

Hello Preteen Leaders/Parents,

We are so excited for this year's Spark Conferences. This year we are focusing on BELIEVING in God, in His power and how we can show what we BELIEVE. We are amped about what God is going to do in the hearts and lives of preteens at Spark but we also want your preteens to be able to have experiences outside of Spark where they can grow, show what they BELIEVE.

We want to extend to you a "BELIEF in action" challenge ... should you choose to accept it. In this package you will find materials and ideas specific for preteens to embrace what they BELIEVE and show what they BELIEVE.

7 ways to make practical Christianity legit for preteens.

- **Concrete is the perfect mortar for ministry** – Preteens learn best by being active. Using a paintbrush, picking up garbage, visiting the elderly, collecting canned food – these are concrete experiences that preteens can relate too and get excited about.
- **What's around you** – Why reinvent the wheel? Contact the PAOC district office, your local community volunteer organization or specific organizations and connect your kids with their existing structure.
- **Empower for greatness** - Create projects that will mean something to your group, not ones that will just keep them busy or out of trouble. Empower them by having them suggest ideas, make a game plan, and take ownership so they feel/know that they are essential to the ministry.
- **Debrief highs and lows**– Each activity that you do together as a team can trigger different feelings and opinions in preteens. Find out what they liked (high) and disliked (low), and what they learned.
- **Have your ducks in a row** – Disorganization can be an enthusiasm killer. Make sure that all your supplies are ready before your project begins. Ensure that you have enough adult volunteers to assist with the project and make a first aid kit because you just never know.
- **A Dovetail isn't just a good carpentry trick** - Get a copy of the church's mission statement and weave your service projects into the church's grater vision. Encourage support for your projects by keeping church staff and lay leaders informed about the projects you are doing.
- **Have Fun** – A main ingredient of a successful service project for preteens is F-U-N. Play some games during the activity to help break up the intensity and seriousness of the project. While you want to get something accomplished, you also want to instil a lifelong interest in mission and service.

* Keys from: Teaching Kids to Care and Share, Jolene L. Roehlkepartain

BELIEF in action Challenge #1

Choose a park to clean and hydrate. Pick a playground/skate park that a

majority of you preteens go to. Pick up trash. Sweep all the sand of gravel off the sides and swings. Remove sticks, leaves, grass, and other debris from sandboxes. And offer pop, freezes or bottles of water to those hanging out at the park.

BELIEF in action Challenge #2

Get in touch with the event planner for your city and offer your time to volunteer for a city wide event (ie. Canada Day celebration, fall carnival, city days). This can be a great way for your group to make a positive impact on your city while supporting the city wide event.

BELIEF in action Challenge #3

Get in touch with a soup kitchen and make a commitment for your group to serve a meal of on a regular basis (weather twice a year or four times a year). Making a commitment is an important partnership not only for your preteens to serve but also for the soup kitchen so the workers know of volunteers they can depend on.

BELIEF in action Challenge #4

Connect with another non-profit organization. Have the preteens research an organization in your community with a plan to help them through making sandwiches, collecting toys or clothing, etc. Take the preteens to the organization to see how their efforts have helped others. Note: some organizations and shelters are careful with who comes to the facility. Make sure to discuss this with the director of the organization.

BELIEF in action Challenge #5

Ask your preteens to write letters to their teachers or school administrators to encourage and thank them for their great work and support as educators. This is a great way to show God's love to those who are involved in the preteen's lives.

BELIEF in action Challenge #6

Check with a care facility to see if your group can come and play games, talk or take people in wheel chairs on walks . Preteens really enjoy pushing people in wheelchairs, especially after learning how to push them at an appropriate speed. This is a wonderful opportunity for preteens to build relationships with people who are shut in.

BELIEF in action Challenge #7

Spring Cleaning is a great involved in your community. As a group you can visit the neighbours of the church and see if they have weeding or gardening that needs to be done. Make sure to have all the appropriate tools before you start doing a job. It is also important that a first aid kit is near by at all times.

SPARK Debrief Ideas

God does amazing things in preteens at SPARK; they make deeper commitments in their faith and are challenged to show what they BELIEVE in new ways. Sometimes you as the parent or leader don't always get a chance to find out about the wonderful growth events that take place and therefore lose out on further opportunities for your preteen to grow and for your relationship, with them, to grow as well! Here are some ideas on how to get a little bit more than just 'It was good.' Or 'I had fun!' in response to 'So, how was Spark?'

Here are some simple questions:

- What were three highlights to the weekend – this helps you know about specifics that went on. You can then ask them to further explain their reasons. This is a great way to get the ball rolling.
- Sometimes even asking them what they would change if they could get's discussion going too! This question can also provide a deeper sense of what is and is not so important to your preteen.
- Ask how they enjoyed the speaker or the band that led in worship and what specifically they liked about them. Did they learn something new (a new song that they liked/ a new concept about faith).
- You can also ask if they were challenged in any way over the weekend and what they plan on doing about that. This where you can help them get creative in executing and succeeding in small victories over the challenges they received. This is a great way for you to help them be accountable and it helps you to be a part of their SPARK experience whether you were there with them or not.
- Ask them what you can pray for in the weeks following SPARK. This shows your preteen that you are devoted to them and their personal growth. This also gives them an example to follow.

The sooner you are able to engage your preteen in conversation about their Spark experience the better. They will be able to process and remember more as well as give you more details and excitement. That's right, once you get them beyond the simple pat answers of 'good' and 'fun' and they start to reflect, which often leads to excited reminiscing. Another idea to make it more meaningful is to set some time as a date or hangout. A simple 'lets grab an ice cream and you can tell me all about your experience at Spark' makes a recap time very special. Anything to make the occasion more special and memorial will bring great benefit to you as a parent/leader and your preteen.

Leaders: something to consider is having a brief gathering as soon as you return to your local destination for a small time of stories and testimonies for the parents, peers and leaders. This can be for 30-60 minutes and since most youth groups grab dinner on their way home you shouldn't be too pressed for any scheduled agendas. Most parents would probably love to hear from the leaders and students; plus, students are often more into opening up if peers are there doing so also. Using the questions above is a good place to start for them to express their experiences. To

get the most discussion possible focus on a specific question that they are to answer so they can consider what they will say. If they go a little further, let them unless particular students who enjoy talking start to showboat, if you know what I mean?!?

These debrief questions can be done one-on-one, with the entire group or it can be made out into a reflection sheet so that their thoughts can be documented and looked back upon down the road to see potential progress, etc. This is a great way to introduce or encourage journaling.

Another great way for parents/leaders to get the most out of SPARK after the actual event is to get involved in is a service project of some sort in your surrounding area. You can even tag up with other preteen groups in your area or city and do something as simple and fun as a free pop handout in a popular area like the lake or cleaning up a local park. Find out more in the **post-SPARK challenge** link or contact us at info@historymaker.ca for ideas or ways to help.

Hope all your debrief activities propel you and your preteen to grow, know, do, say, show, learn, find, strive for, and embrace what we **BELIEVE**.

SPARK Team 2009