

# 7 Tips for Creating Effective Retreats

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Many teachers and youth ministry workers tell me that one of their greatest challenges with creating a retreat program is allowing every game, discussion and ritual to fit in its right place and connect seamlessly with the overall journey. Another struggle is knowing how to gently lead your students through the varying depths of the different retreat elements. Does this sound familiar to you?

The most effective programs follow a purposeful and intentional process from the very start of the retreat to the moment everyone leaves. Every element within the program is carefully selected and integrated with the sole intent of enhancing each student's ability to connect with the theme through meaningful experiences.

Consider the following questions when selecting the different games, activities, discussions, times of reflection or rituals for your retreat:

- **Do the elements within the opening session create an atmosphere of positivity, safety and trust while also setting the theme?** The opening session sets the tone for the rest of the retreat so ensure it is used to create the right environment and expectations.
- **How does this element reinforce the theme and provide points of connection for the participants?** Try not to use games and activities just to fill time or because they are fun. Allow everything you do in the program to strengthen and deepen the messages.
- **In what way does this activity connect the other elements before and after?** To create a fluid, meaningful journey it is important that each element leads from one to the next.
- **Are the participants ready for the required level of depth and trust?** If not, try to use other games, activities, stories or discussions before hand to lead them there.
- **How does this element mirror and enhance the group's progression and dynamics?** Carefully select games, activities, discussions and prayers that are appropriate for the current dynamics of your group and for where you need them to go next
- **Am I using this activity, game, story or ritual because it is my favourite or does it serve a real purpose?** Unfortunately, sometimes it is important to leave out a favourite element so that a more meaningful and purposeful one can be used to enhance the program.

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