

***Co-facilitation with Youth:  
Ways to Involve Youth in Program Leadership***  
*Jesse Jaeger*  
*Youth Programs Director*  
*UUA, Boston, MA*

The standard model for facilitating a curriculum-based program is for adult teachers to lead with all the young people as participants. This model is probably best with children who are in grade school. However, when those children become junior-high and senior-high youth, we encourage you to experiment with co-facilitation. Co-facilitation of curriculum is a great way to empower youth to start taking a more leading role in their faith development. It helps them build such skills as preplanning, group presentations, and much more. These skills will serve them well into the future as they grow to become leaders in their youth program as well as in the congregations. Plus you are training new religious education teachers!

There are a few different ways that you can think about doing co-facilitation. What you do mainly depends on what level of leadership you think the young person is ready for. It is easy to think that this is wholly dependent on the age of the youth. While it is generally true that junior-high youth will need more support than senior-high youth, there are many junior-high youth who have what it takes to really engage with co-facilitation and some senior-high youth that will need a lot of support. So, assess each youth as an individual before assuming things about their capabilities. Here are a few co-facilitation models that you can think about employing. Of course, these are just suggestions—use your creativity in implementation!

- **Lead an Activity:** This is probably the best place to start with youth who you would like to encourage to take a larger role in leading the curriculum. Leading an activity can be as simple as asking one of the youth to do the opening or closing reading. It can also be more complex, such as leading an energy break or taking on one of the segments of the day's programs to prepare and lead. With any of these, support is essential. Like any volunteer, adult or youth, it is important that we do not set youth up to fail. If it is their first time selecting a reading, it would be helpful to show them the back of the UUA Hymnal, a book collection of readings, or to brainstorm with them places that they might find a reading that fits the themes of that day. If it is an energy break or leading a section of the program, help them plan it out. You might even encourage them to practice presenting it with you beforehand.
- **Lead a Unit:** Leading a daily unit would be the next step. Have a youth work with you to set up and lead one of the daily units for the curriculum. Meet beforehand to work out the timing and who will lead what sections. Again, support is critical. Make sure they have a firm grasp on what they are doing and help them find the resources they need to succeed in leading that unit. With more experience, have the youth plan and lead more of the unit. You might even get to a point where you are there mainly for support and the youth is doing most of the planning and leading.
- **Co-Lead a Curriculum with an Adult:** In your group of youth, you might find that you have one or two youth who are ready to co-lead the curriculum with you for its whole

length. You can treat your youth co-leader like any other co-leader you might have for a curriculum: doing the preparation together, meeting regularly, and sharing different tasks. The one difference is to offer a little more support. Like yourself or anyone else, youth have very busy lives. The difference is that they are just learning to balance their lives and their commitments. Help them stay on top of things with regular contact, and give them feedback if they seem to be taking on too much.

- **Co-Lead a Curriculum with Another Youth:** You might find that you have two or more youth who are ready to lead a whole curriculum themselves for the other youth. These will usually be older youth who have experience in the youth group and maybe have even been teaching Sunday school classes for some time. But this might not necessarily be true. You might have a couple of very dynamic younger youth who are ready for the challenge. It is important that you do not just hand them over the curriculum teacher guide and leave them to it. You will want to stay in touch with them, give them guidance, and help them evaluate how they are doing. Be present with them throughout the process, but also leave them some room to truly take it on and make it their own. These youth will undoubtedly have ideas of their own to bring to the curriculum.

With support and guidance, facilitating youth to take larger roles in their religious education by leading or –co-leading the curriculum is one of the best tools in youth empowerment. It is this type of youth empowerment that helps grow engaged and committed current and future Unitarian Universalists. The most important thing is to have fun. Working in collaboration with youth can be one of the most rewarding things you will do.