

How do we adapt teaching to the needs of Junior High students?

Class 7-8

Sometimes called Junior Secondary School or Junior High School

1. Physical Development-J.S.S.

The bodies of junior high youth is in the process of great change or is about to begin that process (puberty). Puberty is a great change, but a good one. Young people, however, can be greatly afraid when these changes begin happening. Because their bodies are changing so rapidly, they think about their bodies all the time. It sometimes seems that they know longer know their own bodies. Every day their body keeps changing. They can be afraid what their bodies will end up like, whether they will be tall or short, good looking or not. Look for opportunities to talk with the young people privately one by one or in very small groups, to offer counsel.

Their newfound interest in sex and their developing sexual desires can lead to many questions, problems, and fear. They want to know about every little detail. It is very important that the teacher give them true teaching according to the Bible. It is best to talk about sex with girls in one group and boys in another. If they know you can talk about sex without getting embarrassed or upset, they may come and talk with you about it.

Many problems that appear to be emotional or spiritual may have a physical cause. For example, a common problem for JSS'ers is fatigue—being very tired all the time. It may seem that they are lazy, but in reality their bodies are growing very rapidly, and this may cause them to feel tired. Another example is the way in which girls may be angry or easily upset before their period. The rapid chemical changes taking place in their bodies cause them to react emotionally, but the root cause is physical.

Malnutrition can be a problem at this time. JSS students are very active, they are growing very quickly, their understanding is developing, but often they do not want to eat or they do not eat foods that are healthy. Teaching on good nutrition is very important.

2. Mental Development--J.S.S.

The mental capacity or understanding of junior high youth is also developing rapidly. They are thinking very actively, and their understanding is growing, but they still lack the experience that life brings. Because of this they have many questions and many doubts. The teacher must have great patience with their constant questions.

They ask questions and have doubts even about things that they once believed firmly earlier in their childhood. It seems as if they must learn everything all over again. Do not become angry. Do not shame them. Just have patience. Don't think of their doubts as sin, but as an opportunity God has given you to help strengthen their faith. Listen to every question and every doubt without becoming angry. Encourage the thought that doubts do not lead us to throw away our faith, but to look for satisfying answers and explanations.

Junior high youth, if their education has been adequate, often like to read. A little library for the class or department or church is a good idea if possible. The teacher can loan them books to read.

These young people like to learn things for themselves. It is important that active teaching methods be used, not passive lecture. Just telling them will not be effective. Discussion can be a good teaching method if the teacher is able to guide the discussion by asking questions that steer it in a biblical direction. Asking questions can be very effective. The teacher may ask them what a verse or a phrase means.

Although their minds are full of questions, some young people may be ashamed to ask them. They feel that others will think they are stupid. A question box where they can place written questions without their names can help. Whatever they ask, the teacher should say something like, "That is a good question. I think many others probably are wondering the same thing." Do not discuss their questions or problems or tell anybody else what they have said. Make a list of things they are wondering and asking about. If you don't know the answer, don't be ashamed to admit it. You don't have to have all the answers. You might say something like, "I don't really know much about that, but I will look for an answer." Then, ask someone older and wiser in the faith, or look for an answer in the Bible or other books.

The class can plan many of its own activities. A class council is very important. They can plan together activities for the class.

Junior high youth learn through trial and error. They must try many new things and see what results. Don't make them feel ashamed if they try something and do not do very well at it. They are investigators. Interactive groups work well. Projects they can do are good, research according to their ability, and homework assignments that are like games.

These youngsters want to grow up, not to be children any more, but they are unable to act or to think like adults. It is best for them to be in a class of their peers. Speak to them respectfully as grownups, but avoid giving them difficult assignments. They are not yet adults.

They do not understand how they can do well in school, and this is very important to many of them. Practical help in study skills is useful.

3. Emotional Development--J.S.S.

Junior high youth are unstable and unpredictable in their emotions because of rapid changes in the hormones in their bodies. 1) They are not yet accustomed to those hormones. 2) Their bodies are making hormones in an irregular manner, in spurts. Therefore the teacher needs to have great patience and pray to God much for them.

Their emotions go to extremes. They may be very happy or very sad, but often they are very sad, and this sadness is caused only by changes in their hormone levels. The teacher should think of this as just the way God has planned for people to grow. It is a natural, God-given stage of development. The teacher should assure them often that he likes them and loves them. He should spend time talking to each young person individually as much as possible.

These young people are really asking in their hearts, “Who am I?” They want to be seen or thought of as someone unique and special. That is another reason it is important to get to know each one personally. Each one needs to know and feel that others accept them and like them. Greet each young person by name whenever you can, and talk a little with each one as they are coming and going from class.

They are often embarrassed about their physical and sexual development. There should be a firm class rule that no one laughs at anyone else.

4. Social Development--J.S.S.

Junior high youth need to get to know one another. They need to form friendships with others their own age. Friendly discussion is an important part of class.

They want to be seen as “OK” in the eyes of their friends. The teacher should never ridicule or embarrass them in front of their friends.

Social activities are very important. Games are important—both Bible and other learning games and games just for fun and fellowship.

They often find it difficult to talk with their parents. It is important that their parents be slow to scold them, but fast to listen to them. Their parents will not be very effective at telling them what to do, but they can ask questions like, “Have you thought about this....?” The teacher can be a friend in whom they can put their confidence.

Circular response is a good way to begin class times—

“It would be great if my parents would...” (The teacher suggests the beginning of the phrase and each student completes the statement briefly.)

“One thing that is very hard for me is.....”

“I am very happy when.....”

“My hero is.....because.....”

“I don’t like it when.....”

“My favorite song is.....because.....”

Man times, junior high youth begin to rebel against authority. They want to learn and to decide matters for themselves. The teacher can lead them to look at the Bible themselves and think for themselves about what it is teaching. The teacher can give them time to talk about their thoughts during class. The teacher should not such talk all the time, telling his own thoughts.

Boys and girls begin to like each other again, maybe way too much. The teacher should plan times and opportunities for healthy friendships to develop. If boys and girls begin to think only about one another so that they cannot think about the Bible lesson, the church may divide the class into girls (with a woman teacher) and boys (with a man teacher).

5. Spiritual Development--J.S.S.

These young people can decide for Jesus Christ. In fact they often do make decisions for Christ, yet if these decisions are to be genuine, they must be the young person's own. The teacher can provide an opportunity to decide for Christ, but he should never put pressure on the young people.

They need to learn how to USE the teaching they are learning from the Bible. The teacher should work hard to choose a good assignment that will enable the Christian youth to put the Bible principles they are learning into practice. Begin by discussing with them what the Bible says about their daily living. Give many examples and situations like the ones they might face in their daily lives.

They want to try out every new thing. They will try everything that they think will make them grown up: drugs, bad language, sex, rebellion.... Any and every evil thing can easily come into their lives in this manner. It is important that the youth see new ideas and new things in the church. There should be variety and interest in teaching methods and in activities.

You can use their strong friendships to draw in other youth outside of the church. Provide interesting activities and encourage them to invite their friends.

They need to know that they are important. You show them they are important to you when you greet them by name, spend time talking about their interests, and pray with them. They need to know that they are important to the church, too. The teacher should try to find service projects for the young people in the church.

They need to know that how they feel does not determine how God receives them. God can be happy with them even when they are feeling sad or tired.

They need to know what to do when they fail or sin. Teach them that God can give people a second chance after they have ruined their first chance by sin. Example: The story of Jonah can show them that when they confess sin and turn in God's direction, God will forgive them and may allow them to begin again (1 John 1:9, Proverbs 28:13).

They are very quick to know when a person is genuine or false. The teacher needs to be real and to set a good example for the young people.