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Awana Student Leaders

Who They Are. What They Do.
How They Can Energize Your Ministry.



By **Linda Weddle**
Author of How to Raise a Modern-Day Joseph

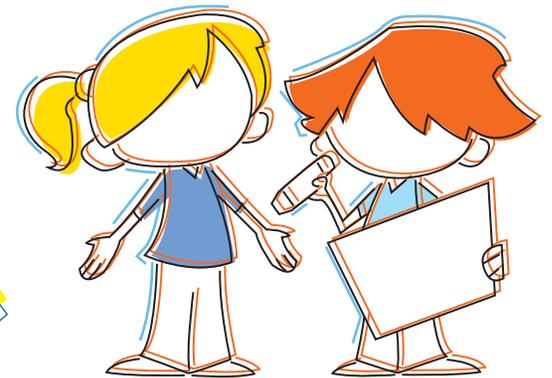
Remember Jacob?

Just yesterday he was a
towheaded Cubbie too
shy to say his verses.

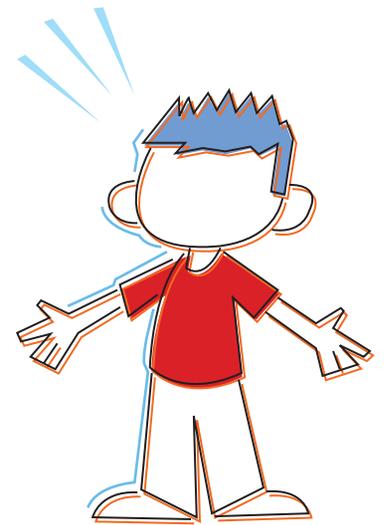


Remember Sarah and Morgan?

They were inseparable
from the time they
were toddlers, always
getting into something,
always being creative
and inventive.

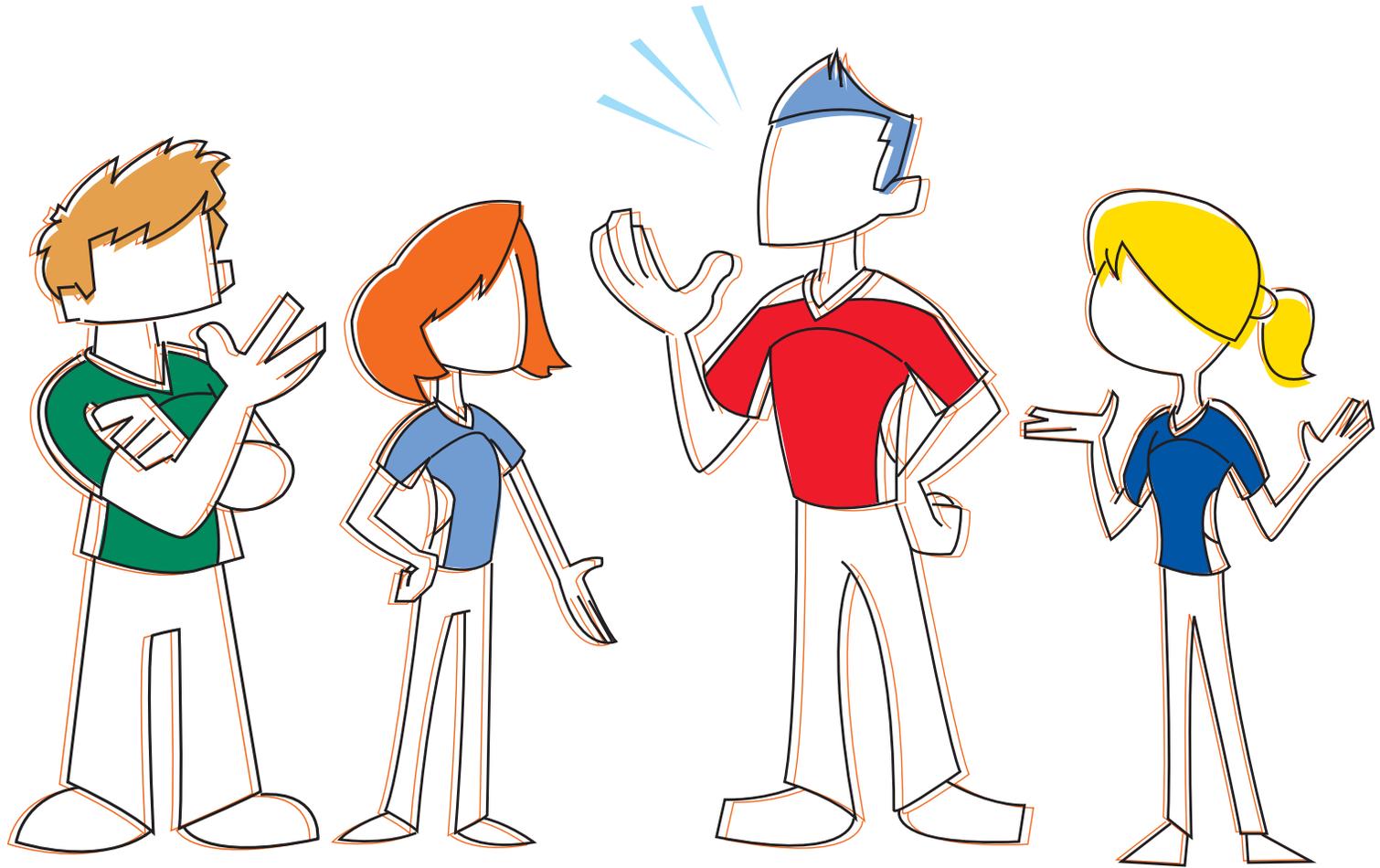


Remember Aiden?
He burst into Cubbies
that first night like a
star on stage.



**And now —
here they are —**

high school freshman ready to begin their student leader experience. Jacob is certainly no longer too shy to talk, Sarah and Morgan are still good friends and Aiden continues to charm everyone with his antics.



Yesterday's clubbers. **Today's leaders.**



Student leaders are teens who serve in your church Awana® club.

The purpose of the student leader program is to help high school (and sometimes middle school) students develop their spiritual gifts while allowing them to serve in their local church. Participation in the student leader program is a privilege, and as such, students must qualify and agree to uphold the preset standards.

Jacob's Story

Director Cal knew he couldn't do much more. The T&T™ boys' club was rapidly growing and each week seemed to be more chaotic. The boys who were visiting were not churchgoers and yielding to authority in a church setting was not something they understood. Cal worked hard with his leaders to come up with ways to make the club appealing, but at the same time structured.

Each week as Cal did the Large Group lesson, he prayed that the boys would see their need for salvation and some did respond. Since Cal himself taught many of the lessons, he couldn't leave his post up front to counsel with the boys who had questions about trusting Christ.

"Look, men," he said during one leader's meeting. "I need help. I need someone to talk to these boys one-on-one. We have the corner in back of the room which lends itself to private conversation but isn't secluded from view. I need to know who would be willing to take on the privilege of going back there at the end of the lesson and talking to these boys."

At first no one volunteered, but then he saw a hand — not one of the adult leaders — but Jacob, a rather quiet student leader. Cal had known Jacob from the time Jacob was a toddler and he knew that even though the teen was shy, he was spiritually mature and would know what to say to the young boys.

Two weeks later, Jacob led two, wildly-troubled sixth-graders to Christ.

Student leaders are as diverse in personality, abilities and spiritual gifts as the adult leaders in your group.

Some have already worked with kids or at least been around kids in their own family or through babysitting. Others still think of themselves as *THE kids*, and have a difficult time adjusting to being the leader in a club situation. As director or commander, you have the responsibility to mentor and guide student leaders and to only allow teens who recognize the seriousness of the position to participate.

With everything else on your to-do list, like filling in for the hospitalized game director, scheduling Large Group lesson speakers, finding lost beanbags and deciding whether to order sausage or pepperoni pizza for the party, making sure your student leaders are on track might be the last thing on your mind.

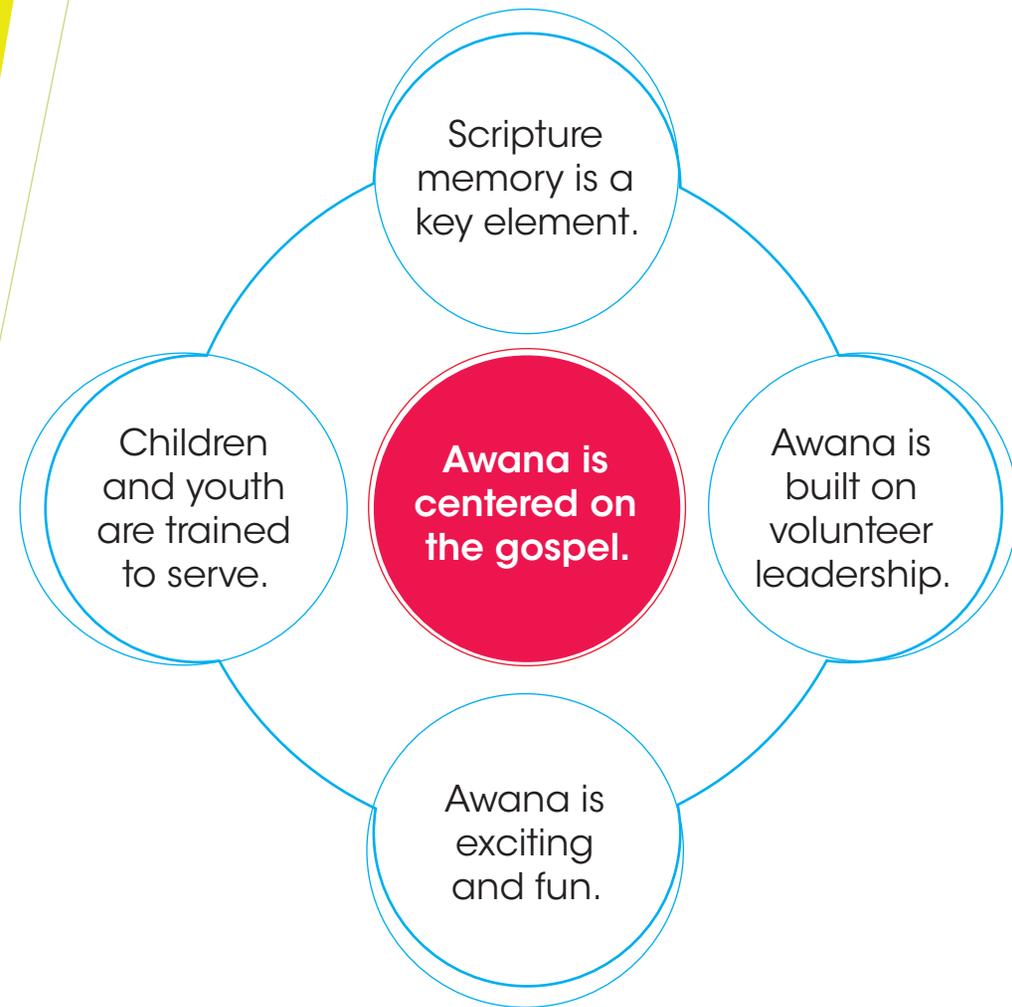
But you **DO need to pay attention**. Student leaders can be a valuable addition to your club — with some effort on your part.

Consider mentoring these young people as a privilege, not a distraction or annoyance.

The Lord has given you the opportunity to be a godly influence in their lives. You may find that the results of mentoring your student leaders are as significant as the results achieved from teaching the clubbers. Take this aspect of leadership seriously as you team up student leaders with more mature adult leaders.

Awana Basics

Awana is based on the five principles developed by Lance Latham back when he first originated the idea for a children's/youth program.



Lance Latham's **Five Principles**

Awana Curriculum

is based on the
five Master Life Threads.

Journey™ — **perspective**

Trek® — **destiny**

T&T™ — **grace**

Sparks® — **wisdom**

Puggles® /Cubbies® — **respect**

The student leader program is a stepping-stone for both lists of objectives.

The fourth principle on Lance Latham's list is about training children and youth to serve. What better place to plug in a wanting-to-serve-the-Lord teen than as a student leader? Where else can he get the training to someday be an adult leader, director or commander than by actually working in a club?

Likewise, destiny and perspective are the life threads for middle schoolers and high schoolers. As they prepare to make life-changing decisions, our desire is to instill in them the confidence that God is sovereign and in control. As we encourage them to choose a life of service, whether through Christian ministry or having a godly influence in a secular field, student leadership is a good way to train them for their future.

But there's a third basic to consider.

Titus 2 is the outline God gives us to use in training younger men and women. The student leader role fits right into that chapter: Learning self-control, respecting godly authority, learning to love children, etc., are all part of Awana leadership training.

Wait — maybe you enjoy working with Cubbies and Sparks but teens aren't your thing. In fact, they scare you a little bit. The last time you talked to a bunch of teens was when YOU were a teen yourself. Being the authority over a group of student leaders is not anywhere near your comfort zone.

Yes, teens can be impatient, loud, giggly, crazy-acting, undependable ... well, all those things that adults can be too! On the other hand, teens can have enthusiasm to spare, be capable of leading music, of listening to a verse and of teaching a lesson. Teens can also be great role models and heroes to impressionable little kids.

You have a fantastic opportunity to not only mentor the teens in your group, but to encourage them to use their gifts and capabilities in service to the Lord.

Thank the Lord for the privilege set before you!

This **e-book** is divided into three main sections.

1

What the student leader needs to know —

Unfortunately, many churches allow teens to work in their Awana clubs without giving them any training. The commander/director knows he needs more leaders, so when the two 14-year-olds ask if they can help, he readily agrees. But teen leaders need to be trained as thoroughly as adult leaders. In some ways, teen training can be even more important. Many adults have several years experience. They've worked with kids either in a church or school situation or as a parent. Many come with a predetermined ability to use common sense when working with children. Although some teens do have experience, that experience is limited. Some are not much older than the clubbers themselves. They need to be trained.

2

What the student leader needs to do —

Knowledge is key, but when someone uses that knowledge, the result is wisdom. Hours of training will mean nothing unless the teen actually puts what he has learned into use. This section lists the requirements on the teen's to-do list and the importance of having an adult nearby to hold him accountable.

3

What the student leader gains from the experience —

This is a shorter section, but an important one. Being a student leader is more than being the one reminding the next clubber that it's her turn in the beanbag game. A student leader's experience can be life changing.

At the end of the book, you will find answers to those difficult situations that can arise with teens, a student leader's point-of-view essay and a sample contract for student leaders and their parents. You will also find a checklist for directors.

1

What a Student Leader Needs to Know

1. A student leader needs to have a meaningful relationship with Christ.

Just because a teen said she raised her hand once back in Sparks doesn't mean she can explain what that means. When talking to the teen about her background, ask her what difference knowing Christ makes in her everyday life. Of course, if you attend a small church, you may already be aware of the teen's Christian walk. Even so, you need to ask her to explain exactly what she means when she says she's a Christian.

The teen also needs to have a basic knowledge of Bible theology. That doesn't mean she is able to write a paper on eschatology, but she should know the basic tenets of what God says in His Word.

One commander, who has worked with dozens of student leaders, finds *Trek Check* entrance booklet to be a useful tool. He goes through the booklet with the student leaders (even those who have already completed it as a Trek requirement). Does the teen understand what's being said? Does she know not only whether or not she is saved, but also how God accomplished that in her? Does she know what she believes well enough to share it?

You could also work with the teens' Sunday school teachers or youth pastor to do a series of lessons on your church belief statement. The goal is for student leaders to be able to answer questions such as "Is Grandma in heaven?" or "Am I still saved even though I lied last week?"

2. A student leader needs to know how to lead a child to Christ.

(Your adult leaders need to know this too.) Sure, at this age some teens will feel more confident than others, but you need to train all student leaders and adult leaders how to do it. Plan a training session during a leaders' meeting. Include role play — with one leader being the child and another the adult.

The student and adults should be familiar with the Gospel App (gospel message). Explain to your leaders how to use the graphics to talk with a child.

3. A student leader needs to go through Basic Training and earn their BT certification just as if they were adult leaders.

You need to arrange for them to attend the training before they begin serving. (In some cases, the training might be a few weeks into the year because of the area Basic Training scheduling — in that case, the student leader can “shadow” an experienced leader until training and certification are complete).

Requiring student leaders to go through training can also be a safeguard. Yes, Liz regularly attends church, but her friend doesn't. And, even though the non-churched friend is the world's best babysitter and really, really wants to work in Awana, you need to be firm about training. Having guidelines in place will save you a lot of misunderstanding when situations arise.

4. A student leader needs to go through the child protection policy.

One thing you'll quickly learn when directing student leaders is how much little kids hero-worship teens. You'll find that Sparks and younger T&T girls will quickly get crushes on high school boys — which means they sometimes tend to hang on them. A lot of time the physical contact is not initiated by the student leader, but the clubber.

Director Lauren saw this happening in her group, especially with charming Dylan. She quickly called a meeting and reviewed the child protection policy they had discussed at the beginning of the year. Gently she explained that the boys should not allow little girls to sit on their laps or give them piggyback rides.

These guidelines can be difficult for some teens to understand because they are innocent and truly care for the younger kids. You need, however, to be diligent in enforcing the policy without making the teens paranoid that every high five is looked on with disapproval. Even if you know your male student leader is appropriately comforting Emma, Emma's non-churched mom only sees her daughter being held by a 17-year-old boy and that can instantly convey a wrong impression in our mixed-up world.

On the other hand there is also a startling prevalence of intentional sexual molestation incidents among teen boys. Leaders need to be aware of this reality (and NOT be innocently and dangerously naïve). Just like with adult leaders, we have these standards not only to safeguard the leaders who are blameless, but also to deter and firmly guide away from wrongdoing those who might really be struggling with a temptation in this area. Sadly, exposure to pornography is significantly greater, and much more hard-core porn is more prevalent than in prior eras and is affecting boys at younger and younger ages. Here are some high points from the Awana Child Protection Policy that are particularly important to go

over with your teens. (Please note that this listing is not intended to replace your church's complete child protection training for any of your club leaders. For resources on child protection, consult the *Awana Ministry Catalog*.)

- A minimum of **two adults** are required in attendance during all Awana events and activities. A student leader is normally not considered to be one of the adults. If you do use a teen as an adult, make very sure that student is an exceptionally mature high school junior or senior.
- Private one-on-one contact between adults and children or youth is **not permitted**. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting is to be conducted in the clear view of others.
- Adults (teens) must respect the privacy of children in situations such as changing clothes (which could happen if a young child has a bathroom accident) and intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. Adults **must protect** their own privacy in similar situations.
- Discipline used during ACI-approved events and activities must be constructive and reflect the values of Awana Clubs International. Corporal punishment is **never permitted**.
- Generally there is no contact of adults/teens with minors outside the normal ministry function.
- Only appropriate touching is allowed: non-demanding, gentle touch of the shoulder, hand, arm, head or back. The only hug is a shoulder to shoulder hug.
- Sitting the child on one knee is **ONLY allowed** for children kindergarten and younger.

Again, your student leader needs to know these guidelines and to serve with them in mind. Even if your teens are conscientious, you need to watch them. Many teens do not feel as if they're doing anything wrong (and, in actuality, they aren't), but in our society, we all need

to be above reproach as we work with children. This is a privilege we don't want to abuse, not only intentionally, but also by carelessness. You need to be diligent in protecting your church, your club, the child and your leaders.

5. A student leader needs to enjoy working with little children.

Being a student leader is not simply an opportunity to spend a couple more hours with their friends each week. Many teens don't really like kids or desire to take the time to get to know them, but they do enjoy coming to club to see their peers. To them, serving as a student leader is an opportunity to catch up on the gossip or plan what they want to do the following weekend.

On the other hand, many teens *do* enjoy playing with little kids. They think they're cute and they enjoy the hero worship often lavished on them by a child. Serving as a student leader *can* be fun, but service is much more than that. This is not all about running around circles and teasing the children. Serving is a responsibility *and* a privilege. You need to be firm that teens must take service seriously (while still having fun) or they will not be able to continue as a leader. Emphasize that they'll be in a position which could affect a child for all eternity.

6. A student leader needs to confidently answer basic questions about the handbooks (or direct the child to someone who does know the answers).

Since most student leaders have grown up in Awana Clubs™, they are often more familiar with the books (and know more of the verses) than your adult leaders. You can ask for the student leaders' viewpoint when

questions come up about a specific section. How did *their* leader handle a particular requirement? Ideally leaders' meetings will be give and take with both student leaders and adults learning from each other.

Of course, an important part of the meetings is to review the section standards for both student leaders and your more experienced leaders. Leaders need to know that section requirements are listed near the signature line in Sparks and T&T handbooks.

7. A student leader needs to know her specific job during each segment of club.

Student leaders vary in abilities just as adult leaders do. As a director, you need to be specific in assigning tasks. If you don't direct them toward specific responsibilities, you will find them wandering around the church or chatting with their friends who are there and texting the ones who aren't. None of us likes to feel unnecessary or that we wasted an evening of our time by coming out to club — and that includes your student leaders.

First, you need to decide which positions your student leaders will fill. Here are some suggestions.

- a. Greet parents at the door.
- b. Help register clubbers and keep records of sections.
- c. Entertain clubbers as they arrive at club.
- d. Lead in the flag ceremony.
- e. Direct the singing.
- f. Work as a line leader — or even game director.
- g. Plan contests and keep records of points.
- h. Make computer program games to aid in verse memorization.
- i. Design posters and fliers for upcoming events.

- j. Teach a lesson (a few will be capable and actually very good at this but most probably won't want to teach — especially if you have a large group).
- k. Listen to verses (teaming with an adult leader until the student leader is capable of listening on her own).
- l. Help younger kids put on coats, mittens and boots.
- m. Do crowd control as parents arrive for their children, making sure the children don't leave until their parents come.
- n. Help in the parking lot before and after club as many cars are pulling in and out and kids are running everywhere.
- o. Pair with an adult leader to lead a service project such as raising money for Adopt-a-Club® or participating in a food drive. This is a good opportunity to use the T&T Service Passport — log into the ART site for more details.

Second, you need to talk to your student leaders one-on-one or at least in a small group and assign the various tasks. Keep the communication open throughout the year. Ask if they have any questions about their responsibilities.

- a. Plan a beginning-of-the-year meeting solely for student leaders. Perhaps pizza after a Sunday morning church service would be a good choice. That way, the teens would already be on site (saving parents another trip of getting the teens to church).
- b. Hand out job descriptions that explain the responsibilities for each position. You could make up your own list or look at the job descriptions for the traditional club leadership roles on the ART resource site.

For instance, you might assign one of the student leaders to greet parents at the door. The job description could say something like:

- Open the door when you see a parent coming.
- Greet with a smile and a welcome.
- Learn the names of the child and parents so within a few weeks you can welcome them by name.
- Show a new parent what he needs to do to register his child.

- c. Allow teens to trade responsibilities a few times during the year unless they have a specific skill that only they can do. For instance, Jackson is the only one who can accompany the T&Ters on the guitar or Sierra is always at church early since her dad is commander, so it makes good sense to assign her to greet the parents as they arrive.

Rotating duties enables the teens to develop their talents and abilities. At this time in their lives, many students can't identify their spiritual gifts — giving them the opportunity to serve in different ways helps them determine in what areas they have the most impact.

- d. Assign an adult leader to mentor and work with each teen. (If you have a large group of student leaders, you may want to appoint a student leader director who focuses on the student leaders serving in your club.) The amount of involvement will depend on the teen's maturity and also on the logistics of your club.

In many cases the "mentoring" may go no further than helping teens with club logistics, but in other cases, a mentor can have a life-changing influence.

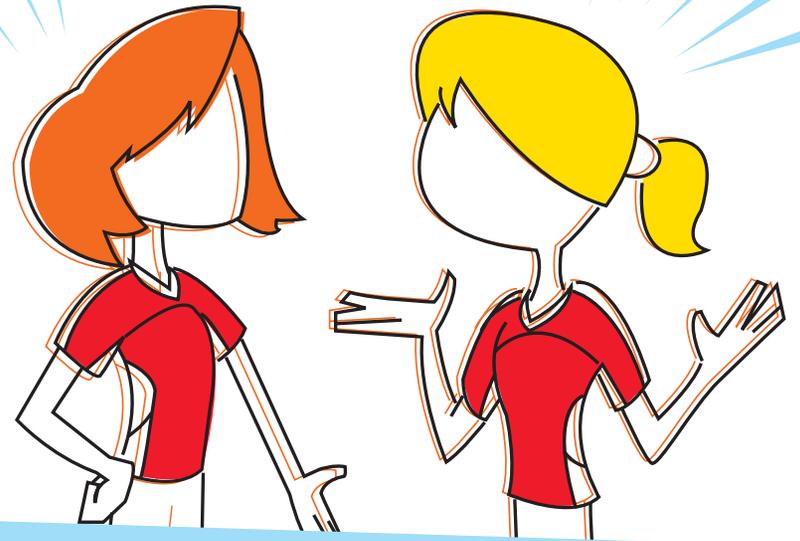
Don't require your leaders to do in-depth mentoring. Mentoring is serious business and you may scare off leaders who thought they were just signing up to

work with children. The one-on-one mentor to teen ratio is an ideal but lofty goal which may not be attainable in most churches. Perhaps there could be one or two leaders (maybe even a married couple) within each club who could be the student leaders' mentors. A personal and effective rapport could be developed in a small group setting, which could also cover the accountability mentioned in other places throughout this e-book. The small group setting could also be the time student leaders recite their verses and have their Trek or Journey Bible studies checked if your church doesn't provide those programs in a group setting. (See the section on C-track™.)

- e. Check on the teens every week or so. Are they doing OK? Do they have any questions? Do they have any suggestions?
- f. Give out treats every once in a while, letting your teens (and adult leaders) know how much you appreciate them. For instance, you could hand out an Almond Joy® with a note that says, "You bring joy to our club (Philippians 4:4)." (On a personal note, I had the student leaders begging to be part of the club I directed just because of these unexpected treats. They liked being appreciated.)

Although leader prayer and planning meetings go on throughout the year for both adult and student leaders, you need an end-of-the-year evaluation meeting.

Sarah and Morgan's story



Sarah and Morgan were student leaders assigned to Sparks.

They had always been off in their own little world — quiet, shy and staying out of trouble.

They were good kids who had grown up in the church and Awana, but they were also at that shy, awkward stage and interacting with the parents or even the kids was difficult for them. They often arrived early to club since their parents were leaders in other clubs. They would stand around talking as the kids arrived. They wanted to help, but they weren't sure exactly what to do. Their director would sometimes ask them to get out a couple of balls and start a game with the kids and they liked that.

One Saturday Sarah was over at Morgan's house watching Morgan's dad make a shelf for Sarah's bedroom. She noticed a piece of wood leaning against the wall.

"What's that for?" she asked Morgan. Morgan's dad heard her. "Oh, I was doing something for a friend and it didn't turn out right, so now I have a messed-up piece of wood."

"Could we have it?" Sarah asked shyly. "Morgan and I could paint it and make a game for the Sparkies. They could throw the beanbags through the holes."

So the next Wednesday the two girls showed up at Sparks with their brand-new game. For the rest of the year Sarah and Morgan would start the beanbag game as the kids arrived at club. Sparkies would sign in, hang up their coats, put their books and Bibles on the table and then stand in line for a chance to throw a beanbag through the hole in Sarah and Morgan's game. The two girls would always oversee the kids — picking up the sometimes wildly-flung bags and making sure the Sparkies were calmly waiting in line. The girls solved a common problem — entertaining kids as they arrive at club and using their own talents in doing so.

2

What a Student Leader Needs to Do

1. Student leaders need to be in high school

(well, maybe middle school). Awana recommends that student leaders be high school students, but we also know that some are in middle school. Yes, there are spiritually mature middle schoolers out there, but most middle schoolers are still kind of like kids themselves. We suggest all student leaders be paired with an adult leader, but sometimes high school teens show that they can handle a responsibility individually. Middle schoolers, on the other hand, always need to be teamed up with an adult leader throughout the club meeting. *Always* put as many years between clubbers and student leaders as possible.

2. A student leader needs to go through Basic Training and earn the BT certification.

Yes, we already mentioned that in the first section, but this is so essential and something that many churches neglect with their younger leaders. You can't just plug teens into a club without giving them guidance on how and what they need to do. A student leader does need Basic Training and also must pass the Basic Training Certification for the club in which he serves.

3. A student leader, his parents and the director/commander (and maybe the youth pastor — depending on the setup at your church) need to be present at a before-the-year-starts orientation to go over the student leader requirements.

(This is different from your beginning-of-the-year planning meeting, but could be combined — say a half hour before or after the planning meeting.)

You need to explain the responsibilities of being a student leader and explain that students who choose not to follow the guidelines will be asked to step down. (See Point 4 concerning role models.) Share with the parents that serving is a privilege and that their sons and daughters are examples to the younger clubbers. You cannot take the chance that a younger clubber will emulate a teen's inappropriate language, dress or attitude.

CAUTION!

Contracts can be good and instill seriousness to the ministry, but at the same time, you don't want the student leaders to look at the contract as something negative. You don't want to teach them that if they fail to keep their end of the bargain, there can never be restoration. Promise, in a positive way, that you want to work with the parents and students so that service is a valuable and memorable experience.

Many churches have designed a contract or statement of service for teens and parents to sign. The contract states what is expected of the teen and can be beneficial if a teen chooses to disregard a requirement of service. Having the requirements in writing may be important if you need to tell a teen she can no longer serve. A sample contract can be found at the end of this e-book.

Another point you need to emphasize to the teens is the necessity of focusing on the kids and not on their latest text. (Some adult leaders also need to be reminded of this.) Make the club room a phone-free area except in the case of an emergency. A teen who is texting his girlfriend is not paying attention to the five wiggly Cubbies in front of him.

Although firmly stating the expectations is necessary, emphasize the positive. Explain to the teens how thankful you are to see their willingness to serve the Lord and that you look forward to working with them (Ephesians 1:16). Many clubs could not function if teens weren't willing to serve. End the meeting with prayer and a big "thank you."

4. A student leader needs to be a consistent role model for the clubbers.

Little kids look up to high school kids and the teens become their heroes. You could begin the year by choosing a student leader theme verse. First Timothy 4:12 is a good one to study together. Remind the teens of the verse throughout the year.

Good teen role models can have a long-lasting impact on children.

The year Katie was a senior, she made a big deal about finishing up her last Journey Bible Studies in order to earn her Citation. She often told the girls in her T&T group how many lessons she had left to complete. Sometimes, if the girls in her group arrived early, she would let them listen

to her practice her verses. Katie and the director noticed how many of Katie's clubbers were regularly saying verses that year, being as excited as Katie in finishing their books. She had showed them how important Scripture was to her life and they had followed right behind.

But life doesn't always work so well. You might have issues with teens being poor examples. Maybe the teen refuses to be serious and is more trouble than the clubbers, or you may have a teen with an attitude problem or one who is an expert at making underhanded comments. Our desire, as adults, is to encourage teens and mentor them into being God-honoring leaders, but if a teen refuses to listen, we can't take the chance and allow her to remain in a position where she is influencing the clubbers.

As difficult as it is to confront someone, something needs to be said. You might begin by talking about the issue in a general sense at a leaders' meeting and see if the teens in question get the point. If that doesn't work, you need to have a one-on-one with a warning. If the situation doesn't get better, you need to go to the commander (or whoever has authority over you) and present the situation.

The commander will then need to invite you and the parent(s) for a meeting in which the situation is explained. Hopefully, the parent will talk to the teen and the behavior will be corrected.

If the problem continues, another meeting will need to be called which includes the teen. At this meeting, the teen is told she will no longer be allowed to work in club. If a specific issue continues to be a problem in your church, you may want to add it to the contract and beginning-of-the-year discussion if it isn't already part of the dialogue.

(Note — if you are related to the commander or person in authority who will be speaking with the parent or errant teen, you need to ask another director or leader to be present as a witness. Again, this is a child protection issue. You need two unrelated witnesses.)

5. Being a role model also means wearing the student leader uniform.

Not only does wearing the uniform show a good example for the clubbers but also alerts the parents that the teen is part of club leadership and has been through proper training. The shirts give the student leaders a unique distinction. Seeing the student leaders in their own style of shirts may also motivate the younger clubbers to become student leaders when they're old enough.

The shirts also help identify the student leaders to the parents. Seeing teens actively serve is also a testimony to non-church parents.

Student Leader Uniforms



Order for your student leaders
at awana.org/store

5. A student leader needs to be faithful and consistent in service.

Of course, adult leaders also need to be faithful and consistent and that doesn't always happen. We need to instill in our leaders a reason to come to church rather than an excuse to stay home.

If teens seem to be neglecting the job they've been assigned, gently remind them that they have a responsibility. Sometimes teens really do get distracted and all they need is a gentle reminder to get back on track. Gently approach them with "Would you like me to help you?" This teaches the students the precept that when we have a hard time in ministry (for whatever reason), help is available. We are also helping the student know (in a gentle way) that their negligence is apparent.

In some ways, teens are held to a higher standard than adult leaders. A non-churched parent bringing her child into club will notice student leaders standing in the corner and assume they're talking about the latest app or game. She'll question why a bunch of young kids are watching her child. The same parent, seeing a group of adults, would probably assume they are discussing something important that has to do with club. Student leaders need to be aware of their testimony at all times.

A teen who greets the parent and confidently takes the child to where he should go will impress an adult.

One of the issues most directors deal with is student leaders who stop serving in Awana for a few months to participate in a school sport or show up sporadically because of a job. Tolerating a pattern of inconsistent attendance sends a message to the clubbers that sports (or any school activity or job) are more important than their commitment to serve in ministry. Again, stress faithfulness at the beginning of the year. Suggest to your teens that they ask their coach if they can continue volunteering at Awana during the sports season. Some coaches and bosses are willing to work with the teen.

One teen I know goes to work after school, is off for two hours to work at Awana and then goes back to her job until 10:00. Other coaches or bosses won't be so accommodating, but the teen won't know if he doesn't ask.

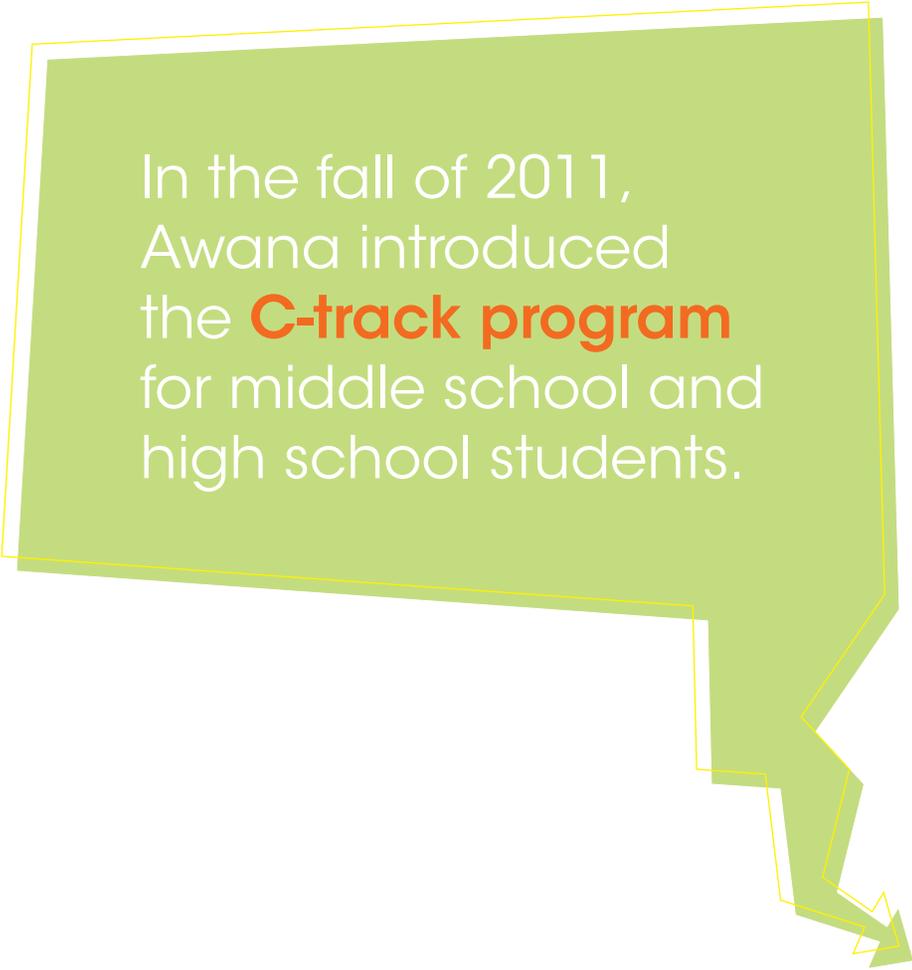
Most students work in restaurant or retail jobs. One commander makes a point of visiting the student's place of employment (as a customer) while the student is working. He looks for opportunities to introduce himself to the manager as the head of the church ministry where the teen serves. He tells the manager how much he appreciates the teen and what an impact the teen has had on the clubbers. He doesn't ask for anything, but simply makes a friendly contact.

Again, use a leaders' meeting to point out how many people are affected when a leader doesn't show. When Jackson decides to go to a concert at the Civic Center, Mike, the adult leader he works with, is responsible for all the clubbers. No one is available to accompany the clubbers on the guitar during the song time. Plus, the other red team leader has the flu and so the red team is without any leader during GameTime. Other leaders attempt to double up while watching their own team and the boys run wild — all because Jackson wanted to see the band. (He ended up in the last row behind a pole.)

Do you have a creative leader or two in your group? They could develop a comedy sketch about what happens when a leader doesn't show and present it at your kick-off prayer and planning leaders' meeting. You could do an *It's a Wonderful Life* type skit showing the leaders what would happen "if."

6. A student leader needs to be doing the Trek or Journey books.

This has always been a recommended qualification of those serving as student leaders. But if the church did not do the middle school or high school programs, student leaders did not have clear direction as to what they should do.



In the fall of 2011, Awana introduced the **C-track program** for middle school and high school students.

C-track

C-track is for those students who want to continue in their Awana books even though their church does not offer Trek or Journey. The program is offered to those teens who attend a church that has Awana for the younger clubbers but stops at fifth or sixth grade.

The C-track student is under the supervision of a qualified, non-related leader, often one of the student's former T&T leaders who wants to encourage the teen, or church staff member (such as youth pastor, pastor, etc.). This supervising leader will check your student leader's Bible study sections and hear memory verses. Many C-track students want to continue in their books in order to earn their Citation and/or one of the college scholarships offered.

Guidelines for the C-track program can be found at awana.org/ctrack.

C-track makes it possible for all student leaders to do their books.

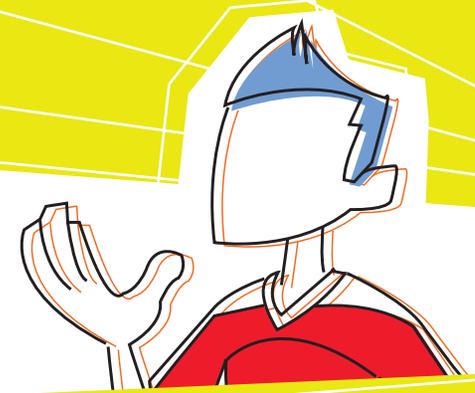
This should be part of the contract at the beginning of the year. The teens don't necessarily have to finish their books in order to be eligible to be a student leader, but there should be at least a serious effort to do the Bible studies and say the verses.

Student leaders may tell you they are too busy to do their Trek or Journey books. Once again, you need to remind them that they are role models for the clubbers. How can they expect the younger kids to do their books when they aren't working through their own?

(Of course, this could be asked of adult leaders. One option is to do the parent handbooks that go along with the handbooks in the younger clubs. Another is to work through the Trek and Journey Bible studies with the teens.)

To further enhance the teen's Trek and Journey experience, Parent's Guides are available on the Awana at Home® website (awana.org/athome) under "Free Resources." These guides go through each lesson, giving summaries of what the teen learned and also provide suggested discussion questions. These guides were created to help the parents of teens doing the Trek or Journey books either through a group program or C-track. But they will also be useful for student leader mentors overseeing C-track students.

Aiden's Story



Aiden loved little kids. The oldest of five, he was used to entertaining anyone under the age of 10. He was a natural Sparks student leader.

The very first night he taught the kids a song he had learned at camp. Actually the song itself wasn't all that memorable, but Aiden's enthusiastic leading had the Sparkies in giggles. A few of the girls immediately began following him around, drawing him pictures and writing him notes declaring their undying love.

Aiden basked in the attention. Being a Sparks student leader was as fun as he thought it would be. Even though the director was fine with Aiden helping with the music, she had also asked him to get to club 10 minutes early and help the Sparkies hang up their coats downstairs at the coat rack. The first couple of weeks, Aiden was at his post, but the third week he was over in the T&T room charming the T&T girls.

One of Aiden's leaders from T&T had offered to be his mentor for the Journey program, but after the first week, Aiden "forgot" to check in with Mr. Collins. The Sparks director knew she had a problem.

She decided to start with a gentle reminder. She asked Mr. Collins to stay after club one night and together they

reminded Aiden about the responsibilities of being a student leader.

Aiden listened and promised to do better. The two adults reviewed the requirements and standards expected. The director also told Aiden she was moving him from the green team to the yellow team so he would not be around the first-grade girls who liked to hang on him. She reviewed the child protection policy and why this could lead to a problem. Aiden agreed.

The director had assigned Aiden to a leader at the beginning of the year, but the leader was a young dad with a lot on his mind. He didn't have a lot of time to pay attention to Aiden. Now she switched things around and assigned him to a different leader, an older man whom she knew would take seriously the task of mentoring Aiden. She knew he'd be a good influence.

Aiden did do better and the director made sure she encouraged him and let him know that she was aware that he was making a sincere effort. She, the older leader and Mr. Collins also let Aiden know that they were praying for him.

Cases such as this are hard. You don't want to discourage teens from serving, but on the other hand, they need to recognize that they are representing Christ to children who may have no idea who God is or what the Bible is all about. Teens cannot serve simply to have fun and to get out of attending their own Awana program or youth group. Serving is a privilege and teens need to know that.

3

What a **Student Leader** Gains From the Experience

1. The **student leader** program is valuable training for those who become adult leaders.

Mentoring by an experienced leader, learning how to deal with less-than-optimal situations and relating to children from a variety of backgrounds are all part of training for the future. Many commanders, directors and leaders were once that freshman teen feeling excited, but a little intimidated, about serving. You have the opportunity to train and guide these impressionable teens. Your encouragement just might be the inspiration that causes the teen to dedicate his life to serving the Lord.

2. The **student leader** program gives teens an opportunity to use their spiritual gifts and God-given talents.

Sadly, teens encounter two-thirds of opportunities to use their talents at school rather than in church or other ministries. The student leader program is a good opportunity to change that statistic. Just last night I was the guest Large Group lesson speaker at a club and watched three student leaders enthusiastically lead the clubbers in several songs. The clubbers sang well — thanks to the excitement on the part of the teens.

3. The **student leader** program gives teens an opportunity to be mentored by an adult leader.

The student leader helps with the adult during Game Time, Handbook Time, etc. Hopefully the leader and teen can develop a relationship in which the leader can gently guide the teen to greater maturity and also gently guide a teen who faces an uncomfortable situation such

as a Sparkie throwing up (yes, it happens) or a Cubbie having a temper tantrum. All these experiences are part of the learning process ... and not necessarily what the teen was thinking about when he signed that contract last fall.

A mentoring adult can also encourage the teen in his progress through the Trek or Journey books, encouraging the teen to continue to grow spiritually as he learns more about the life threads of destiny and perspective and how that fits in with the sovereignty of God. What child or teen wouldn't want her own personal cheering section as she works through the Bible studies? Of course, we hope her parents are also cheering her on. The mentoring adult leader can encourage that by connecting with the parent to share how much it means to have the student leader serving alongside and how encouraging it is to see the student leader's commitment to their Trek or Journey study.

4. The student leader program gives teens an opportunity to grow in their Christian lives.

Yes, doing the Trek and Journey books are one way teens can grow spiritually, but a student leader can also grow in other ways. Many adult leaders have said they've learned more Scripture listening to and helping the clubbers than they did as clubbers themselves. Teens, too, will hear kids say verses whether officially or to allow the child to practice before saying the verse to the adult leader. After hearing the verse 100 times or so, the teen will be able to quote it.

Many student leaders are given the opportunity to explain a verse or even to teach a lesson. The student leader might also be put in tough situations where he learns grace, patience and tact. All these elements can add up to greater maturity.

5. Student leaders get an advanced lesson in parenting!

One of the qualifications the older women are to teach the younger women (see Titus 2) is to be lovers of children. Other verses in the Bible (see Proverbs; Ephesians 6) focus on the importance of the parent role for both men and women.

To many of us, loving children seems natural, but it is obvious by the news we hear every day that loving one's children is *not* always natural. All we have to do is walk through a grocery store or mall and we hear parents screaming at their children. We hear reports every day of parents abusing their children.

Even though teaching young women to love their children is a specific instruction given in Titus 2, not many churches/youth groups actually have anything in place to do so.

But student leaders do get to work with kids. They see a child's frustration at not being able to remember a verse. They comfort a child when he trips during a game. They make a child laugh by telling a silly joke. They answer a child's question — for the 17th time. As student leaders work with children, they are gaining parenting skills that will help the them in the future.

6. A student leader may have the privilege of leading a child to Christ.

Of course, we don't know who will trust Christ or when, but very likely, a student leader will have the opportunity of explaining salvation to a clubber. And isn't that in itself worth all the work to train a young teen to be a leader?

At the beginning of this e-book, I talked about Jacob, a student leader who offered to talk to clubbers about salvation at the end of the Large Group lesson — and had the privilege of leading two clubbers to Christ.

Jacob was a real student leader (not a made-up story). Where is he now? He is a pastor — of a church that has Awana.

The student leaders in your church are in many ways dependent on you — the pastor, youth pastor, commander or director. Invest in these teens. (Did someone invest time, prayer and effort in you at a young age?) You never know how your encouragement and mentoring will influence the teen's adult life for Christ. Once they graduate from high school, many of them will continue in service.

Difficult Issues

1. *We have a strict rule in our church that all Awana leaders MUST attend our church. Should that also count for student leaders?*

Yes, student leaders need to follow the guidelines set up by your church. Your church leadership needs to make the decision as to what exceptions to allow.

For instance, one church made an exception for teens who had grown up in the church Awana program, who were up-to-date in their books and lived an exemplary testimony — as long as they continued in their Bible studies and attended the church's Journey program.

2. *I like using student leaders, but sometimes I'm concerned because they aren't all that much older than the clubbers and it's like I have more children on hand rather than helpers.*

Again, clear guidelines will help you in these kinds of situations. Some churches have determined that only high school juniors and seniors can be student leaders in T&T. Younger teens are assigned to Puggles, Cubbies or Sparks. If you use middle schoolers as student leaders, you might want to assign them only to Puggles and Cubbies. The goal is to avoid the situation where the student leader is only a few years older than the kids with whom he's working.

3. I need student leaders to serve because we don't have enough adults. Unfortunately, a couple of them always seem to be "off" for a couple of months because of sports. This badly hinders our group from functioning as well as we could. At the beginning of the year I think I have 10 leaders for 40 clubbers. Our club grows. We gain more kids, but then suddenly I'm missing four student leaders because of basketball. Sadly, the parents don't see the issue and they encourage the teens to choose sports over service. What can I do?

Bring this up at the beginning-of-the-year parent/teen session. Explain exactly what you did here in your question. Talk about the need for all leaders to show up. Make sure you and the other adult leaders are good role models of faithful attendance. Ask the parents if they would be willing to be trained and fill in while their teen is gone for sports. (One or two might agree, but even if they don't, you might help them think through family decisions.) Explain that when you need and are expecting 10 leaders, you can't run club with six. Pray together about the situation. Remind them that you can't pull an adult (even a parent) in from the church hallway to fill in. You need someone to serve who has gone through Basic Training and child protection training for the good of the church and the club.

A brother and sister solved the situation in their club by both going through Basic Training and earning their BT certification. However, they shared a position in club. During the first half of the year, the brother played football and the sister served. After Christmas, the sister was involved in volleyball and the brother served. Is this a possibility in your club? Can two friends or siblings both be trained and share a position?

Be open about the need for leaders and see what you can work out between the leaders serving in your club.

Can you completely solve your problem? Probably not. Many teens choose sports because they're hoping to earn a scholarship. What those teens and their parents often don't realize is that reaching major milestones in Awana can also make them eligible for scholarships to approximately 40 colleges — scholarships that are probably much more likely than athletic scholarships for those teens who do the Awana work and qualify academically. Challenge the students and parents to seek God's will in the choices they make.

Be prepared as best you can for basketball, soccer, track, or whatever sport disrupts your group. See if you can get somewhat of a schedule at the beginning of the year so you can plan accordingly.

4. *Last year I had a clubber confide in a student leader about drug use in the home. This teen fortunately came to me (the director) and I, in turn, talked to the commander. The commander talked to church staff who took care of the situation. My fear is another situation might come up and because the student leader feels needed since the child spoke in confidence, will keep the "secret" to herself. How can I make sure that the teen isn't getting too close to a child?*

This can be a tough one because, as you said, sometimes the student leader might feel needed because the clubber confided in him. The teen wrongly feels mature enough to handle the problem. Again, this is something you need to address at the beginning of the year. Encourage all leaders to share difficult situations with you. (Not everyone else, but you, the director.) Explain that you will share the confidence only with the staff person in authority who can best help.

5. *I am a director with five or six student leaders regularly working with me. A few of them are immature and goof off more than the kids do. They are, however, good kids and I want to help them take more responsibility. My quandary, however, is that two of the other student leaders are very responsible and because of a summer's mission trip training, more capable than some of my adult leaders in regard to teaching a lesson or leading the kids in singing. Is that OK to give some of the student leaders much more responsibility than others?*

Just as adult leaders have different gifts and abilities, so do the teens in your group. At the beginning of the year ask the student leaders what they like to do and where they feel they would fit in club. You might discover that they are very aware of their own abilities. A teen who is immature will probably not want to lead a Large Group lesson. Likewise, the student leaders who have already had experience might willingly offer to teach.

Talk with each of the teens individually. Pray with them. Tell them where you see them fitting into the program. If a teen resents where he is put, say you would like him to take on that responsibility for at least part of the year — if this is merely an "I don't want to do this" situation. On the other hand, if his attitude is affecting others, you might want to move him right away.

6. Last year started out great and then two of the student leaders (a guy and girl) started hanging out together. The Sparkies picked up on the "dreamy" looks the couple sent each other and quickly this became a distraction.

What's the best way to handle the situation?

When you're dealing with teens, this can easily happen. Hopefully, mature teens would not exclusively hang around each other during the meeting and you won't have a problem. But if, like last year, the relationship becomes a problem you will need to talk to the couple. Give them an opportunity to adjust their behavior in club so that their interest in one another stays outside club. But if they can't or won't make this adjustment, you will need to connect with another director and see if you can move one of the student leaders to another club.

They may be willing to do this. If not, you will need to call the commander and parents in for a meeting. You don't want a teen relationship to be the focal point of Sparks. Even little kids can see when two teens have a "thing" going on. They see relationships play out on television, their parents have "significant others," etc.

Don't discourage a healthy friendship. Instead give the teens an opportunity to show the younger children how teen relationships are supposed to be conducted — no physical touching, no whispering or note-passing, and the utmost respect for one another.

7. We have a high school freshman who really wants to be a student leader. However, his maturity level seems lower than some of the Sparkies.

What can I do?

If the teen truly wants to serve (and not just be in club to be with his friends), work with him. He still needs to go through Basic Training, BT certification and child protection training. If he's still enthusiastic after the training, pair him with your strongest leader — one who will take seriously the responsibility of reigning in the student leader if he gets out of hand.

Also, remember that not all club responsibilities require directly working with the kids. Can he lead the flag ceremony? Help with the singing? Keep a record of points earned in the contest?

See this as an opportunity to help the young teen mature.

8. Our Journey group meets the same time as our younger clubs. I want the teens to have an opportunity to serve, but how do we work that out?

You will need to get together with your Journey director and coordinate the logistics. Some churches start Journey a half hour earlier or run Journey a half hour later than the younger clubs. During the middle time segment, teens go to their respective clubs as student leaders and help in Handbook Time or during games.

9. *My daughter is moving up to high school and our youth group meets at the same time as Awana. My child doesn't want to go to youth group. You know, she's kind of shy and doesn't like all the activities they have. She'd rather be a student leader. Is that all right?*

Awana is part of a total church program — not a basis for competition between church activities. Unless your church specifically gives the students the option of choosing between youth group and serving at Awana (which some churches do), your child should attend youth group.

You could, however, ask your commander to discuss the issue with the youth pastor. (Although he has probably done this already.) Is there some way schedules could be coordinated? Could teens leave youth group for a segment of time to work in Awana? (See Question 8.)

And From the Perspective of a Student Leader ...

By Alyson Schmidt

Becoming an Awana student leader is equivalent to becoming a local celebrity. At least, that's what it seemed like to an impressionable, imaginative preteen eager to leave the limiting world of playing dress up and enter into responsibility and leadership. So, the same year I started high school, I became a Sparks student leader at Central Bible Church in Aurora, Illinois. After serving as a Sparks student leader for two years, I requested to work with the third- through sixth-grade girls in Chums & Guards, now T&T girls.

They were at the age of discovering what life had to offer, and in need of a Christlike example to help them discern the positive from foolish decisions. Most of the girls in the club were not "church kids." Being a student leader to these girls forced me to find a regular routine of praying and studying God's Word so that when they had questions, whether about God, the Bible or life in general, I could answer them with unfailing truth, a commodity these girls rarely experienced in their lives.

One night near the end of the Awana year, with winter on the verge of spring when the clubbers want to be outside rather than studying Bible verses, I was in charge of motivating one of our fourth-graders to memorize a section she had been stuck on for several weeks. She would read the verse several times then attempt to say it, inevitably forgetting everything after the reference. She slid lower in her chair, her shoulders slumped.

**“Why do I have to do this?”
she asked, exasperated.**

“You don’t have to,” I said, “but reading and memorizing Scripture shows our obedience to God and helps us live for Him rather than foolishly doing what we want.”

“Whatever. How come I’ve never seen you memorize verses?” she looked at me. I knew she would scoff at any “Christianese” answer I gave her. She didn’t need more platitudes from me.

“Here,” I handed the book back to her and recited the entire section she was having so much trouble memorizing — a verse I had memorized back in Sparks and still recited as a reminder to put on the full armor of God in order to stand firm against the devil’s schemes.

She remained silent when I finished, but her eyes were wide with amazement and ... trust? Even if just for this one moment, she believed what I told her was legitimate because I had demonstrated how beneficial God’s words are to the believer. She understood that I had been in her same predicament, and if I had overcome this obstacle, then she could too. That kind of respect and ability to relate to the kids, to see the light of understanding in their eyes once they memorize and make sense of verses, and to witness the behavioral changes after surrendering their life to Christ is why I loved being a student leader and now love being an adult leader.

And From the Perspective of a Student Leader’s Parent ...

Two of our children were student leaders and testify of the positive effect it had on them. Joel is now a pastor and started Awana in his church. At his ordination service, he credited Awana and the student leader program as very instrumental in his call and love for ministry.

Our daughter went to Cedarville University in Cedarville, Ohio. She used to say that on Wednesday nights the dining hall was a sea of Awana uniforms with those who had served as student leaders in their home churches and now were continuing that service in churches near the university.

Awana teens learn to love service and Awana also helps them learn to love God.

Sample Contract

Awana Student Leader Contract

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a student leader this year.

Serving in Awana® is a privilege. Our church has a high standard for our leaders. We want the parents of our clubbers to know that they can trust us and that we provide quality leaders, Christ-centered training and care for their children.

Because you will be directly working with the clubbers, you are required to have the same standards in conduct, speech and attitude as the commander, the director and the leaders. In addition, you are required to go through Basic Training and our church child protection training. You will be given specific responsibilities and are under the authority of the director (or an adult leader assigned to you).

Listed below are the requirements. You need to remember at all times that the clubbers are looking to you as a godly example of leadership.

1. You must have a meaningful relationship with Christ.
2. You must uphold godly standards in conduct, speech, attitude.
3. You must have a love for and patience with children.
4. You must complete required training.
5. You must be willing to obey the authority of the leaders, director and commander.
6. (Churches need to reward this according to the situation in their own club.) You must be actively involved in Trek® or Journey™ (which means working on your Bible studies). If your church doesn't have Trek and/or Journey, then you need to participate in your church youth group and be actively doing C-track™.
7. You are to be at Awana during the entire club time unless otherwise directed.
8. You need to wear the student leader's uniform to club.
9. You are to focus on the clubbers (not your peers), treating each one with respect.

Student leaders, by signing below you are stating that you agree to do your best to abide by these rules and that you understand that failure to do so can lead to temporary or permanent dismissal as a student leader.

Parents, by signing this contract along with your teen, you are acknowledging that you support the church and the Awana club in which your teen will be working. You are acknowledging that you will do your part in helping your teen responsibly serve.

Student Leader _____ Parent _____
Signature and Date _____ Signature and Date _____

