

TIPS FOR ACTIVITIES
FIVE TIPS FOR RAISING YOUTH IN THE SGI-USA
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In the SGI, a leader's main function is to care for the members in their organization, to "raise" them in their Buddhist practice. This is, of course, a difficult undertaking. It can be especially challenging to raise young people in our organization, helping them to see the power of faith.

SGI President Ikeda has said: "Something that characterizes true leaders is that they are thoroughly dedicated to raising young people. When you put all of your energy into developing the rich potential of youth, both you and the organization are rejuvenated. I hope that you will find and raise people with great potential, allowing them to steadily rise and fully engage themselves. If you create such a flow, the future will open up boundlessly before you" (*Faith Into Action*, p. 192).

Here are five ways you can help raise the youth in your district:

1) Choose a youth.

Select one person you want to help develop. It can be anybody with whom you feel you can connect. President Ikeda has often said that if you can successfully raise one person, then you are doing kosen-rufu.

2) Find out what's going on in their lives.

What are their dreams and aspirations? How are school and relationships? Don't be judgmental. Even if their primary goal seems as mundane as getting the latest video game, support them in that endeavor (stopping short of buying them the game). Remember: Earthly desires equal enlightenment. After you begin to develop camaraderie with them, ask questions that will help you to discover what kinds of problems they are currently facing.

3) Chant for them.

This is the most important step. I keep a notebook of the names of people I am concerned about. Next to their names, I write one or two words about their dreams and/or problems they want to achieve or overcome. This way, when I sit in front of the Gohonzon, I can look at their names and clearly focus on the issues facing their lives. This really works.

4) Communicate with them on a regular basis.

Take the opportunity to ask them about their practice, if they want help with gongyo and to let them know what's going on. Consistency is the key—even if it's just a "Hi, how are you," it shows you really care and forms the basis of a relationship. Don't worry too much about being ignored, because when they feel they really need help, you will be one of the first people they come to.

5) Personally invite them to activities.

People need to know that you care about them, not only as a member but also as a friend. This is usually reflected in the way you invite someone to a district activity. Taking a passive stance like "We're having a meeting on Tuesday, can you come?" or "Can you participate...?" doesn't show that you really want them to be there and will enjoy their company.

Instead, try being direct—not aggressive, direct. "Would you like to come with me to this meeting?" or "Would you like to help me with this presentation?" After that, go and pick them up, even if you think they can get a ride with someone else or with their parents

(if they come from an SGI-USA family). Travel time together helps to build bonds.

In my area, we have many youth members who have grown up in the SGI-USA. To help them develop, we try not to rely too much on their parents for transportation. One reason why the children of members stop practicing is not that they don't want to, but rather because they are rebelling against their parents. By helping them to form relationships with members outside of their family, these youth can formulate a religious identity that is separate from that of their parents. This, in turn, will give them a better chance of consistently practicing throughout their teens, 20s and beyond.