

Nothing for local youths? A few parents can start something!

An informal gathering for secondary school age youngsters (from a range of local schools, meeting locally) can be a huge asset – not least because it's *not* school, and doesn't need to have all the same peer-group pressures.

Teenagers love to hang out together – and it doesn't need to be a bit group; anything from half a dozen upwards can be fine.

If it's small, they can meet in a home, which always makes for a nice atmosphere – and it's free. If larger, is there a local hall or community centre available? You could have a meeting every (say) Friday, from 7.30-9.00pm.

Here are some ideas:

- First, just 'hang out' – for about 20 minutes.
- Then ask all to share two bits of good news and one bit of bad news
- Then organize some games (see games suggestions)
- or watch a movie with popcorn (comedies are great). Ask to look out for the best quote from the film and then share them
- Or put on a summer BBQ with wide games outdoors
- Or a games evening (board games, X box etc)
- Put on some music – and have a dance!
- They'll love competitions of all kinds
- Get them to save up for a trip (maybe wash a bunch of cars to raise money, e.g. to go ice skating together – parents provide transport)
- Food is always good – simple things like toast and butter, plus maybe pot noodles
- A 'no-phone-zone' is an excellent policy to suggest to them
- Give space to develop friendships
- Say that it's really important that we can care for each other. Who's got something that they're struggling with?
- Maybe develop a 'buddy-system', in twos, to look after each other during the week, keeping up the contact with texts etc.
- Challenge is good. You could ask them to share what they want to achieve in the next week and how they are planning to get there.

From a safeguarding point of view, it's important to have parents (or other adults) from a minimum of four families present at meetings. DBS-checking can be done at www.dbs.gov.uk and a basic check costs £25. The age of the leaders doesn't matter. Genuineness does. The key thing is that the young people feel, and are, loved. Secondary school pupils of all ages can come together. When they get too old, you can ask them to be a helper. Downloadable parents' consent form is **here**. Suggestions for games are **here**. An accident report form is **here**.

Go for it! The helpers will find it very fulfilling and for the youngsters it could be a life line! For practical help and support, do contact Ed Wright of the

Birmingham Association of Youth Clubs on 0121 460 5870 or
ed.wright@bayc.org - and he can probably get you a £600 grant!