

Youth Frontiers Wisdom Retreat Prep Pack

Preparation information to ensure a successful retreat experience



*An example
of our retreat
materials*

Wisdom Retreat Preparation Checklist

Youth Frontiers Retreats

Now that your retreat date is set, you will need to complete each item in the checklist below to ensure the success of your retreat. If you have questions, please call us at 952.922.0222 or toll-free at 888.992.0222.

1 Book a facility

- Booking an off-site facility is strongly recommended for Wisdom Retreats.
- If you reserve an off-site facility, a large carpeted room in a community center, church, synagogue, banquet center, hotel conference room or similar facility works best.
- Arrange transportation to and from the retreat site.

2 Plan lunch (and an optional snack)

- Bag lunch is preferred, rather than something that is hot or time-sensitive (like pizza), as lunch time needs to remain flexible.
- If your retreat requires an overnight stay for YF staff, lunch must be provided for them as well.

3 Nametags

- Create nametags for all participants before the retreat.

4 Inform teachers, staff, and parents

- Inform parents about the retreat (see sample letter).
- Ask the school counselor and/or school psychologist to attend the retreat to help students process the day's experience after the retreat is over.
- Look into inviting YF out to provide a Parent Talk to help parents understand and follow-up on their child's experience.

ONE MONTH PRIOR TO RETREAT:

5 Complete the YF Priority One form

- Your YF Priority One form will be emailed to you by the YF Retreat Coordinator six weeks prior to your retreat.
- You may complete the YF Priority One form online at www.youthfrontiers.org/clients/wisdom/ or fax a completed hard copy to Youth Frontiers at 952.922.2122.

Wisdom Retreat Overview

Youth Frontiers Retreats

Length	5 hours, 30 minutes
Maximum #	250 participants

General Schedule:

- Welcome and group-building activities
- Introduction to the theme of the day
- Small group activity: time to process the message from the introduction
- Break (optional: distribute snack)
- Large group activity
- Small group discussion: processing time
- Lunch
- Large group activity
- Presentation: topic-based talk – *Life After Graduation*
- Small group discussion: processing time
- Closing: participants commit to take action based on the day's retreat topic

General logistics: participants and length

Mandatory attendance is **not** recommended for the Wisdom retreat. It is usually a voluntary retreat that seniors can sign up for.

Generally, the Wisdom Retreat runs five hours and 30 minutes in length. For the highest quality retreat experience, the size of your group may determine the best length for the retreat. If your group size is large (more than 150 students) consider scheduling the retreat as six hours. Likewise, if your group is small (less than 100 students), five hours and 15 minutes is ideal. Please call our Retreat Coordinator with questions.

Opening and games

As soon as the students arrive, we engage them in interactive games. We have found that these activities help to break the ice and build a sense of community among the students. We consider this time "earning the right to be heard" on the part of our staff. We know that in order for students to get the most out of the day, they need to first get a feel for who we are and what the day has in store for them.

Topic-based talks

Retreat staff members will give a talk during the Wisdom Retreat. The speaker will focus on finishing their class experience and preparing for life after graduation. Specific topics include letting go of past resentments, dealing with failure and experiencing pain and grief as a natural part of life. We want to challenge your students to look for answers within themselves and to see each other for who they really are.

Small groups

Throughout the day, students will meet in small groups for discussion. The groups focus on questions revolving around bringing closure to their high school experience and preparing for the new challenges that lie ahead. Small groups allow more personalized attention to the issues that were discussed in large-group presentations.

Closing

The closing is often hailed as a highlight of our retreats. This is an opportunity for seniors to begin to say goodbye to one another. It is a chance for them to thank each other for the love and support that they have experienced from classmates and teachers. It is a time to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. It is a time for the seniors to celebrate their relationships and experiences.

Booking a Facility

Youth Frontiers Retreats

We strongly recommend that you book your retreat at an off-site facility away from your school campus. Retreats at a neutral location are more effective and free from distractions.

Location selection

When choosing an off-site location, schools typically reserve space at a nearby community center, church, synagogue, banquet center, hotel conference room or similar type of facility.

The room size and flooring of the room are important factors when choosing a retreat location. The minimum size for a group of 100 students is 1600 square feet (allow 16 square feet per participant). Throughout the day, the room will be used for a variety of high-energy, large group games as well as small group interaction that requires adequate space for students to spread out. The room must be totally empty and free of chairs, pillars, bookshelves, etc.

Students will spend significant amounts of time sitting on the floor. If possible, book a location with a carpeted floor.

Location preparation

Please notify the staff at the facility that the sound at the retreat will be very loud. Since music is an important element of our retreats, we use a sound system to play live and recorded music throughout the day.

Please arrange to have the facility opened at least one hour before the students arrive to allow the Youth Frontiers staff to set up.

We need one eight-foot table and three chairs in the room, along with garbage cans for trash.

Teachers and staff may sit on chairs in the back of the room. If you have any students in a wheelchair, you will need to provide chairs for his or her small group (an additional five to eight chairs).

Transportation

When holding your retreat off-site, please arrange transportation to and from the facility and notify Youth Frontiers of the exact arrival and departure times. We also need to know if students are arriving in shifts, as the retreat will not begin until all participants are present.

Please remember that transportation costs are paid by the school and are not included in the Youth Frontiers retreat fee.

Food

Youth Frontiers Retreats

All Youth Frontiers Retreats have a built-in time for both a snack and lunch. You (the coordinator) will need to confirm the lunch time with the Youth Frontiers Retreat Director the morning of the retreat.

Snack

You have the option of providing a snack for your students, such as a cookie or granola bar. We do not recommend plastic water bottles for a snack. If provided, snacks are distributed mid-morning, during the break.

Lunch

As a general rule, lunch will take place about two and a half to three hours into the day, but we ask that lunch time remain flexible.

Although pizza or sub sandwiches work for lunch, problems often arise due to meals not arriving on time or not being ready for the scheduled lunch break; therefore, we recommend asking your students to bring a bag lunch. A bag lunch allows the most flexibility in breaking for lunch.

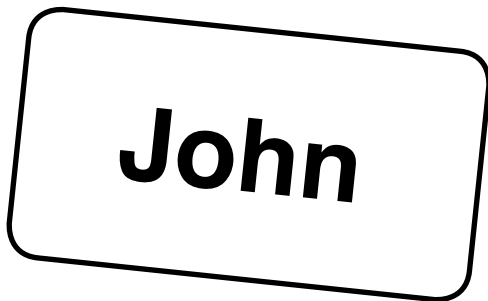
Students will not be allowed to leave the retreat site for lunch, even if you have an open lunch policy at your school. If you do ask the students to bring their own lunches, you may want to bring a loaf of bread and peanut butter for those students who will inevitably forget their lunch.

If your retreat requires an overnight stay for the Youth Frontiers staff, please remember to include them in your provided lunch. Thank you!

Nametags

Youth Frontiers Retreats

Students need to be wearing their nametags before the retreat begins. Please distribute nametags to the students prior to your arrival at the retreat location. When students are wearing nametags as they walk in the door, the Youth Frontiers staff can begin connecting with your students by name immediately. Students do not need to be placed into assigned small groups before the retreat. For computer printed nametags, be sure the font is at least 48-print type so our staff can read them from far away (see below).



Teacher and Staff Participation

Youth Frontiers Retreats

Expectations of teachers and staff

We understand how busy educators are and the desire for staff to complete work outside the retreat. However, we encourage teachers/staff to be present the entire retreat to observe and experience for themselves the power of these programs. The retreat offers unique perspective and insight for both teachers and students about the school's climate and community, and gives teachers touch points of language to continue the impact of the retreat in the classroom.

We expect teachers to:

1. Attend the teacher meeting with the YF Retreat Director during the first small group discussion time for the students.
2. Be present during the large group activities and topic-based talks.
3. Participate in the activities as they feel comfortable.
4. Assist with any disciplinary problems when requested by our staff.
5. Help distribute snack, lunch or materials as needed.

Benefits of teacher and staff participation

1. Teachers and staff will better understand the messages of the retreat and can reinforce those lessons in the classroom. This can help lengthen the impact of the retreat.
2. The experience builds community by allowing teachers and staff to interact with students outside of the classroom. Teachers have told us that the retreat gave them a chance to see students in a different light, and many students say the same about their teachers.
3. The values being taught are timeless, and adults can benefit from thinking about them as well.

End-of-Day Sharing and Disclosure Information

Youth Frontiers Retreats

A Youth Frontiers retreat provides many opportunities for dialogue in both large and small group discussion.

During both small group conversations and large group sharing, students will be asked to refer to their own experience at school. Students will be instructed to be mindful of maintaining appropriate boundaries in their small group conversations and to redirect the conversation if a student is sharing personal information inappropriate for a peer setting.

In our large group sharing at the end of the retreat, our staff will also create expectations for your students regarding what is appropriate to share during that time. The students will be asked to focus on honoring their experience together and to be sensitive to blaming or embarrassing classmates.

If, during any part of the retreat, a YF staff member is made aware of a student referring to wanting to hurt themselves or someone else, the Youth Frontiers Retreat Director on your retreat will document the incident and relay it to one of your staff, ideally a counselor or school psychologist, if present. Small group leaders will also be asked to be aware of similar comments and to relay that information to one of the Youth Frontiers Staff.

Counselor/ Mental Health Professional Recommendation

Youth Frontiers Retreats

At the end of our Wisdom Retreat there will be time for students to share some of their thoughts and reflections from the day. Our staff will set expectations for the students that this should be a time for them to reflect on their high school experience. Occasionally, students may bring up emotional or personal experiences. Our staff will redirect students, when necessary, to stay within appropriate boundaries. Because we are encouraging students to reflect on their own personal experience, it can sometimes elicit a strong emotional response in students. We recommend that you have a counselor or mental health professional present at the retreat in the event that a student requires further support following the retreat experience.

Sample Memo to Staff

Youth Frontiers Retreats

Dear Staff,

We are excited about the upcoming Wisdom Retreat to be presented by Youth Frontiers, Inc. Youth Frontiers is a nonprofit organization that has been delivering programs to schools for more than 20 years that build positive school communities and help young people realize the importance of respecting themselves and others. Their vision is to change the way young people treat each other in every hallway, lunch line and classroom of every school in America so that today's young people can make tomorrow's world better. Last year, Youth Frontiers worked with nearly 100,000 students and educators throughout the country.

On the day of our retreat, you are asked to fully participate in the retreat experience. Youth Frontiers staff members recognize how busy educators are, and that you may want to complete work outside of the retreat room. We encourage teachers/staff to be present the entire retreat to observe and experience for yourself the power of these programs.

Your participation is important, both to understand and be able to reinforce the messages of the day, and to help build on the momentum created from this experience. The shared efforts of both teachers and Youth Frontiers will help build a greater sense of community in our school.

Youth Frontiers expects teachers and staff to:

- Attend the teacher meeting with the YF Retreat Director (mid-morning)
- Be present during the large group activities, topic-based talks, and closing activity
- Assist with disciplinary problems if requested by the YF Retreat Staff
- Help distribute snack, lunch, or materials as needed

The Wisdom Retreat is scheduled for _____ for the 12th grade class, and will be located at _____.

Thanks in advance for your support and participation at this important event.

Sincerely,

Sample Memo to Parents

Youth Frontiers Retreats

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

Our school believes that to do well in school, students need to be comfortable with who they are and feel physically and emotionally safe. In this effort to create a safe and caring culture, we are bringing in Youth Frontiers to facilitate a Wisdom Retreat.

Since 1987 Youth Frontiers, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Minneapolis, has been delivering programs to build positive school communities that help young people realize the importance of respecting themselves and others. Their vision is to change the way young people treat each other in every hallway, lunch line and classroom of every school in America so that today's young people make tomorrow's world better. Last year, Youth Frontiers worked with nearly 100,000 students and educators throughout the country.

On the Wisdom Retreat, the Youth Frontiers retreat staff will focus on creating a more positive school community by engaging students in a variety of activities that reflect on their high school experience and commit to leaving a positive legacy of respect at school.

This high-energy, interactive retreat is scheduled for _____ for the _____-grade class and will be held at _____. We encourage parents and caregivers to inquire about the retreat experience once the student returns home by asking the following questions:

1. What was your favorite part of the day?
2. Did you see any of your classmates in a new way?
3. How will use the lessons of your high school experience moving forward?

Visit www.youthfrontiers.org/ for more information on Youth Frontiers or to access great parent resources.

Sincerely,

School Principal or Teacher

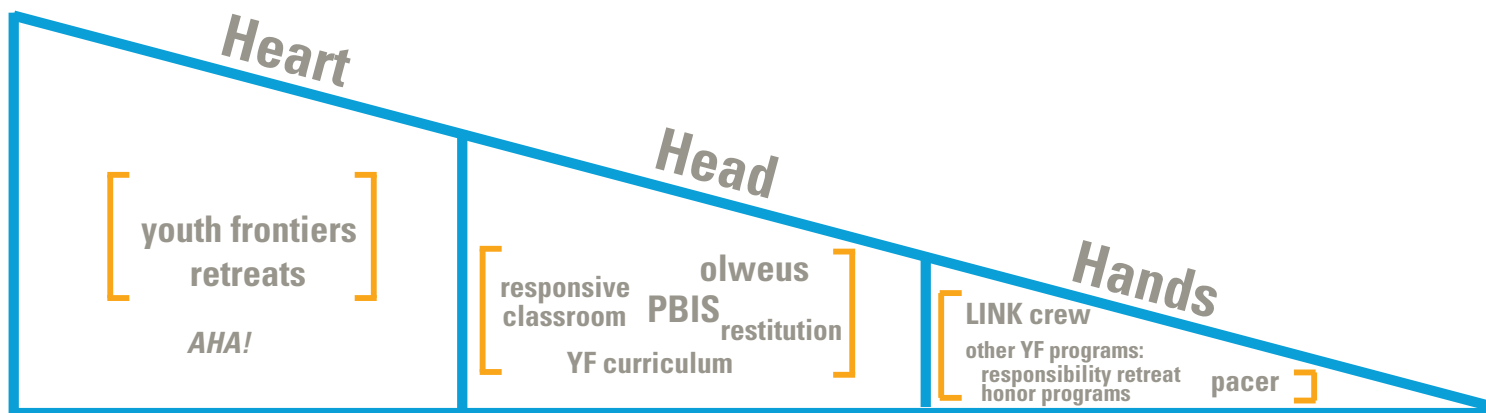
Beyond One Day

The Youth Frontiers Change Model: a school-wide approach

Building cultures of respect in schools through dynamic character retreat programs

Many schools use Youth Frontiers' programs as part of a larger school culture change model. Our retreats act as a **catalyst** for your school-wide, social-emotional character development initiatives. These retreats on the timeless values of kindness, courage, respect and responsibility engage the **heart** so that your students' **heads** are engaged in the academic curriculum. Ultimately, your students' **hands** are engaged in making their school a place where everyone is accepted and respected, and feels safe to learn to their full potential.

Below is a model of how to utilize Youth Frontiers' programs and follow-up curriculum – along with other complementary programs – to fully engage your students in a cultural change model that will shift your students' attitudes and behaviors and build a positive school community.



Heart

YF Retreat: Your students experience the AHA! moment of why a respectful school culture matters. When their hearts are engaged, students are empowered and learn the following SEL competencies:

1. Empathy
2. Perspective-taking
3. Responsible decision-making

Head

YF Follow-up Curriculum: Your teachers get an a la carte menu of options to keep the momentum of the retreat going and to go deeper into issues that are affecting your students.

Complementary Curricula:

1. PBIS
2. Olweus
3. Responsive Classroom
4. Restitution, etc.

Hands

Ongoing Leadership Development: Your student leaders experience continuous opportunities to realize their potential. Your parents and teachers receive access to resources to become better caregivers themselves and build a positive school community.

1. YF Responsibility Retreat for students
2. PACER (parent resources)
3. LINK crew (leadership development)
4. YF Honor Programs for educators



Visit us online at www.youthfrontiers.org/clients/ to learn more about how this model works.

Based on the Character Education Partnership concept of the HEART/HEAD/HANDS: For students to live a life of character, they need to care about (HEART), understand (HEAD) and act upon (HANDS) their core ethical values (www.h3.acoe.org/). The "YF Wedge" Model adapted from Danzig's Youth Ministry Change Model.