



S T U D E N T S

# LEADER HANDBOOK

My job is to pray for, teach, and shepherd our students. I cannot do this without you, which is why I need your help and am so grateful for it. This handbook is designed to equip and guide us to work together toward our mission.

“So, being so affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”

1 THESSALONIANS 2:8

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## PHILOSOPHY OF STUDENT MINISTRY

Cross & Crown Student Ministry exists to glorify God by *supporting the mission of the church*. The mission of the church is not man-made or even unique to our local body at Cross & Crown. We confess that the ministry of the local church has been prescribed to us in God's Word. The mission statement of Cross & Crown Church reads:

“Cross & Crown Church is a gospel-centered community committed to making disciples who love Jesus Christ and love others in Jesus' name.”

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### MISSION STATEMENT:

In partnership with Cross & Crown parents, the Student Ministry exists to shepherd students in a gospel-centered community so that they love Jesus, love others in Jesus' name, and make disciples who love Jesus.

### OUR VISION:

We faithfully desire to see all our students saved, growing in Christ, and integrated into the life of the local church through which they make disciples to the ends of the earth.

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To accomplish our mission we will (1) keep the Bible at the center of all we do as we enjoy life together in (2) deep discipleship so that (3) our lives—and therefore hearts—would reflect Christ's.

#### (1) BIBLE-CENTERED:

The Bible is the sufficient foundation of truth, source for guidance, instruction manual for living, and main means of discerning God's commands, expectations, and promises for our ministry (2 Tim 3:16-17; Psalm 19:7; Deut. 4:1-2). This means that leaders will subject themselves to the Bible so that it informs and directs how we pursue students, prepare to teach, and pursue righteous living.

This also means that **we will be doing our job most faithfully when we are exposing students to what God says in His Word**. Since it is Scripture that trains us in righteousness, we make it our aim to bring students into personal contact with the Redeemer that the Bible offers. We cannot change their desires, but by unleashing the power of God in the

exposition of what God teaches in the pages of Scripture, students' affections will be brought to rest on God.

The good news of Jesus Christ becoming sin for us and satisfying the whole wrath of God by dying on the cross, being buried, conquering death by raising from the grave three days later, and ascending to the right hand of the father thereby securing eternal life for those who repent and believe in Him, is the means and purpose of ministry (Rom. 5; Ephesians 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:13; Col. 3:16). We long for every student in our church to repent of their sin and **treasure Jesus** as their Savior. This means that the things we talk about, the ways we pursue them, the way we live our lives, and how we aim to cultivate authentic change in their lives is derived from and fueled by the gospel. We also recognize that the Spirit of God is the only One who can bring about this change and are confident that He works primarily through the various ministries of the Word.

## (2) **DEEP DISCIPLESHIP:**

Christians need one another (Gen. 2:18; Heb. 3:13; John 13:34-35) and are commissioned to **help one another love Jesus** (Matt. 28:18-20, Romans 12). As some around us help us love Jesus more, we simultaneously help others love Jesus more. We will seek to cultivate this community of discipleship *within the church* specifically amongst students. Our role is to encourage students to engage in living life together with close, honest, vulnerable relationships. This often means welcoming and pursuing uncomfortable or awkward conversations such as confessing sins, sharing about trials and struggles, and welcoming feedback.

We will show *our* weaknesses, share *our* burdens, ask for help, kill *our* sin, and be learners **as** we invite students into our homes, seek to understand their worlds, have fun with them, and talk with them. This creates open opportunities to share the Word (Colossians 4:2) which leads to personalized care relating to each student's story and experiences. Our goal is to normalize this culture of discipleship so that they replicate it in their own circles. Discipleship happens most effectively in friendships that invest time and care. Therefore, we seek to be present, consistent, and available for students.

We are created as having both body and spirit (Rom. 12:1-2; Matt. 10:28). This means that we not only care for student's primary spiritual needs but also seek to care for physical needs. First, we will protect the students' safety

by abhering to the “Student Safety Policy.” We will also be considerate of physical limitations, whether bodily or mentally, as we develop our care for each student individually. We are called to disciple the whole person by *diagnosing the heart*. Having a more wholistic approach to this ministry will provide a framework for safe and effective pursuit.

### (3) **CHRIST-LIKE LIVING:**

Faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26) yet many will call on Jesus' name on judgement day trusting in their works and He will cast them out (Matthew 7:21-23). Works will never make anyone righteous. The Christian life of faith includes *comprehension, conviction, and commitment*. This section highlights the commitment of the Christian life to do the will of the Father. Those who love God will obey his commandments (1 John 5) and pursue righteous living that accords with the holiness of God (Matthew 5-7). We first practice this in our private lives but must also encourage one another to obey the Word of God.

Repentance from sin is a major aim of this student ministry (James 5:16a). We long to see students' lives *actually changed* in light of what they see in God's Word by means of confessing their sin and taking it seriously, growing in love for one another and for strangers, practicing a lifestyle of evangelism, and being characterized by love, mercy, and compassion like the Lord Jesus Christ.

All believers have specific spiritual giftings that are to be used to complete "the body" of the church (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8). This means that **students have a vital role to play in the health of the church**—the body needs their gifts! Students should be affirmed and encouraged in their God-given gifts and be helped to find ways to use those gifts. Though student ministry leaders will acknowledge and cultivate these gifts, we long for the students to see that the church needs them through its other *members* too. We encourage every student to build discipleship relationships with people of all demographics in the church. The church is a means of grace to the believer (Eph. 4:11-13) and far too often students are forgotten about. We also want students to recognize *their need* for the body and enjoy the gift that God has given to us in the gathering of His people to worship Him.

## MINISTRY ELEMENTS

### **Wednesday Night Youth Group:**

The foundation for C&C Student Ministry will be established on Wednesday nights from 6:30-8:30pm. These nights play a vital role in what we hope to see the Lord do in the lives of our students. These nights will consist of:

- Expositionally Teaching God's Word
- Singing led by the Youth Music Team
- Small groups
- Fellowship Time Before and After (for connecting with the students relationally)
- Games and fun
- Occasionally: Student or Leader Testimony

### **Bible Reading Plan:**

One way we center our ministry around the Word is by encouraging every student and leader to read through the Bible together. We use the Five Day Bible Reading Program and ask that all leaders join this reading program with us. Getting students reading, meditating on, and memorizing the Word for themselves is one of the greatest things we could do for them and will be the greatest tool that God uses to work change in their life. If you had to counsel any student with only one action step, encourage/admonish/help them to start taking in the Bible for themselves.

### **Small Groups:**

Small groups are a vital part of creating a culture of discipleship. The purpose behind small groups is threefold. First, to apply the word of God to your group on a personal level. Second, to build relationships that lead to deep discipleship. Third, to build authentic, biblical community among the students.

The general outline for small group time (30min) is:

- 5 min of opening conversation
- 5 min of discussion about the Bible Reading Plan
- 10 min of discussion from the sermon
- 10 min of prayer requests and prayer

\* See the Small Group Leader Training below for more details

### **Camps:**

*Summer:* We take the High School students to Glorietta, NM for Camp REGEN. The Junior High students will have their own summer camp put on by C&C Student Ministry.

\*This *may* slowly shift to being every other year to make room for future C&C Student Ministry mission trips (to discuss on 2/8)

*Winter:* We partner with Southside Bible and Parker Bible and take both our HS and our JH students to Ponderosa Camp just north of Colorado Springs.

These camps are crucial elements to our ministry. They provide special times of the year to check-in on the spiritual health of every student. New students begin to feel like a part of the group and leaders quickly deepen their friendships with each other and the students. We highly encourage every leader to make an extra effort to attend these camps. Our prayer is that every leader who can come, comes.

\* Scholarships: We do not want insufficient funding to be the obstacle for a student's attendance for an event/camp. We have a scholarship form that is always open for anyone who needs assistance.

\*Leaders will (almost always) have their camp costs covered.

### **Ask Anything:**

Once every trimester (1 in the Fall, 1 in the Winter/Spring, and 1 in the Summer) we will use the Equipping Hour to invite older men and women in the church to a Q&A panel. As students seek to love Jesus, love others in Jesus' name, and make disciples who love Jesus, a *lot* of questions will/should arise. We want students to have an avenue to have their hard questions answered and for key sin struggles and doctrines to be discussed.

### **Missions:**

To train and mobilize the students to engage in God's mission in the world we would like to have opportunities for the students to serve on mission trips both locally and globally in the coming years. Our first step is to pray fervently that God would make it abundantly clear to us how best to pursue engaging in missions. We will encourage leaders to prayerfully consider joining these mission trips.

We will also work to establish a presence on the campus of TCA, since most of our non-homeschoolers attend there. The more time we can be around students in their



everyday world, the more key discipleship opportunities we will have. More information on this is TBD as we pray and wait on the Lord to provide a clear path forward.

### **Leader Meetings & Trainings:**

To prepare us to faithfully serve and disciple the students as well as to care for our own souls, we will have one leader meeting each trimester. These leader meetings aim to accomplish four things: train to become more equipped disciplers, maintain unity of mind and vision in our leadership, build friendship, and pray.

*Training:* There are so many fantastic resources on counseling and discipleship which we will slowly work through together, starting with *Discipling* by Mark Dever. We will decide together how we would like to approach this study. Part of our training will also include mock counseling scenarios that will allow us to safely grow our skills and offer one another feedback. Finally, we will spend time discussing common temptations and struggles faced by students and how to walk with them through those.

*Unity:* We all lead with different personalities and preferences. Meeting once per trimester will help us stay the course and talk *together* about any changes to the “ministry elements” we think would be best for us. We will only benefit from reminding ourselves of our vision and to pray for the Lord to help us care for students as a unified family.

*Relationship Building:* The students’ community will replicate what ours looks like. If we enjoy time together, pray together, and encourage one another, students will begin to do those things too. We need designated time to be involved in each other’s lives, even if we are not all best friends. These meetings are made to create a context for us to enjoy one another’s company and encourage all the ministry that happens in between the meetings.

*Pray:* We must pray. It is *hard* to be consistent in praying for our own spiritual growth, how much more difficult to be praying for the students we disciple. Our meetings will prioritize spending time praying for every student on our roster—what a sweet thing it is to bring our discipleship hopes, attempts, and failings to our King *together!*

\* These meetings will usually be scheduled far in advance, so *please* make every effort to be there.

Additional trainings will hopefully be offered throughout the year.

## **Discipleship:**

The Great Commission is binding on our lives. Our responsibility is to leverage our unique giftings and relationships with students to equip them from the Word of God to follow Jesus.

We want you to take responsibility for the discipleship of **the students in your group**, remembering that your discipleship is a partnership with their parents at home. Our hope is that as we have more leaders, we could split some of the larger groups into smaller ones to make discipleship more manageable per leader. We encourage you to build relationships with students, take them to coffee, go through a book with them, grab groceries with them, pray with and for them, follow Christ and allow them to see it lived out in your life. Of course, you will not be able to do this with every student, but prioritize the ones who are hungry for it (FAT – Faithful, Available, and Teachable) without neglecting the ones who aren't yet. Balance is key. Trust the Lord to identify these students to you. Jesus loved and lived among the twelve disciples and particularly brought three of them closer. Start by thinking of one person to disciple. One person who you want to see follow Christ more. Then think about how you can do spiritual good to that student. Then take action.

## **Prayer:**

We will be committed to prayer and to teach the students to pray. It is our first duty every day to make our souls happy in Jesus. A primary role-player in that endeavor is relying on God to do what we cannot by coming to Him in child-like, faithful prayer. Only by God's work will students be saved and sanctified, so we will knock until God does what only He can do (Luke 18:1).

## **Events:**

Every trimester we will have fun events planned for the students to build community and relationships. Having fun together builds culture as well as trust in relationships that enable more discipleship

## **Student Leadership**

We need to honor and lift up those F.A.T. (faithful, available, teachable) students so that as we equip them, they go out and do the work of ministry also. Though no official student leader team is in process, be on the lookout for student leaders and pour in to them, encourage them to serve actively, challenge their comfort level, and give them opportunities to take the lead.

## LEADERSHIP CHARACTER QUALIFICATIONS

What does God say to those that will lead His children? Two things stand out. First, we are under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:2-4). Jesus is the true shepherd, and He has given us this ministry as stewards. **This is not our ministry; it is God's ministry.** It is a massive privilege and responsibility to be able to influence these students for the glory of Christ. This should not be taken lightly. Second, because we are under-shepherds, we are accountable to God for the way we lead. Not only are we accountable, but we will see stricter judgement from God for the way we bring God's word to bear on the lives of students (James 3:1). Again, this position should not be taken lightly.

Below are the character qualifications for youth leaders:

**Upright Character:** Reflects consistent integrity that points to Christ.

**Team Player:** Able to work within and serve on a team while preferring others and not causing strife.

**Respected:** Lives a life that other believers look up to and would want to emulate.

**Teachable:** Can receive encouragement, instruction, and loving reproof with a humble and eager spirit.

**Self-controlled**

**Proven:** A believer that has a track record of faithfulness.

**Selfless:** Consistently cares for the needs of others more than their own.

## LEADERSHIP EXPECTATIONS

### **Personal Presence**

Leaders will do their best to be at the church on Wednesday nights. If you cannot make it, make sure to let the Student Ministry Pastor know ahead of time.

Leaders are not required to be at events and camps, but their attendance is *highly* encouraged.

We ask that leaders come ready spiritually, mentally, and emotionally to pour into the students with love, joy, and thoughtfulness on Wednesday nights.

### **Opposite Sex (reiterated from Safety Policy)**

Under no circumstance will leaders be allowed to date students. Failure to comply will result in immediate dismissal.

Leaders will **never** find themselves alone with a student of the opposite sex for any reason. Leaders will demonstrate safe touch outlined in the “Student Safety Policy” with students no matter the gender. A leader should not draw a student out of the social group settings.

Leaders are expected to dress modestly.

### **Alcohol, Tobacco & Drug Use**

Leaders will abstain from alcohol and tobacco in the presence of the students.

Leaders will defer their personal opinion and support the students’ families’ beliefs concerning alcohol and tobacco.

Leaders will not post alcohol or tobacco on their social medias.

Habitual use of alcohol and tobacco will result in dismissal from the leadership team.

**Use wisdom and caution with your spiritual liberties, and always prefer the weaker brother in love.**

Any use of illegal substance will result in dismissal from leadership team.

Leaders will be “sober in all things” when it comes to alcohol, marijuana, and other substances (2 Timothy 4:5).

### **Media**

Leaders will be cautious of the music, movies, and media they speak of, watch, or listen to with students.

Any movie watched with students must be rated G or PG. Permission to play any other movie must be approved by the Student Ministry Pastor

Any video game played with students must be rated E. Permission to play any other game must be approved by the Student Ministry Pastor.

Leaders will not give their personal political opinions to students.

### **Theology & Doctrine**

Leaders will commit to teach the students only what agrees with the “What We Teach” document on the Cross & Crown Church website. If your personal belief differs from that, we ask that you just make a clear differentiation between what the church believes and what you personally believe.

Leaders should not feel the pressure to answer all theological/doctrinal/other questions they do not know the answer to. A great answer is “I don’t know, let me get back to you on that.” Ask a pastor and get back to the student at a later time.

### **Rest**

Seasons of rest are important so that we do not burn out. We’re in this for the long haul, which means we *must* rest. We will discuss what this looks like at our Leader Meeting on 2/8

\*Failure to comply with any requirements or expectations may result in dismissal from the leadership team.

## LEADERSHIP PROCEDURES

### Abuse

Per the “Student Safety Policy” *any kind of abuse* **must** be immediately reported to a ministry leader and elder, and if qualified, to the appropriate government authority. Failure to do so could result in criminal prosecution.

### Student’s Confession of Sin (Non-abuse scenario)

If a student confesses a specific sin in their life, leaders must employ prayerful discernment and biblical wisdom when considering how much to escalate and share with another ministry leader and the Student Ministry Pastor.

One key principle to keep in mind is to **never** promise a student that you will not share certain information they disclose with a pastor. The health and well-being of the student takes priority over confidentiality. It is not unloving to explain to a student that sometimes caring for them best involves another leader and/or pastor, as well as any consequences that may follow their confession. Situations that deal with particularly sensitive information should be brought directly to a pastor’s attention, including suicide, drug and alcohol use, sexual promiscuity, eating disorders and abuse. Small group leaders are not expected to keep secrets with students but instead have an open relationship with ministry leadership. In any case that a small group leader has a question or doubt, consult any of the pastors.

A leader must also consider how much of their own sin history (or current struggles) they share with a student. Especially concerning matters of sexual sin, leaders must exercise caution in what and how they share their sins. Remember, we are adults interacting with minors, and though we do not want to put on a persona of being perfect, oversharing is a real danger in counseling/discipleship conversations.

### Parents

We are partners with the parents who are primary disciplers of their children. We want to take advantage of every opportunity to get to know and speak with parents. Always respect parental authority and support their decisions. At no point should you contradict a parent or undermine their authority. We encourage you to ask parents what goals they have for their children, what areas of growth they are working on, and any other information that would be helpful to know in discipling their child.

### Questions

Always feel free to bring questions and situations to the attention of the Student Ministry Pastor.

## SMALL GROUP LEADER TRAINING

*This has been taken from Crossroads Student Ministry in CA and adapted to better fit our context*

### **The Role of a Small Group Leader (via 1 Thessalonians 5:14-18):**

*“Admonish the idle”*

The idle are out of step and going in a different direction than the rest and need to be pointed in the right direction. Students need you to speak the truth to them.

*“Encourage the fainthearted”*

Encouragement is something we all need often. We need to be leaders who walk up next to hurt, burdened, and frustrated kid, and remind them of how God sees them.

*“Help the weak”*

The fragile in faith and those plagued with doubts about Jesus are more susceptible to error, temptation, and sin. Students are in one of the most stressful and emotional seasons of life and need help.

*“Be patient with everyone”*

We have no excuse to become irritated, impatient, or frustrated with any kid, parent, or fellow leader. Students try our patience, but we need to be the more mature and more stable one, calling on the Lord for help in trying moments.

*“...Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*

God’s will for us as leaders is to pray. Because we are not perfect and cannot do any of the above commands without supernatural strength, we must pray! We serve out of the abundance of our own walk with Christ

### **Leading a Small Group Time:**

Every group is going to “look” different, and every week might be slightly different. However, there should be some key items each night that every small group should hit: *opening conversation, bible reading and sermon discussion, and prayer*. This job can be hard—you never know what a student might say that takes your small group a different direction for the rest of the time. Facilitating discussion is an art and takes thoughtfulness and practice, but I am confident that God always equips those He calls—you can do it! A wise man/woman understands how to draw out the heart with thoughtful questions to then apply the Word of God.

### *Opening Conversation*

As the students move from the main meeting area to their small group location, they will start conversations with their peers or you. When the group is finally all in the small group location some of those conversations have ended and some have started.

You may have the tendency to allow these conversations to take over the night, never progressing to discussing the sermon or praying. Or, you may have the tendency to shut down those conversations with probing 15-point questions from the sermon. We want to stray away from a rerun of the sermon in different words. Students need time to process and some are vocal or visual learners. They need us to guide them.

A good balance might look like allowing the conversations to continue for a minute or two. Some students haven't seen each other all week, and some have come in late and didn't get a chance to talk to their friends. It's ok, and then when a new topic pops up or a lull happens, take the step to start talking about the sermon. If there is not a natural break in the conversation, you may need to do a hard shut down and bring everyone into a new discussion about the sermon. That's ok; they know that the expectation is that at some point you will talk to them about Jesus. If a student really needs to talk about a personal issue, ask them to talk more with you 1-on-1 after the group lets out—or meet up with them during the week.

### *Discussion (Bible Reading & Sermon)*

Start by leading by example. Do your best to keep up with the reading plan and, have your Bible and notebook open during teaching time, remind your students to do the same. Sit with your students so you know what they're doing. Maybe even claim a row and plant your flag in it. Listen to the sermon and take note some of your own questions. What did you take away from it? How can you apply this to your own life? Then think through the lives of your students. Would a specific point be more applicable to them?

Flexibility is the key. Plan, but be open to help them through their questions.

It is always helpful to at least bring up the Bible Reading Plan, even just as a more personal encouragement from you (not just the Student Ministry Pastor) to be in the Word every day.

### *Prayer*

Prayer is very important. We do not have because we do not ask. However, sometimes allowing students to “share” their prayer requests can open the door for allowing a student to gossip. Don't be afraid to warn them of this as you hear it happening: “Sorry just one second, I don't know all of the information



or your heart behind it all, but this sounds like it may be more information than we need and we want to be careful not to gossip as we share prayer requests.” This may feel scary and awkward but it is kind, cautious, and speaks volumes to the students! On the flip side of oversharing, try your best to not just slip in a quick prayer before dismissing the group but instead protect those last 5-10 minutes the best you can.

A good balance may look like setting an alarm on your phone so as soon as it goes off, you have 5 - 6 minutes to pray. Reiterate each week at the beginning of prayer time that while we want to share and pray for each other’s circumstances, we want to pray for areas where they feel weak and need help and/or areas they’ve been encouraged to see growth in. Also, feel free to stop and pray during any part of small group time as a need arises.

\* Finding all these balances will take time and is much easier said than done. Keep persevering in patience and ask God to help your group step up to the goals you are setting and aiming for.

### **Creating Culture:**

We don’t want to create a culture where students feel like they need to have it all together. We desire for your students to feel comfortable sharing openly about their private lives and their deep thoughts. If someone shares openly, honor that highly! You reproduce what you honor. You know your group best; maybe your students feel like that one student is a gossip and they would be helped by you setting some sharing ground rules. You also know yourself best; beware your strengths more than your weaknesses and embrace your weaknesses—it will bless the students immensely to see you admit your faults and share some insecurities. We encourage you to take some ownership of your group and cultivate the kind of environment you wish you had when you were a student.

### **Pursuing Students:**

We can’t do it all. Here is a grid to think through as you connect at various levels with your students

*Care for all: (6-12)*

“I’m thankful for you,” “I’m encouraged by how you \_\_\_\_\_,” “You are really gifted at \_\_\_\_\_.” Every student who comes to our ministry will hopefully hear you say one of these things over time.

*Pour into a few: (3-5)*

“I see your gifts and leadership and want to help that flourish even more.” Out of the dozen students you lead, you will find 2-5 of them who really want to learn from you. Maybe it’s a shared interest or a similar life story, but you click with them and may not completely know why. Take them along for everyday task. Give them opportunities to take positions of leadership. Challenge them specifically to step up in your group and in the ministry.

*Replicate in one or two: (1-2)*

“I want us to help each other follow Jesus more. Let’s meet consistently and study, pray, confess sin, and encourage one another.” Pray about who this may be. Don’t be discouraged if you do not find this person or ever have this opportunity, that does not necessarily mean you are doing something wrong. Be careful not to favor them in public but instead expect greater things from them. The simple way of putting it is that this student / these students receive a majority of your time, prayer, and pursuit. Again, this is just *one way* of honing our limited time.

### **Counseling through Hardship:**

*Be a Focused Listener*

Make eye contact and repeat statements as an active listener. Do your best to not look surprised or judgmental. Be ready to follow up with investigative questions. Never make promises that you won’t share what’s shared with you. They are promises you can’t keep when there are issues of harm, abuse or addiction. You are a mandated reporter in such issues.

*Don’t Quick Fix*

Fight the urge to have all the answers. Students usually know the right answer, but they want someone on the journey with them to feel their pain.

*Admit You Don’t Know What to Say*

Especially when it comes to grief it feels scary to know what to say. We want to encourage them, but we don’t want to say something stupid or hurtful. I encourage you to admit that by saying that out loud. “I really wish I knew what to say. I see you hurting, and I don’t know what to say but I just want you to know that I’m here with you, I’m for you, and I want to care for you without saying something unhelpful.”

*Give Hope*

You do not need to know every answer and be able to give Biblical evidence for every answer. You do need to send your kids to the gospel and give them hope. The gospel tells us Jesus sees all, knows all, is surprised by nothing, and

loves you enough to die for you, save you, and live with you for eternity. If you don't know how to answer any of their questions and feel at a loss of what to do... give hope. God's Word is a hope-filled book. Even if you have to read a couple chapters of the Bible together until hope is found, do it—give hope that there is help in God's Word.

#### *Take Notes Afterward*

It is easy to forget everything you talked about with a student, and if you want to follow up with Micah later to talk through a plan of care, it will be helpful to jot down as many things as possible right after you have a conversation with a student.

#### *Share from your life*

Sometimes our experiences overlap with those of our students. If so, share with them how God brought you to a similar place as they are. However, be careful not to overshadow their hardship by overlaying your trials onto theirs. You aren't facing exactly what they are, and sometimes it can hurt when someone says that they understand what you're going through. Tell them you don't completely understand, but that you want to.

#### *Follow Up Appropriately*

Some issues you can handle and for those, you can stop there, while other issues need more help. For these please speak with Micah. This may be a mandated reporting situation, a professional help situation or family counseling. We will figure it out, and chances are that his path has already been walked through by someone in the church.

### **Common Pitfalls to Effective Counseling:**

Here are 10 Common Pitfalls to Effective Counseling, adapted from R. Kent Hughes in his book "The Pastor's Book."

#### *(1) Playing the role of the Holy Spirit.*

Our role as informal counselors are to be a conduit for the Holy Spirit, not to be the Holy Spirit. We do not convict. Nor can we take on the whole burden. Counselors cannot and should not see themselves as the surgeon, but rather as the ambulance bringing the sick to the Great Physician. Perhaps we are just the *passenger* in the ambulance, coming alongside these students in their care.

#### *(2) Saying "I understand".*

Many of us have made this mistake. Although it can be a tender expression, the reality is that you do not totally understand.

*(3) Endorsing their problem.*

Be careful of accidentally validating and enabling a sinful perspective that the Holy Spirit wants to bring to the surface.

*(4) Filling the silence.*

We really are strangers to silence. Watch nonverbal and blank stares. A well placed, “what are you thinking about” could really be a breakthrough. Sometimes students just need silence to build up the courage to confess a sin or continue explaining more of their struggle/hurt.

*(5) Raising unrealistic expectations.*

Don't promise to solve any problems. You cannot mend the scars left behind from abuse. You should want to deliver hope to the sinner in bondage and have compassion on the hurting, but we don't want to further harm someone by raising expectations of how the grass will be greener on the other side when it very well may not be.

*(6) Misusing humor.*

We all love humor, but it can sometimes derail a great counseling moment. Resist the urge to release the pressure of a tense situation with humor if it does not call for it. Sometimes humor is the perfect answer and other times it can be unhelpful. I trust your wisdom here.

*(7) Failing to refer.*

Some issues need to be referred to a pastor, counselor or professional. If a student is in immediate danger, then you are in a “must refer” situation. If you are outside of your comfort level, then you can bring in the pastor for a second opinion. Don't be afraid to ask for help or advice, we all need it.

*(8) Violating confidentiality.*

This is not to be confused with the previous pitfall. Generally, only emergency situations should be the allowance to violate confidentiality. We all love these kids and sometimes we share too many details with other youth leaders or friends. One safeguard is to be vague or not use names as you ask your life group or others for prayer/help in a counseling/discipleship scenario. Also, we should continue to cultivate an environment when it's ok to stop one another when the line seems to be being crossed.

*(9) Overusing yourself as an example.*

You can do this in the positive *or* the negative sense. If you have it all together, then you've unknowingly set an unattainable goal for students. On the other hand, if you are just as bad as your student then you are becoming a blind person leading another blind person.

*(10) Ending your commitment too soon.*

In a lot of ways, a shepherd gives a "lifetime guarantee" to his/her sheep. Jesus modeled this and the disciples followed his example. Although your commitment to specific students may come to an end, you need to approach each relationship you start with a "lifetime guarantee" mindset. You have no idea who may show up on your doorstep, visit your office or call your cell phone in the next 5, 10, or 15 years. You have no idea who will send you a wedding invitation one day and who may name their child after you. You seriously have no clue.

### **Suicide Prevention:**

KOAA News 5 reported in March of 2022 that El Paso County had the highest suicide rate in Colorado and was ranked seventh highest in the nation in 2020. They also pointed out that "according to the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, middle school and high school students reported the poorest level of mental health in El Paso county compared to anywhere else in the state." Of course, we as Christians can confirm that our sin natures combined with the sinful realities of our world mean that we will face the whole gambit of struggles—suicide being one of those. We need to be equipped to be biblical counselors who notice and address signs of suicide in our students.

The following are some common thoughts about suicide that we encourage you to beware of believing. There may be some truth to them, but these statements are mostly unhelpful.

"If I have true faith, I will not experience suicidal thoughts"

"People who are suicidal are just trying to get attention"

"People who are suicidal usually don't tell anyone"

"Talking about suicide may give the person the idea to complete suicide"

"If someone wants to kill himself, there's nothing I can do"

"Most suicides occur over the holidays"

The following statements are some common signs of a student contemplating suicide and should be immediately investigated and clarified further.

“Life is not worth living”  
“No one would miss me if I were gone”  
“I am too much of a burden to my family”  
“Life is just hopeless, what’s the point anyways”  
“It’s never going to get better”  
“Does God forgive suicide?”  
“I don’t want to be here anymore”

These are some factors that may contribute to prompting suicidal thoughts, motivations, or actions.

- Substance Abuse
- Extreme Perfectionism
- A family member dying due to suicide
- Previous suicide attempts
- Imagining plans
- Chronic Pain
- Sexual identity confusion
- Trauma
- Isolation

Now what? The most important things to know if you notice *any* of these signs or factors is to ask questions, listen, and do not leave that person alone. Take every instance of talking about suicide *very seriously*. You need to make sure that student is safe. Ask them what they mean by an ambiguous phrase and keep getting more details until you are certain that they are not contemplating suicide. If they are struggling with suicidal thoughts, immediately get another youth leader and notify the Student Ministry Pastor who will also notify their parents. If you are texting a student and have the slightest bit of concern, your next text should be: “are you alone?” Quickly either call them or make sure they are not in a room by themselves. Continue talking to them on the phone until you or another person is physically with them. We need to make sure they will not be a danger to themselves. This is also why a necessary step is to not leave them alone. We do not want that person out of our sight until we are absolutely certain they are not a threat to themselves. These steps are necessary for you to do *as* you contact their parents and the Student Ministry Pastor to help you care for them. It may feel wrong to deal with it yourself for a little while, but if you are the eyes on them or the only person talking to them, you need to make sure you do not hang up or walk out of the room—wait for your call for help (a text or call to parents and/or pastors) to come to you.

## **God-Honoring Sexuality**

Again, we know enough about sin to know that our youth group is not without those struggling with same-sex attraction, unsafe sexual desires, or other sexual identity confusion. Here are some signs that a student may be struggling with these things.

“I don’t know what I am”

“If we are in love it is fine for us to show affection”

“Porn is not that bad”

“I feel like as a Christian I will always have to do the opposite of what comes naturally to me. The burden is too much to keep bearing.”

“I’m afraid I don’t have the strength to resist committing great sexual sin.”

“I have sought Godly council about some past areas of my life (sexually) that I feel shame.”

“I don’t understand why God made me like this.”

“If I am honest, I sometimes think my sexual behavior and thoughts aren’t as bad as they could be so I don’t think much about stopping them.”

“I don’t want to disappoint my boyfriend/girlfriend.”

“I feel ashamed for my past sexual sins.”

“Is it possible to be a gay Christian?”

## **A Christian Response to Homosexuality**

It is not a sin to realize that you struggle with same-sex attraction. Acting in any way on those desires is sinful. Acting on unbiblical heterosexual desires is just as wrong. If a student confesses that they struggle with this, stand convicted in what the Bible says and be consistent with them. You also need to be compassionate: do not be surprised that someone is struggling, assure your friendship, and give zero-tolerance to gay jokes. Focus on truths from Scripture and be redemptive in your conversations: “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11). Thank the student for being honest with you and encourage them that they are obeying God by walking in the light. Remind them that they are not alone and that you are in this walk towards purity and understanding with them. Gather data about the specifics of any sexual sins they committed in the past, but don’t focus too much on fixing all the externals. Encourage them to pursue God-honoring same-sex friendships and model that with them—show them what that biblical friendship can look like! Please do not compare their struggle with pedophilia, addiction, or murder. Do your best to steer their use of language away from “gay Christian” or

“impossible.” Do not try to convince them it's just a simple choice. Listen, listen again, and listen again. Ask good questions, we want them to feel understood *and* you can help them better the more you understand their heart struggle. Be patient and consistent and be transparent. Don't be afraid if you don't know what to say: listening and reminding them that you want to be a friend to them in this process is a fantastic first step.

Helpful Resources: [www.christopheryuan.com](http://www.christopheryuan.com) & *Transforming Homosexuality* by Burk and Lambert



## CROSS & CROWN STUDENT MINISTRY LEADER AGREEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand I am entering into a relationship with the students, parents, and church leadership at Cross & Crown Church. I have read and understood the C&C Student Ministry Safety Policy and this Leader Handbook. I commit to display and adhere to the leadership qualifications, expectations, and procedures listed. I will prioritize pursuing my own relationship with the Lord and follow Him wholeheartedly. I commit myself to the students and my Student Ministry Pastor. I believe that, despite my sins and failings, God can use me in this ministry.

Sign \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Cross & Crown Student Ministry Leader,

Know that I trust you! The Holy Spirit is in you and I am confident that He will care for students through you. You love these students—that's why you've gotten this far. God will bless your love and prayers for them as you pursue them with wisdom, gentleness, care, and honesty. The most we can offer is to be faithful to do what God has called us to do, today. What rest that brings to our discipleship efforts.

I am confident that God loves to work through weak and needy people like you and me. I'm grateful that we get to do this together...what a family God is building in this team! Thank you for wanting to be a part of it.

I am so thankful for you and look forward to serving you and serving alongside you!

Faithful today,  
Micah Spansel