

MORE INCLUSIVE

Our world is growing more diverse and more connected than ever, which means it should be a top priority of churches to create communities where everyone feels included. There's no better time than right now to talk about becoming leaders who value, pursue, and model inclusion in our ministries! Today on the podcast, Hedreich Nichols joins Kenny and Elle to share nine ways to create an inclusive culture in your youth ministry.

1 *READ, READ, READ.*

We live in an amazing time with so much information readily available. This information can allow us to learn more about the history and demographics of your community, find and connect with churches near you who are reaching people that your church is not, and to purposefully learn from thinkers who don't look like you or share your same experiences.

2 *BE OPEN TO FEEDBACK.*

Not every opinion is a fact, but we would be wise to listen. You never know what you could stand to learn from starting a dialogue rather than shutting down an opinion that makes you uncomfortable.

3 *EXPAND YOUR CIRCLE.*

If your friends all look like you and think like you, your capacity for growth will be limited. We all need to pursue relationships with people from different backgrounds, cultures, and faiths. If you want a place to start, reach out to a pastor in your area who looks or thinks differently than you and offer to buy them coffee.

4 *GET COMFORTABLE BEING UNCOMFORTABLE.*

Many of these tips point towards this big idea. Comfort can often present itself as the true enemy to growth, especially in this area of inclusivity. Embrace the tension that will come during this process and don't let it stop you from growing.

5 *DON'T FORGET GENDER.*

If we aren't careful our events, games, messages, and environments will most naturally speak to teenagers of our gender and background. It's important to get out of our boxes of what we might "think" is best for everyone and make sure males and females are well represented on our leadership teams.

6 *BEWARE "IMPERCEPTIBLE" DISTANCE.*

You want to treat everyone the same, but naturally, we are all predisposed to struggle with certain people. Nobody wins if we deny this, but we can grow by being honest with ourselves. Who are the people that can be harder to love and how can you actively pursue a relationship with them? Once again, it's necessary to get comfortable with the uncomfortable.

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7 VALIDATE CODE-SWITCHING.

Simply put, code-switching is about communicating in a way that is appropriate to the situation. We all have different ways of speaking and functioning depending on the setting we find ourselves in. In other words, we all communicate to the audience with which we are speaking. Don't come down on a kid for their vocabulary or "slang," but validate the different hats that a teenager wears based on the scenario they find themselves in.

8 EMBRACE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.

We don't want to talk about disparities that exist between males and females.

We don't want to talk about socioeconomic divides.

We don't want to talk about racial inequality or long histories of injustice.

There are wounds that we want to be careful to avoid, but you can't heal wounds by sweeping problems under the rug. It's important that we are okay with talking about the things that we are uncomfortable with because this is the only way we can come to an understanding.

9 IDENTIFY AND FIGHT BIAS.

We need to become reflective practitioners who take time to understand our own biases. The truth is, everybody has biases (including you and me), but we don't have to be controlled by them. Be honest with yourself and surround yourself with people who can help you grow!

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