

Tweens to Uniteens: Making the Transition

Emotional Effects of Change

Change is natural. It is a part of our every day physical experience and yet, we often resist change. Change can trigger a variety of emotional responses and often give rise to feelings of fear. Fifth graders who are about to move into the Uniteen program may see this move as something much bigger – and scarier – than you might think. Consider the many feelings and thoughts that may be rising up for your fifth graders.

Creating activities that allow the fifth graders to interact with your Uniteens on a regular basis throughout this transitional year will help to smooth the process and ensure their feeling of security as they move forward.

Opening Up The Circles / Group-Building

The transition from the Sunday School environment to the Youth Group setting can be emotionally challenging. If the individual groups have been together for a while and have worked on group building skills they are probably a very close group. And a “close” group can appear to be a “closed” group to a newcomer – regardless of their age. Group-building activities for the two groups will ease the process and open the circles.

Putting the Pieces Together

Many Pieces, Shapes and Sizes

Just as a jigsaw puzzle has many pieces, shapes and sizes, the groups you are attempting to combine have many varied characteristics. Just think for a moment about the characteristics of a fifth grade boy compared to an eighth grade girl! The differences in size, physical dexterity and social, emotional & spiritual maturity can be huge. Although combining these groups is not impossible by any means, the differences must be acknowledged and considered when creating programs and activities for the combined group.

Elementary School Characteristics

WHO AM I?

- I am self centered and like for you to make me feel secure
- I am curious, like to imitate and I am very impressionable
- I can understand that God, Jesus and the Bible are special
- I like to use my five senses, I am very active and I like to play

- I am anxious to please, but sometimes shy

Middle School Characteristics

WHO AM I?

- I love excitement and competition, but I have a strong sense of loyalty and justice
- I like to read
- I enjoy groups and group activities
- Because I can think critically, I can understand God as Spirit and I want spiritual experiences

Bridging the Gap: Ages & Stages

Look What I Can Do: 5th Graders

(Adapted from “The Enlivened Lesson Plan” by Rev. Diane Venzera)

Physical

- Both boys and girls of this age can react physically with speed and accuracy
- They enjoy organized games and larger group activities
- Their bodies are beginning to change

Intellectual

- Reading and writing have advanced
- Can work independently for longer periods
- More in-depth challenges and projects are appreciated
- More complex craft projects are OK – they may even help to clean up
- What they CAN do and what they have been trained to do may be different, so help them live up to their potential
- Interactive learning and small groups are effective where they share then come back together and discuss their findings with the whole group
- Beginning to think abstractly
- May see multiple correct answers and ideas to questions
- Discontent with sitting and listening
- Need to experience lesson from variety of perspectives
- Sense of values is developing
- Atmosphere of trust and acceptance is important to self-confidence
- Art and Music help to internalize information and enhance self-concept
- Enjoy educational games

Emotional

- Emotional fulfillment requires a broad spectrum of creative, meaningful activities
- Important to demonstrate relevance of new experiences
- Increased sense of responsibility
- Need positive mentor who will challenge and encourage setting high but reasonable goals
- Developing identities through the influence of peers
- Looking for role models
- Looking for place to belong
- Most can discuss and evaluate their feelings with their peers
- Difficulty accepting evaluation from authority figure. Guide them in small group discussions
- Will correct and challenge each other – guide them in this
- May tease others due to unexpressed feelings. This may be a red flag

Social

- Concerned with the truth. Developing clear sense of right and wrong
- Avoid highly competitive games
- Desperately need approval from adults and peers
- Reasoning is possible; can grasp other points of view

- Reaching out to others and showing more concern
- Appreciate service projects and feel empathy for those who have had their feelings hurt or have been violated
- Strong need for mutual acceptance, understanding and cooperation

Spiritual

- Able to begin evaluating ethics
- Good researchers. Invite them to find Scriptures to justify class rules or the Unity Principles that you are teaching. God becomes the authority, not the teacher
- Most are able to accept that there are some things about God we don't understand
- Ready to relate different Bible events to the scope of Bible history
- Recognize the difference between right and wrong and able to make deliberate choices about actions
- KEY CONCEPTS: "I CREATE MY LIFE WITH MY THOUGHTS, WORDS AND ACTIONS"

Look What I Can Do: Uniteens

(Reprinted from "The Enlivened Lesson Plan" by Rev. Diane Venzera)

Physical

- Kids are extremely sensitive about their differences at this age
- They are full of energy but they tire easily and require more rest
- Strenuous activity requires more recovery time
- Overly tired kids will be unable to control their emotions, tongues and attitudes
- Devastated when they feel awkward and gain great satisfaction from mastering new skills
- Very concerned with their appearance and where they fit into the group

Intellectual

- Able to think abstractly and like to explore many sides to an issue
- Can focus on things they think are important but tend to be careless with things they find unimportant
- Impulsive and don't yet have the full capacity to think things through in detail
- Need experiences and activities that give them the opportunity to interact with their peers
- Need rituals that help them to mark turning points in their lives
- Need opportunities to take on major responsibilities in the classroom
- Need to be with adults who are compassionate with all they are going through yet able to give loving guidance
- They have monumental curiosity
- Allow time to explore their environment and engage in individual learning activities
- Well developed critical-thinking and problem-solving skills
- Beginning to question authority figures
- Prefer to reason things through for themselves
- Interested in how past and present world events affect their lives
- Easily distracted so they need well-prepared lessons with a clear connection between the activity and lesson

- Tendency to daydream and lose focus. Use subtle prompts and cues to assist them in focusing
- No concept of time and will wait for the last minute to register or never get information to their parents

Emotional

- Hormonal changes create mood changes and out of control emotions without apparent provocation
- Need to feel a sense of belonging
- Need to remain calm and model nature emotional responses
- Anger emerges due to fatigue, feelings of inadequacy, rejection and uncertainty
- Kids need encouragement, verbal praise, personal valuing and appropriate physical affection
- Forgiveness needs to characterize the teacher/student relationship
- Fear often manifests as worry (about non-acceptance, report cards, peer criticism, increasing demands and being alone in the dark) They feel adults tend to dismiss their fears thinking they should have grown out of them

Social

- Normal for them to have a very close friend of same gender
- Boys tend to become rambunctious and rude, and a group of all girls will tend to be “cliquish,” gossipy and catty. Most will respond to the teacher to stay on task
- Mixing sexes will bring complaints from boys, but may create positive group dynamics if you have more than one or two of each
- It is very helpful to have co-ed leadership
- They are preoccupied with selves. Even entering a room can be traumatic
- Loners and less popular kids may need special help with social skills
- Service projects are especially powerful in breaking the self-absorption
- Capable of self-awareness, insight and empathy
- Can set goals and are able to concentrate
- Developing an interest in social justice and fairness
- Need time to talk and develop social relationships. This is a legitimate urge at this time. Friendship-building activities are popular.

Spiritual

- This may be a time of new or renewed commitments to God
- Time of deepening their spiritual understanding
- Spirituality becomes more personal as they open to abstract thinking
- In a “leaving” stage of development. They seek to distance themselves from parents and seek their own values and beliefs
- Want to test what they have been taught about God against their own experiences
- Able to make choices about finding God’s will and following it
- Leaders can guide them in their relationship with God
- Guided classroom discussions are key tool for exploring, understanding, and applying Truth principles
- KEY CONCEPTS: READY TO EXPLORE KEY PRINIPLES OF UNITY MORE DEEPLY

Bridging the Gap: Activities

Creating Excitement and Anticipation

We may think of the transition from fifth grade to Uniteens as exciting and perhaps as a rite of passage. However, our fifth graders may not feel that excitement – unless we create that atmosphere for them. Although the bridging activities and group building events you plan will help the groups to be comfortable with one another, creating opportunities for achievement, recognition and ceremony will create an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation.

Bridging Activities / Rite of Passage

Bridging activities are not something we do on the day our fifth graders graduate to Uniteens. Bridging is a Rite of Passage and requires a year-long process of getting to know one another, learning about one another and learning about Unity.

In traditional cultures, rites of passage activities served to support individuals during a time of significant change. The activities should be designed to help the individual recognize their unique gifts and potential and what they bring to the group or community. Bridging activities should address the need to learn about the new group and opportunities to discover one's own talents. Activities should include:

- Opportunities for interaction with new group
- Social skill building activities
- Exploration of the program they are entering; who are they, what do they do, etc.
- Exploration of Unity teachings, i.e. Twelve Powers, Unity Principles, History of Unity
- Exploration of their own unique talents
- Opportunities to serve others

Bridging Award / Rite of Passage Acknowledgement

The bridging activities can create even more excitement when they are offered as requirements for a recognition award. The award can be anything you choose to give them; a pin, patch, special certificate or other gift. The award for moving from one group to another will take on a much greater significance if there are requirements for achieving the award. The requirements will also encourage the youth to take part in the various non-Sunday bridging activities that you create. Possible requirements might include:

1. Find out about Uniteens
 - Visit the regional Uniteen website
 - Talk to a Uniteen at your church
 - Ask your teacher or youth director for information about Uniteens & what they do
 - Read your church youth ministry pamphlet
2. List 3 activities that Uniteens do that interests you.
3. Do one of the following Uniteen activities
 - Read a meditation for your class
 - Write and read a prayer for your class
 - Other ...
4. Participate in a service project with your Uniteen group
 - Participate in a non-Sunday event with Uniteens such as, movie night, lock-in, field trip, etc.
 - Help plan your bridging ceremony.

Bridging Ceremony / Rite of Passage Ceremony

Everyone loves ceremonies, especially adolescents. With a little planning, music, candles and meaningful words the presentation of your Bridging Award and the graduation to Uniteens will be an exciting and memorable event. Invite all of the stakeholders; minister, board, parents, teachers, Uniteen Leaders, Uniteens and the fifth graders to be involved in the planning and the presentation of this ceremony.

Rites of passage are a core human desire. We all seek recognition and have a desire for a meaningful place among our peers. Research has shown that American youth who do not take part in traditional rites of passage often find a substitute rite of passage in the form of initiations, hazing and gang related activities.

The Rites of Passage ceremony should be more than a party or graduation day. It should be the final event in a culmination of activities that have served to support the transition from one group to another, i.e. children's church to youth group.

In planning your ceremony, consider the following:

- Who will take part in the ceremony
- Where and when will the ceremony take place
- Who will present the award
- What words/poems/scripture will be read
- What can the fifth grader leave behind for the younger children
- How will candles be used? Will they be real or battery operated candles?
- How will the fifth graders be involved?
- How will the Uniteens be involved? How will they greet the incoming Uniteens?
- What will happen after the ceremony? Will there be cake? 😊

Event Preparation Blueprint

(Adapted from Children's Ministry Profession Edition. Childrensministry.com/leaders)

This checklist will ensure your key planning areas are organized and intact – and that your event is built to last on your ministry's vision

Start with a strong foundation

Prayerfully consider the event's purpose and goal. What's Spirit telling you? Who is this event for, and why should they come? Keep the intended outcome in the forefront of your mind.

Enlist help from load-bearing pillars

Form an event-specific team you can rely on, and communicate with them regularly leading up to the event. Personally invite those who've served with you in the pasts or newer volunteers who've proven themselves.

Draft your plans

Plan the overall theme and program of the event using the event's ultimate purpose as your filter. BE creative during this brainstorming process, but keep your brainstorming team small. Teams of three to four people work best.

Blueprint Checklist

- Set a date.** Carefully choose a date fitting with the wider church schedule, school schedules, and the community calendar.
- Get estimates.** With any event, cost is critical. Revisit your annual budget and project the expenses for the event. Decide whether a fee is appropriate.
- Talk it through.** Determine the centerpiece of your event; will it be a speaker, entertainer, experience or something else. Nail it down and confirm it – at least three months in advance for a major event and at least one month in advance for the minor ones.
- Choose your site.** Select a location that best supports the event. Consider pitfalls. Is complacency or boredom a risk of having an annual event in the same location year after year? Is the location big enough or too big?
- Determine your audience.** Decide whether the event will be open to anyone or just a select few. Plan ways to get the word out: face-to-face or mailed invitations, bulletin announcements, e-mail, posts on the church's website, posters, fliers, text messages, radio spots—choose your method according to what your attendees will most likely respond to. Make registering for the event clear and easy with a defined deadline and a “learn more” page on your website.
- Plan your interior.** Plan what happens on-site by thinking of what the attendees will experience with their five senses – what they will hear, see, smell, taste and touch. Whatever your approach, plan these areas: décor, facility setup, food and beverage, and supplies.
- Paperwork.** Be sure to have all of the appropriate release forms completed. Check with regional consultant for check the Youth & Family Ministry Guide or Uniteen Program Guide for details.
- Move in.** Enjoy the event. Planning ahead and work with your team will release you from some of the necessary tasks during the event. This frees you to connect with the youth, parents, volunteers and other attendees.
- Finish well.** Don't underestimate the power of appreciation. Even a simple thank you for the smallest of tasks plants seeds for future volunteer opportunities. At the event, publicly thank those on your team. The next week, quickly follow up with handwritten notes, personally thanking them for their work and investment in not only the event, but also the ministry.

Bridging Award - Worksheet

Consider the following questions as you create the award:

- What will you give out as the award?
- What will the requirements be?
- How will the requirements encourage interaction between the two groups?
- How can the award create opportunities for Asset Building?
- How can the Uniteens be involved in creating the award?
- Who will present the award?
- Will the award be given at the graduation ceremony or at another time?

Bridging Award Requirements

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Create a Timeline:

- When will children be working on the award requirements?
- How long will they be able to continue working on it? What deadline will you set?
- When would requirements have to be complete?
- How much time do you need between the completion date and the ceremony to obtain or create the actual award?

Bridging Award Timeline

Date	Task	Person/Group Responsible

Combined Sunday Event/Lesson - Worksheet

Name of Event/Lesson: _____

Where: _____

Purpose of Event: _____

How will the two groups interact during the lesson? _____

What role will Uniteens have? _____

What role will 5th graders have? _____

Who will host the event/lesson? _____

What is the theme of the lesson? _____

Activities/Parts of the Lesson:

Opening – Meditation, Prayer, Opening Statement, etc.

Who will be responsible for each part, prayer, meditation, etc?

How long will the meditation be? What kind of meditation?

Opening Statement _____

Exploration – Story or Active Experience

Creative Expression

Closing

How can the kids get involved in the pre-planning?

Combined Sunday Event/Lesson – Planning Timeline

Date	Task	Person/Group Responsible

Non-Sunday Event at Church - Worksheet

Name of Event: _____

Where: _____

Time(s): _____

Purpose of Event: _____

How will the two groups interact during the event? _____

What are some opportunities for interaction after the event? _____

Paperwork Needed: _____

Other Safety Considerations if any: _____

Adult Ratio/Chaperones Needed: _____

Materials/supplies will you need: _____

What Will Participants Need to Bring: _____

What role will parents play? _____

Will food be needed? Who will be responsible for food? _____

How can the kids get involved in the pre-planning? _____

Approximate Cost: _____

- **Create an Agenda (below)**
- **Create a Planning Timeline (p. 15)**

Event Agenda (include times if possible)

Time	Activity	Supplies	Person Responsible

Event Planning Timeline

Date	Task	Person/Group Responsible

Bridging Field Trip - Worksheet

5th Grade & Uniteen Group

Name of Event: _____

Where: _____

Purpose of Event: _____

How will the two groups interact during the event? _____

What are some opportunities for interaction after the event?

Paperwork Needed: _____

Other Safety Considerations if any: _____

Adult Ratio/Chaperones Needed: _____

Transportation Considerations: _____

What Will Participants Need to Bring: _____

Approximate Cost: _____

Where will you meet? _____

What role will parents play? _____

How can the kids get involved in the pre-planning? _____

- **Create a Planning Timeline (below):**

Bridging Field Trip Planning Timeline:

Date	Task	Person/Group Responsible

Graduation / Fly-up Ceremony - Worksheet

Who will take part in the ceremony? In the planning? _____

Where (i.e. sanctuary, youth area, etc.): _____

When (i.e., before, during or after Sunday service): _____

What permissions will you need from church/staff: _____

What will you do (what will be done & said (Page 11): _____

What props will you need? _____

What materials will be needed? _____

How can the kids get involved in the pre-planning?

Will there be requirements to be met before taking part in the ceremony (i.e. rites of passage)? _____

How will the two groups interact during the event? _____

How will parents be involved? _____

Is there any additional paperwork needed? _____

What awards or gifts will be given & who will be responsible for them? _____

Other Safety Considerations if any: _____

What Will Participants Need to Bring: _____

Approximate Cost if any: _____

- **Create an Agenda/Script for the event (below):**
- **Create a planning timeline for the event (p. 18)**

Graduation/Fly Up Ceremony - Details/Script

Graduation/Fly Up Ceremony - Planning Timeline

Date	Task	Person/Group Responsible