

RESPONDING *to* UNPREDICATBLE EVENTS

will happen. These can include:

- Illness
- Extreme homesickness
- Air/car sickness
- Extreme Anxiety
- Injury/Work accident
- Loss of passport and/or luggage
- Unexpected family emergency at home
- Car accident
- Crime
- Group instability

Before you leave, consider how you will handle each of these situations. Here are some recommendations:

Illness: Be sure you know where the nearest hospital is located. If it is a routine illness (like a bad cold or a stomach virus), the sick person will need to be separated from the group in order to recover and to prevent spread of the illness. An adult leader of the same gender should be assigned to care for the individual while the remainder of the group continues on mission. When the individual is prepared, call home to let the parents know the young person is sick but reassure them that they are being well cared for.

Homesickness: It is common for a young person to experience homesickness. Mission experiences are an opportunity for them to practice independence and confront homesickness in a safe environment. However, there can be cases where the young person is experiencing such extreme homesickness that they cause themselves to become physically ill. In these cases, be in contact with the parents at home and determine together the course you will take in handling the homesickness. Resolution can involve everything from asking one adult leader to be especially present to the individual to making arrangements for the young person to go home early.

Air sickness: Before you leave, ask parents about the possibility of motion sickness and how they handle it with their individual child. While you're traveling be sure to visually keep an eye on your young people and notice if any of them are looking particularly uncomfortable. Some youth would prefer to handle the symptoms of motion sickness on their own while others will need your support. If this situation occurs, one adult leader can take responsibility for caring for the individual while the remaining continue to monitor and interact with the rest of the group.

Anxiety: Some youth are on medication for anxiety while others can unexpectedly

develop an anxious reaction to a new situation. Always be watchful for young people who are exhibiting signs of being uncomfortable. In particular, notice if they are growing quiet, isolating, perspiring, or acting unusually watchful. Often, a comforting exchange between a young person and an adult can intervene in the situation and prevent it from becoming a larger anxiety attack. Also, consider using prayer, meditation, silence, and separating the anxious person from the rest of the group for a quiet walk.

Injury: Of course, we all hope for an injury—free experience. However, even with all safety precautions, injuries can occur. Always handle the medical situation first. You should be carrying each individual's health insurance, medical release forms, and emergency contacts. Call parents as soon as reasonably possible, inform them of the situation, and reassure them that all is being done to take care of their child and that you will call them with an update. You will also want to contact your Rector, Senior Warden, or another responsible person back home so that they are aware of the situation and can work with the families and insurance issues.

Loss of Passport or Luggage: Youth can be especially destabilized by the loss of personal valuables. The most important thing to remember here is that as a leader, you must stay calm and in control. This is a great time to model non-reactivity and demonstrate how travel creates resilience and ingenuity. If

your luggage is lost, work with the airline to create a plan for retrieving your suitcases. If it is going to be an extended period of time, take the youth to a local store to purchase necessities. If someone lost a passport, contact the embassy immediately. You should have packed copies of passports so the embassy should be well-equipped to handle this situation.

Unexpected Family Emergency: If you get the call that something has happened at home in a young person's family or circle of friends, be sure and work with the parents to determine their preferences for delivering the news and making arrangements for dealing with the young person's response. In some cases, the young person will need to go home and you will need to work with the family on making travel arrangements. In other cases, the adult leaders will be asked to provide pastoral care as you continue on your mission experience.

Car accident: Car accidents on trips can range from minor fender benders to serious situations. For legal purposes, be sure you have obtained the riders from your faith community's insurance group before you leave home. Additionally, if you are renting a car, purchase the additional insurance they offer. Finally, if you are in an accident, handle the situation locally immediately through the appropriate law enforcement agencies. If medical care is required, call individual parents as soon as you can to let them know about the situation. As soon as

possible, call your Rector, Senior Warden, or another responsible person back home so that they are aware of the accident and can alert insurance.

Crime: Prepare your group ahead of time on keeping their valuables safe and avoiding pickpockets. However, if a crime occurs, contact local authorities and the parents back home immediately. Even the smallest crime can feel violating to the group's safety. You may need to process together the situation and spend time together in prayer in order to restore feelings of comfort and safety.

Group instability: Every so often young people will simply not get along. Many of these group dynamics can be worked through before leaving home. However, if tensions get high and tempers flare, work with your adult leaders to non-reactively handle the situation. This can take hours and patience but it is an opportunity to model forgiveness, reconciliation, and tolerance. If the entire group is involved in some way, stop what you are doing — whether you are working or in the middle of a tourist experience — and process completely what is happening.

Mission Experiences tend to have a predictable arc. In most cases the group will get along well for the first few days but as emotions, fatigue, and new and uncomfortable situations take their toll on participants, individuals often start to get a bit less understanding and a

bit more on edge. If you are on a week-long trip, this usually happens on or about day 4. Recognize that this is normal and predictable and it will pass. However, this is when you will need to rely on the patterns for check-ins and the personal connections that you have established. If there is noticeable tension, check-in with the involved individuals individually. If the anxiety is more group-wide, you will need to take a time-out from whatever you are doing and process together. This can take 15 minutes to 5 hours. Be patient, model non-reactive, pastoral leadership and know that this is the “good stuff” of the trip.

Sample

INCIDENT/ACCIDENT REPORT FORM

Parish Name: _____

(Please print all information)

Date of accident: _____ Time of accident: _____

Name of youth injured: _____ Age: _____

Address of youth: _____ Parish of youth: _____

Town: _____ Location of accident: _____

_____ Parent or guardian: _____

Name of person(s) who witnessed the accident:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Describe the accident: _____

Describe what care the youth was given: _____

Signature of individual recording the incident: : _____

HANDLING DISCIPLINE

So many of the patterns of behavior and connection are established through the series of meetings and the retreat you sponsor before you even leave home.

However, especially on a mission experience or pilgrimage involving travel away from home, a young person can react behaviorally in response to the tension of traveling, uncomfortable situations, and fatigue. In addition, you never know what issues are going on at home in the life of that young person.

Regardless of the circumstances, do not let behavioral situations slide.

Be true to the Covenant each participant signed before the trip. This Covenant is to protect every member of the group as well as the host community – and the job of the adult leaders is to ensure that each member of the group is abiding. Be sure parents were left with the copy of the Covenant and understand that their child will be sent home if behavioral problems occur, with the parent bearing responsibility for arranging the trip, including the cost.

If a young person is having issues, check with them to find out if there are issues with fatigue or group interpersonal relationships. If so, you might consider giving the young person a break from the group and checking back in with them at a certain time.

Work with them to identify the most appropriate way to apologize or make some

amends. Use prayer as a tool to reflect on the situation and ask for guidance. Consider involving other group members to discern the best reactions to misbehavior, which should include prayer, as well. Often peer influence has a stronger impact than an adult's disciplinary actions.

Although most outbursts can be brought under control without involving parents, do not hesitate to contact parents back home if behavior is spiraling and the group is adversely affected.

If behavior can't be redirected, it is entirely possible that the best response is to allow the young person to return home.

WHAT HAPPENS *after* YOU RETURN HOME?

Returning home is the start of the process of making sense out of the experience and integrating what you have learned into your day-to-day life. If what a person learns on their mission experience is not processed, resolved, and integrated, it can dilute the value of the experience and possibly have a negative impact on the individual. This is an important process for every team member, including the team leader.

Your most important tools in re-entry are prayer, a loving and patient community anxious to welcome home its missionaries... and sleep.

What are some of the reactions that can occur upon re-entry? Here are a few examples:

Unmet Expectations

The success or failure of the mission experience is largely connected to the kind of expectations the team member brought to the mission. If most of the expectations were met, they will consider the mission experience a success. If the experience did not measure up to expectations, they could feel like the experience was a failure.

This is the point when each individual can be asked to ask themselves: “What ideas and

dreams did they have about returning home? Did they glorify their view of home or did they assume that people at home will not be interested in their stories, anticipating depression, loneliness, and anger, or being immobile and unable to cope with everything?”

You can help team members develop realistic expectations about their re-entry to their home culture. The following statements have been formulated to help short-term team members prepare for what realistic re-entry may look like. Talk about them before, during, and especially after the mission experience.

- I will go through a readjustment period, parts of which may be difficult.
- People will show initial excitement in my stories but will quickly diminish in their interest. I shouldn't be surprised or discouraged.
- Being the center of attention will feel great, but it is short-lived.
- Returning home may initially feel great, but I may feel alone at times and confused, sad, and misunderstood.

- I should expect my renewed faith to be tested, tried, and strengthened.

Spiritual Confusion

Issues of spiritual pride and struggles to reintegrate back into the life of the church may face Team members. They may have had an enriched spiritual experience while away and find daily life in the congregation less appealing. Help them find ways to incorporate their newfound spiritual practices or beliefs into the life of the congregation. Give them avenues for discussing all that they saw and heard and work with them to identify the unique gifts of the faith community that sent them on the experience.

Crisis of Faith

Either as a result of something they saw or a new realization, some team members may experience a crisis of faith during the mission experience. This is a normal and predictable reaction to mission experiences that are especially challenging. It is important that every Team is surrounded by spiritually mature adults and a loving community that can walk with this individual as their faith is re-formed and strengthened.

Handling Change

The person that started out on the mission experience is not the same one returning home. Each person will have changed in some way as they have seen God move in and through them during the mission experience. Team

members will be looking at the world around them through different eyes.

For example, they may have faced poverty for the first time in their life and now they consider, “Do I want...” or “Do I need...”


The changes will include both a shift in belief and perception as well as in behavior. In order to handle the changes, as a team leader, you need to help the team members to:

- Recognize and accept that they have changed and how they have changed.
- Identify which changes are temporary (negotiable) and which changes are permanent (non-negotiable).
- See themselves not only as changed people but as change agents as well. They need help introducing change in their spheres of influence.

Crisis in Identity/Self-Worth

Another related issue that some struggle with is self-worth. Transitions in life have a way of exposing what people are made of at their core. The mission experience, and the subsequent transition home, may have redefined the participants' self-worth and perception of themselves. They may have felt valuable, needed, and appreciated while away from home. Upon return, however, they may not receive the same affirmation.

Or, the short-term mission experience may have stripped the participants of the things



they consider important and the places where they have placed their worth and value. They may be returning with confidence placed in new areas.

The re—entry transition is a good opportunity to evaluate where a person’s self—worth lies and to remind each individual that they are beloved members of the body of Christ.