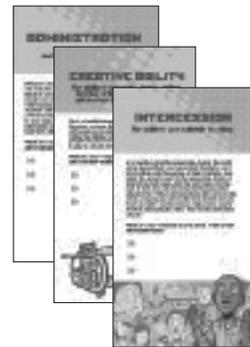
KNOW Word Smart Self Smart People Smart

Gifted for Service

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Goal | Identify specific places and ways in which we can use our gifts. |
| Time | 25-30 minutes |
| Materials | <input type="checkbox"/> Student journals <input type="checkbox"/> Pens <input type="checkbox"/> Newsprint <input type="checkbox"/> Marker |

Have students turn to pages 29-42 in their student journals and follow along as volunteers read aloud the gift name and definition, then the case study that illustrates that gift. Take a couple of minutes to brainstorm ways students in your class could use that gift in your church or community, or in their schools or homes.

As students suggest ideas, have everyone write them in their journals while you write them on newsprint. (This will help kids who are slower writers, and the lists will be useful in steps 3 and 4.) Repeat the process with each gift, as time permits.



 Each case study is a true story of a young teenager or pre-teen. Don't let anyone—including your students themselves—underestimate his or her ability to use the gifts God has given!

 If you have under 30 minutes for this step, you won't have time to discuss every gift. To save time, start by discussing the number 1-ranked gift of each student. As time allows, discuss others.

Plan a Group Project

 Self Smart

 People Smart

Option to
step 2

Time

25-30 minutes

Materials

- Paper
- Pens

Your group may be very ready to organize an activity or service project that they can work on together. This will, of course, require a time commitment beyond the four sessions of this unit. Though this kind of project takes time and effort, it also sends an important message to your students: “Your gifts are valuable, and you can use them to do good things for the Lord!”

Brainstorm ideas with the group. Possibilities include

- visiting a Head Start program and helping out with activities.
- collecting a “Pyramid of Pampers” for a local crisis pregnancy center.
- organizing and presenting a special program, perhaps for a holiday. The audience can range from children to seniors; the setting from church basement to rest home.
- organizing and conducting a paint party or yard work party for someone who needs that kind of help.
- collecting food for a local food pantry.

When you’ve listed a number of options, narrow the list down to several realistic possibilities. Try to arrive at a group consensus. Help students assess whether the project is a realistic one for them to undertake, given the gifts they have.

Once you’ve decided on a project, you’ll need to schedule other meeting times to plan, prepare, and carry out the project.

3

GROW

Living Sacrifices

 Word Smart

 Self Smart

Goal

Be excited about using our gifts to benefit God’s family.

Time

5-8 minutes

Materials

- Bibles
- List of ideas from step 2

Hand out Bibles. Have students turn to Romans 12:1-8 and follow along as volunteers read the passage aloud. Discuss with questions like these:

- **What do you think it means to “offer yourselves as living sacrifices”?**
The Message puts verse 1 like this: “Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” Every aspect of our lives becomes an act of worship when we offer it to God.
- **What does this have to do with spiritual gifts? (Hint: look at verses 6-8.)**
God wants us to use whatever gifts we have to the fullest—giving generously, governing diligently, showing mercy cheerfully. That should be part of our “everyday, ordinary life,” as you discussed in session 2.
- **Which of the ways to use our gifts that we listed on newsprint could you do in your “everyday, ordinary life” this week?**

4

SHOW

Business Cards

AA Word Smart
Self Smart

Goal

Commit to using one of our gifts during the coming week.

Time

10-12 minutes

Materials

- Student journals
- Pens
- Scissors



Have students regroup, turn to page 43 in the student journal, and personalize the “business cards” there. After filling in name, address, phone number, and top three working gifts, have them choose at least three activities from the ideas lists for their top working gifts (pp. 33-46) in the student journal) and write them on the cards. They may want to talk with friends in the class and list things they would like to do as a team. Make sure that students understand that, by listing these things, they are saying that they will consider actually doing them if someone asked them to! At least one of the activities should be something they could do this week in their “everyday, ordinary life.” (Draw their attention to the additional cards on pages 45-49. Encourage them to use those cards for personal pledges in the weeks to come.)

Have each student cut out one card and give it to you. Challenge each student to commit to doing one of the activities this week, and have them make that pledge public to the class if they are willing to. As students share their commitments, mark that activity on their business card so that you can follow up on how it went the next time you see them. (If you do this as group project, as suggested in the option to step 2, the business cards will help you match students’ gifts to the tasks of the project.)

Have each student draw one of the business cards from your hand. Close by having each student pray for the person whose card they drew, giving thanks for that person’s gifts and asking that he or she will be able to follow through on the commitment to use his or her spiritual gifts this week.



You can use the business cards in a variety of ways:

- Post them on a church bulletin board (see Overtime).
- Give the cards to youth leaders or to others in your church who need volunteers for one project or another.
- Have each student pick out someone they’ll give their card to.
- Picture one card in each issue of your church newsletter.

