NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
MINISTRY WITH
YOUNG ADULTS

FORMATION

Accompaniment Basics: A Crash Course

Four short sessions for anyone who wants to walk alongside young adults the way Jesus walked the road to Emmaus

Learn
What accompaniment is, and what it isn't

Practice
Five core skills with exercises for pairs and teams

Care
Boundaries, referrals, and caring for yourself

A free resource from the National Institute for Ministry with Young Adults · ministrywithyoungadults.org

HOW TO USE THIS CRASH COURSE

Walking with young adults

Young adults rarely say they want a program. They often say they want someone who will listen, take them seriously, and walk with them through real decisions. That is accompaniment, and anyone with a living faith and a willing heart can learn to do it well.

This crash course has four short sessions. Each one includes something to read, something to reflect on, and something to practice. Use it on your own, with a ministry team, or as a parish training over four weeks. Each session takes about 45 minutes with a group.

THE FOUR SESSIONS

1 **The road to Emmaus**
What accompaniment is, what it isn't, and the pattern Jesus gives us.

2 **Listening that heals**
Presence and deep listening, the first two of five core skills.

3 **Questions and discernment**
Asking good questions and helping someone notice where God is at work.

4 **Knowing your limits**
Boundaries, referrals, safe environment, and caring for yourself.

FIVE CORE SKILLS

1 **Presence**

2 **Listening**

3 **Good questions**

4 **Discernment**

5 **Knowing limits**

SESSION 1

The road to Emmaus

Begin by reading Luke 24:13–35 aloud. Then sit in silence for one minute.

Two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem, discouraged and confused. Jesus joins them, but they don't recognize him. He doesn't correct them or announce who he is. He walks, asks, and listens. Only then does he help them make sense of their story. He accepts their invitation to stay, breaks bread with them, and they recognize him. Then they run back to share what happened. Their story gives us five movements for accompaniment.

1 Draw near

Jesus goes to where they are, on the road and heading the wrong direction. Accompaniment starts by showing up in young adults' real lives, not waiting for them to come to us.

2 Ask and listen

"What are you discussing as you walk along?" Jesus lets them tell the whole painful story, even though he knows how it ends.

3 Open the Word

Only after listening does Jesus help them see their experience in light of Scripture. We share faith in response to someone's story, not instead of it.

4 Stay and break bread

"Stay with us." Jesus accepts their hospitality. Accompaniment leads toward community, the Eucharist, and the life of the Church.

5 Send

They return to Jerusalem to share their own story. Good accompaniment ends with a person who can now accompany others.

ACCOMPANIMENT IS	ACCOMPANIMENT ISN'T
Walking at the other person's pace	Moving them through a program on our schedule
Trusting that God is already at work in them	Assuming we bring God to them
Helping them discern their own next step	Telling them what to do
A relationship with healthy limits	Being someone's only support
Leading toward community and the Church	Building loyalty to ourselves

REFLECT

1. Who walked with you when you were in your twenties or thirties? What did they do that helped?
2. Which of the five movements comes naturally to you? Which is hardest?
3. Where are the young adults in your community "on the road" right now?

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

- Notice one young adult you see regularly but don't really know.
- Learn their name and one thing about their life.
- Pray for them by name each day.

NOTES

SESSION 2

Listening that heals

Pope Francis wrote that young people need people who listen with patience and without judgment, and he described listening itself as a gift of time and attention (*Christus Vivit*, chapter 9). Most young adults can name very few adults who truly listen to them.

SKILL 1 · PRESENCE

Presence means being fully there: phone away, eyes up, not thinking about your next meeting. It also means being consistent. Showing up again and again builds more trust than any single conversation.

SKILL 2 · LISTENING

Listen for the person

Pay attention to what they say and to what they feel. Notice tone, energy, and what makes them light up or go quiet.

Listen for God

Listen for signs of grace, desire, and hope, and for what pulls them away from life and peace.

Listen for direction

Listen for where they are heading and what they are really longing for underneath the story.

HABITS THAT HELP

- Let silences sit. Count to five before you speak.
- Reflect back: “It sounds like you’re feeling …”
- Ask for more: “Can you say more about that?”
- Name what you notice, gently and tentatively.
- Remember details and ask about them next time.

HABITS THAT HURT

- Jumping to advice or answers
- Turning the story toward your own experience
- Minimizing: “At least …” or “It’ll be fine.”
- Correcting or debating what they feel
- Checking your phone or the clock

PRACTICE · LISTENING IN THREES · 20 MINUTES

Form groups of three: a speaker, a listener, and an observer. The speaker talks for four minutes about a time they felt truly heard. The listener only listens and asks follow-up questions, with no advice. Then the observer shares for one minute what they noticed. Switch roles until everyone has had each role.

Debrief together: What was hard about listening without fixing? What did it feel like to be heard? Which habit that hurts is your biggest temptation?

SESSION 3

Questions and discernment

A good question invites someone to look at their own life more closely. It treats them as the expert on their experience and trusts the Holy Spirit to work in their answer.

SKILL 3 · GOOD QUESTIONS

OPEN QUESTIONS

- What's been on your mind lately?
- What's giving you life right now? What's draining you?
- What are you hoping for?
- What do you think God might be inviting you to?
- What would you do if you weren't afraid?
- What's one small step you could take this week?

QUESTIONS TO AVOID

- Yes-or-no questions that close the conversation
- "Why" questions that sound like accusations: "Why did you do that?"
- Questions that are really advice: "Have you thought about just …?"
- Several questions at once

Try "What led you to …" in place of "Why did you …"

SKILL 4 · DISCERNMENT

Discernment is noticing how God is moving in our lives and choosing in response. You don't need to be a spiritual director to help a young adult begin. A simple review of the day or week, adapted from the Ignatian examen, is a good place to start.

1. **Be still.** Ask God to help you see clearly.
2. **Give thanks** for one gift from today.
3. **Notice** moments of peace and moments of unrest.
4. **Talk with God** about what you noticed.
5. **Look ahead** to tomorrow with hope.

When a young adult faces a decision, help them notice which option brings lasting peace and a sense of life, and which brings anxiety or a sense of shrinking. Encourage them to take important decisions to prayer, to people they trust, and to the sacraments. Your role is to help them listen to God, not to decide for them.

PRACTICE · QUESTION SWAP · 15 MINUTES

In pairs, take turns sharing a real decision you face. The listener may only ask open questions, no statements. After five minutes, the speaker shares which question helped most. Switch.

SESSION 4

Knowing your limits

Good accompaniment has boundaries. Knowing what you can't do protects the young adult, protects you, and points them toward the help they really need.

SKILL 5 · HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

- Meet in public or visible places, and follow your diocese's safe environment policies.
- Be clear about how and when you're available. You don't need to answer every message at midnight.
- Don't promise total confidentiality. Some things you must share to keep people safe.
- Avoid becoming someone's only support. Connect them with community.
- Don't lend money or mix accompaniment with business or romance.
- If a relationship starts to feel unhealthy, talk with your pastor or supervisor.

WHEN TO REFER

Accompaniment is not counseling, therapy, or spiritual direction. Refer to a qualified professional, and to your pastor or ministry supervisor, when a young adult shares:

- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
- Abuse, violence, or feeling unsafe
- Ongoing depression, anxiety, or trauma
- Substance use that is causing harm
- A crisis in housing, food, or finances
- Questions you aren't equipped to answer

IF SOMEONE IS IN DANGER

If a young adult is at immediate risk of harm, call 911. In the United States, people can call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at any time. Follow your diocese's policies and your state's laws for reporting abuse, and tell your pastor or supervisor.

Before you begin accompanying anyone, find out who your local referral resources are, including Catholic Charities and counselors your parish trusts, and keep the list handy.

CARING FOR YOURSELF

You can't give what you don't have. Keep your own prayer life, have someone who accompanies you, and take time to rest. Remember that you are not the savior of anyone you walk with. That role is already taken.

CLOSING

My accompaniment commitment

Complete this at the end of Session 4. Share it with one person who will check in with you in a month.

ONE OR TWO YOUNG ADULTS I WILL WALK WITH

THE CORE SKILL I MOST WANT TO GROW IN

ONE PRACTICE I WILL START THIS MONTH

REFERRAL RESOURCES IN MY AREA

THE PERSON WHO ACCOMPANIES ME

CLOSING PRAYER

Risen Lord, you walked with your disciples when they could not see you. Make us companions on the road for the young people you place in our path. Give us patience to listen, wisdom to ask, courage to stay, and joy to send them out as witnesses. Amen.

Keep going

Accompaniment grows with practice and with good companions of your own.

FROM NIMYA

Mentoring Young Adults

A practical next step for those ready to commit to a season of regular mentoring with a young adult.

FROM NIMYA

Young Adult Listening Session Guide

Put listening skills to work with a whole group of young adults in your parish.

CHURCH TEACHING

Christus Vivit

Pope Francis's 2019 apostolic exhortation to young people. Chapter 9 on discernment includes his reflections on listening and accompaniment.

U.S. BISHOPS

Listen, Teach, Send

The national pastoral framework for ministries with youth and young adults, built on the Emmaus story.

U.S. BISHOPS

Journeying Together Handbook

Practices for sacred listening and accompaniment across cultures, including peace circles and planning with communities, not for them.

FUTURE OF FAITH

Relational Discipleship

Research and a framework on trust-based relationships as the primary context for faith formation, at futureoffaith.org. Future of Faith is a free resource designed to support all those working in ministry. No strings attached.

Free for your ministry

NIMYA resources are free for everyone who ministers with young adults. Copy them, adapt them for your community, and share them widely. No strings attached.

The National Institute for Ministry with Young Adults forms and accompanies pastoral leaders who minister with young adults in their late teens, twenties, and thirties, through pastoral formation, leader accompaniment, research, and advocacy. Learn more at ministrywithyoungadults.org.