

FLORIDA CONFERENCE FAMILY MINISTRIES

Creating Deep Connections

Leveling Up Your Counselor Role

A Two-Session Interactive Workshop for Pathfinder & Adventurer Counselors

WHAT THIS WORKSHOP IS FOR

Your counselors already know how to run an honor, check off a requirement, and keep a unit on schedule. This workshop helps them do the harder, more important thing underneath all of it: build real relationships — with the kids in their unit, with those kids' families, and with God.

Two parallel sessions are provided — one built for Adventurer counselors, one for Pathfinder counselors — so the language, examples, and pacing fit each age group. Both run the same four-part framework and the same 75 minutes.

At a Glance

Time	Segment	Purpose
Session 1	Adventurer Class Counselors (ages 4–9)	75 minutes
Session 2	Pathfinder Unit Counselors (ages 10–15)	75 minutes

The Big Idea

Pathfinder and Adventurer curriculum gives leaders a clear finish line: honors earned, requirements signed off, badges sewn on. That structure matters. But a patch never tells a child they are known, and a checklist never introduces a child to Jesus. The counselor does that — or doesn't — in the small, repeated moments around the activity: the debrief after worship, the question asked at snack time, the way a leader responds when a kid says something hard.

This workshop trains counselors in four connection points that run underneath everything on the curriculum calendar:

- **Opening program** — turning pledges and worship into a real connection point, not just routine.
- **Kids** — leading discussion and circle time so children do most of the talking and feel truly heard.
- **The gospel story** — weaving the Great Controversy and a personal relationship with God into every activity, not just "Sabbath School time."

- **Families** — partnering with parents from the first meeting of the year through every note home.

FACILITATOR NOTE

Run this as a live workshop, not a lecture. Counselors should leave with something they wrote in their own hand — a question, a story stem, a text message — ready to use this week. Each segment below includes a short practice activity; do not skip it for time. If you must cut something, cut narration, not practice.

Session 1 — Adventurer Counselor Workshop

For counselors of Adventurer classes (Eager Beavers through Helping Hands, roughly ages 4–9)

Session Schedule

Time	Segment	Purpose
0:00	Welcome & Framing	Set the big idea: connection over checklist
0:05	Connecting Through the Opening Program	Turn pledge/worship into a relationship moment
0:20	Connecting with Kids	Circle time and discussion skills
0:40	Weaving in the Gospel Story	Every activity points back to God's character
0:55	Connecting with Families	Partner with the parents already in the room
1:10	Commitment & Send-Off	Choose one practice to try this month

SEGMENT 0 · 5 min

Welcome & Framing

Open with a question, not a lecture:

ASK THE ROOM

Describe a child who shows evidence of having a personal relationship with Jesus? What are their behaviors like? How do they treat others? How do they engage in class or in an activity?

Describe a child who does not seem to have a personal relationship with Jesus? What are their behaviors like? How do they treat others? How do they engage in class or in an activity?

What is the difference between having a personal relationship with Jesus vs. a cultural knowledge about Jesus?

How do you move a child from not knowing Jesus or who only has knowledge about Jesus to a meaningful personal relationship with Jesus?

Let two or three counselors answer out loud. Then land the point: the curriculum is the vehicle, not the destination. Today is about what happens in the small moments around the activities — the moments that make a 4– 9-year-old feel safe, seen, loved, and curious about God in ways that push them to know Him personally.

SEGMENT 1 · 15 min

Connecting Through the Opening Program

Teach: Pledge, Worship, Then Debrief

Adventurer Pledge

Because Jesus loves me, I will always do my best.

Adventurer Law

Jesus can help me to:

Be obedient
 Be pure
 Be true
 Be kind
 Be respectful
 Be attentive
 Be helpful
 Be cheerful
 Be thoughtful
 Be reverent

For Adventurers, the pledge and worship time is often the only moment every child in the room is doing the same thing together. Counselors tend to treat it as a warm-up to get through before the "real" activity. Flip that: opening program is the first connection point of the day, and it needs a debrief.

- **The pattern:** Pledge → worship thought → immediately gather your class into your small circle and ask at least one simple question tied to the worship thought, before moving into the activity.
- **Add Meaning to the Law:** Spend 10 weeks focusing one law at a time. Why does it matter? What does this law say about God? Jesus asks us to do things because He wants us to be happy. He knows what is best for us. How do we feel when we are _____ fill in law of the week. How do we feel when we are not _____ fill in law of the week. What does _____ fill in law of the week, look like in the child's life? Discuss these questions in small groups. Keep referring back to these concepts as they come up throughout the year.
- **Keep small group time short** – Children can only listen for about the same number of minutes as they are years of age – example 4 mins – 4 year old vs. 9 mins – 9 year olds. Pay attention to their engagement. If they are not focused after discussing one or two questions, move on. If they are focused and engaged, let them talk. It is important to make sure you establish listening routines and set expectations. Don't attempt to start until you have everyone's attention. (Pro tip – verbally start pointing out the children who are ready and affirm them publicly. Children are eager for affirmation so this usually gets others to quickly follow the behaviors of the child you are affirming.
- **Use the "Me Too" signal:** a hand near the heart, or a quiet thumbs-up — so kids who agree with a friend's answer can say so without interrupting.

SAMPLE DEBRIEF QUESTIONS BY WORSHIP THEME

- **Be Obedient** → "What does it mean to be obedient? How do you feel when you are obeying?"
- **Be Pure** → "Can you think of something that is clean? What makes something clean?"
- **Jesus is our friend** → "What do you do with your best friend? Do you think Jesus likes doing that too?"

TRY THIS NOW (3 minutes)

Pair up with the counselor next to you. Choose a law. Write one debrief question you could ask. Read it to your partner.

SEGMENT 2 · 20 min

Connecting with Kids

Teach: You Are a Guide, Not a Teacher

In circle time, your job is not to get to the right answer. It's to make it safe enough for a young child to say what's true for them. Aim for a 1-to-3 ratio: for every minute you talk, kids talk for three.

A Teacher Says...	A Guide Says...
"That's not quite right, but..."	"Hmm, tell me more about that."
"Good job! The lesson means..."	"I love that. Did anyone feel that way too?"
(fills every silence)	(counts to 10 before speaking again)

State Expectations — Every Single Week

With this age group, repetition builds the safety. Say a version of this at the start of every small group time, every week:

SAY THIS EVERY WEEK

"In our circle, we share about ourselves — not something unkind about a friend. Nobody has to share if they don't want to. When someone is talking, we look at them with our eyes and our hearts. And everything we share stays in our circle."

Build an Emotions Vocabulary

Young children need simple words for big feelings. Tie one emotion word to your activity or story each week, and connect it to real life.

- **Envy** — "wanting something someone else has." (Connects to Joseph's coat/wanting someone's toy)
- **Nervous/Excited** — "feeling two things at once." (Connects to Joshua as a new leader/trying a new craft or game.)
- **Left out** — "when it feels like nobody picked you." (Connects to David as a shepard/almost any group game/playing with friends.)

TRY THIS NOW (5 minutes)

In groups of three: one person is the counselor, two are "Adventurers." Practice asking one starter question — "Has there ever been a time you felt really proud of yourself?" — then wait silently for a full 10 seconds before saying anything else. After 10 secs, the "Adventurers" can respond. Finish by connecting that feeling with a Bible character who may have felt that feeling (Bible story). Switch roles.

SEGMENT 3 · 15 min

Weaving in the Gospel Story

Teach: Every Activity Can Point Back to God's Character and the Great Controversy

The Bible will have a lot more meaning when children understand about the war in Heaven and how sin entered that world. Without this context, Bible stories become just another story and not any different than a Disney story for a child. It is well worth your time to teach children the story of the war in Heaven and the creation story so children understand why there is trouble and sad things (sin) in our world in the first place. We are here on this earth to be a witness about who God is. Is He loving like He says or is He controlling and mean like Lucifer says? Look for evidence every week that shows God's character and love for us. Ask children who they believe God or Lucifer? Don't make every child give an answer, do give them the opportunity.

Adventurers don't need a theology lecture — they need to see, over and over, that Jesus is good and trustworthy, and that this activity connects to that bigger story. Before you plan an activity, ask one question:

THE ONE QUESTION TO ASK BEFORE ANY ACTIVITY

"What does this activity show us about what God is like?"

A nature walk becomes evidence God is creative. A cooperative game becomes evidence God wants us to help each other, the way He helps us. A craft about "helping hands" becomes evidence of a Helper God.

Model a Personal Relationship with God — Age-Appropriately

Young children learn what a relationship with God looks like largely by watching you have one. Keep it simple, brief for younger ones, however, don't underestimate how much a child can comprehend. Keep it authentic and real yet age appropriate.

- **Share a one-sentence prayer moment:** "I was nervous about today, so I asked God to help me — and He did."
- **Let them see you pray, not just lead prayer:** close your eyes, fold your hands, and actually mean it.
- **Never present yourself as having it all figured out:** "I still get grumpy sometimes. Jesus is helping me with that."

TRY THIS NOW (3 minutes)

Write one sentence you could say to your class this week that starts with "This week I..." and ends with something true about you and God. Make sure you share something young children can relate to and make sure the hero is God, not you.

SEGMENT 4 · 15 min

Connecting with Families

Because Adventurer Parents Are Already in the Room — Use It

Adventurer ministry is unique: parents are often present at club. That's an advantage — the goal isn't to introduce yourself, it's to deepen a partnership that already has a foot in the door.

The Beginning-of-Year Conversation

In the first few weeks, have a short, warm conversation with each family — Ask two things:

1. "What does your child love right now? What lights them up?"
2. "Is there anything happening at home this year that would help me understand your child better?"

Keep Parents in the Loop All Year

- **Weekly note home (3–5 sentences):** the theme, the Bible story, one emotion word, and one question to ask at home.
- **Family worship support:** send the same conversation-starter questions you used in circle, so the connection continues at the dinner table or in a car ride.

Celebrate What You See — Specifically

General praise doesn't land. Specific observations do.

Instead of This	Try This
"She was so good today."	"She was the first one to make room for the new kid in our circle — that's real kindness."
"He did great."	"He asked if God was ever scared — that's some deep thinking for a 6-year-old."

TRY THIS NOW (3 minutes)

Think of one child in your class. Text-draft one specific, genuine observation you could send their parent this week. Read it to your table.

SEGMENT 5 · 5 min

Commitment & Send-Off

Ask each counselor to circle just one practice from today to try in the next two weeks:

- One debrief question after opening program
- The 10-second pause in circle time
- Connecting emotions to a Bible character's experience in a story
- One "this week I..." personal story
- One specific-observation note home

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pray specifically for the counselors' own walk with God — that as they model a relationship with Him, it would be a real one, not a performance. Then send them off with their one written commitment in hand.

Session 2 — Pathfinder Counselor Workshop

For counselors of Pathfinder units (roughly ages 10–15)

Session Schedule

Time	Segment	Purpose
0:00	Welcome & Framing	Set the big idea: connection over checklist
0:05	Connecting Through the Opening Program	Turn pledge/worship into a real check-in
0:20	Connecting with Kids	Circle time and discussion skills for pre-teens/teens
0:40	Weaving in the Gospel Story	Anchor every honor and activity to the Great Controversy
0:55	Connecting with Families	Build the partnership you don't automatically have
1:10	Commitment & Send-Off	Choose one practice to try this month

SEGMENT 0 · 5 min

Welcome & Framing

Open with a question, not a lecture:

ASK THE ROOM

Describe a child who shows evidence of having a personal relationship with Jesus? What are their behaviors like? How do they treat others? How do they engage in class or in an activity?

Describe a child who does not seem to have a personal relationship with Jesus? What are their behaviors like? How do they treat others? How do they engage in class or in an activity?

What is the difference between having a personal relationship with Jesus vs. a cultural knowledge about Jesus?

How do you move a child from not knowing Jesus or who only has knowledge about Jesus to a meaningful personal relationship with Jesus?

Let a few counselors respond. Then land the point: at this age especially, kids are deciding — often quietly — whether faith is something that survives contact with real life. Your meetings may be one of the few places that decision gets shaped week to week.

SEGMENT 1 · 15 min

Connecting Through the Opening Program

Teach: Pledge, Worship, Then Debrief — Circle Time is not just for little kids

Pathfinder Pledge and Law:

By the grace of God, I will be pure, and kind, and true. I will keep the Pathfinder Law. I will be a servant of God and a friend to man.

The Law is for me to:

Keep the morning watch
 Do my honest part
 Care for my body,
 Keep a level eye
 Be courteous and obedient
 Walk softly in the sanctuary,
 Keep a song in my heart,
 Go on God's errand.

Pathfinders can smell a babyish activity from across the room. The debrief still works at this age — it just needs more room for real disagreement and harder questions.

- **The pattern:** Pledge → worship thought → gather your unit and ask one open question tied to the theme — one with no obvious "Sabbath School answer."
- **Add Meaning to the Law:** Spend 8 weeks focusing one law at a time. Why does it matter? What does this law say about God? Jesus asks us to do things because He wants what's best for us. How does this law make us better? What happens when people don't follow this law? Make sure to apply real world scenarios kids can relate to. Discuss these questions in small groups. Keep referring back to these concepts as they come up throughout the year.
- **Let it get uncomfortable:** if a Pathfinder pushes back on something in the worship thought, that's not a problem to shut down — it's the conversation actually starting.
- **Watch the ratio:** if you're doing most of the talking during debrief, you've slipped back into "teacher" mode.

SAMPLE DEBRIEF QUESTIONS BY WORSHIP THEME

- **What does "Keep the morning watch" mean?** → Why is it so hard to connect with God daily? What are some things that make you feel close to God? How can you blend doing things you enjoy with spending time with God?
- **God keeps His promises** → "Has God ever felt slow to you — like He wasn't keeping a promise fast enough?"
- **Whose team are you on?** → "What's something that makes it hard to trust God's character right now?"
- **Identity in Christ** → "What's a version of yourself you feel pressure to perform at school? How is that different at Pathfinders?"

TRY THIS NOW (3 minutes)

Pair up with the counselor next to you. Choose a law. Write one debrief question with no easy "right answer." Read it to your partner and have them push back on it.

SEGMENT 2 · 20 min**Connecting with Kids****Teach: You Are a Guide, Not a Teacher**

This matters even more with Pathfinders than with younger kids: a pre-teen or teen who feels talked at will disengage fast. Aim for a 1-to-3 ratio — you talk for one minute, they talk for three.

A Teacher Says...	A Guide Says...
"That's not quite right, but here's the real answer..."	"I'm curious what makes you think that."
"Good answer. The point is..."	"Say more — I want to understand what you mean."
(immediately calls on the next kid)	"Does anyone else want to respond to what he just said?"

State Expectations — Every Single Week

Older kids still need the safety net restated, even if it feels redundant to you. Say a version of this at the start of every unit meeting:

SAY THIS EVERY WEEK

"In this circle we talk about our own stuff — not something that would embarrass or hurt someone. Passing is always fine. When someone's talking, we're actually listening, not just waiting for our turn. And what gets said here stays here."

Build an Emotions Vocabulary — Tuned to Adolescence

- **Jealousy vs. envy** — "Jealousy is fear of losing something you have. Envy is wanting something you don't." Ask which one shows up more at school.
 - **Pressure** — "feeling like you have to perform to be accepted." Connects to almost any honor requiring public performance.
 - **Numb** — "when a feeling is there but you've stopped letting yourself notice it." Useful for older teens who've learned to shut down.
- *Explore the emotions a Bible character may have had during various stories. Connect these same emotions to situations that are relatable to older children and teens.

TRY THIS NOW (5 minutes)

In groups of three: one counselor, two "Pathfinders." Practice asking a going-deeper question — "Is there something you've been wondering about God but haven't known how to ask?" — then hold silence for a full 10 seconds. Resist the urge to rephrase early. After 10 seconds, the "Pathfinders" can respond. Finish by introducing a Bible story with a Bible character who likely had the same question and/or feelings. Switch roles.

SEGMENT 3 · 15 min

Weaving in the Gospel Story

Teach: Anchor Honors and Activities to the Great Controversy

The Bible will have a lot more meaning when children and teens understand about the war in Heaven and how sin entered that world. Without this context, Bible stories become just another story and tend to feel boring and unrelatable. Don't assume people know these stories. It is well worth your time to teach children and teens the story of the war in Heaven and the creation story so they understand why there is trouble, confusion, and evil (sin) in our world in the first place. We are here on this earth to be a witness about who God is. Is He loving and invested in our lives like He says or is He controlling, unrelatable, and mean like Lucifer says? Look for evidence every week that shows God's character and love for us. Allow children and teens to ask questions and don't give

them predictable answers. Instead, ask questions back. Let them look for the evidence themselves in the Bible and in the world. Tell them your short testimonies of God's goodness, love, and evidence in your life and how God makes you better. Balance that with the times you have struggled as well in ways that are relatable to the age of the child or teen. Make sure to listen more than talk and dig deeper into what the child or teen thinks rather than telling them what you want them to think. Older children and teens need to begin to own their own experiences and not rely on pleasing us with the "right" answers. They need to feel safe to explore their real questions with adult support.

Pathfinders can handle — and need — the bigger picture: why sin exists, what Jesus did about it, and how it ends. Every honor and service project is a chance to circle back to it.

THE ONE QUESTION TO ASK BEFORE ANY ACTIVITY

"What does this activity give us evidence for — about who God is, or about the lie Lucifer tells about Him?"

A wilderness survival honor becomes evidence of a God who provides. A community service project becomes a chance to ask: "What have you learned about other people's needs today and how can we show God's love to people through this service?" A leadership honor becomes a direct conversation about power used to serve versus power used to control — the actual center of the Great Controversy. Don't force conversations, let them happen naturally. Pray continually that God will show you the doors to these important conversations.

Model a Personal Relationship with God — With Real Vulnerability

At this age, a polished, perfect leader is not aspirational — it's unrelatable. Pathfinders are watching for whether your faith survives contact with a hard week.

- **Share a genuine win:** "I chose to pray instead of firing back a text I would have regretted. It helped."
- **Share an honest struggle, kept age-appropriate:** "I still struggle with patience. Jesus is working on me."
- **Never present a struggle as fully resolved if it isn't:** Pathfinders can tell when something isn't genuine — and it costs you trust.
- **Always point it back to God, not to yourself:** the story should open a question for them, not make you the hero.

TRY THIS NOW (3 minutes)

Write one "This week I..." sentence — a real, age-appropriate win or struggle you could share with your group, that ends by pointing back to God's character rather than your own performance.

SEGMENT 4 · 15 min

Connecting with Families

Because Pathfinder Parents Usually Aren't in the Room — Build the Bridge on Purpose

Unlike Adventurers, most Pathfinder parents drop off and leave. That partnership doesn't happen automatically — it has to be built with intention, starting on day one.

The Beginning-of-Year Parent Meeting

In the first few weeks, hold a short parent meeting (in person, or a brief call/message if that's not possible). Cover:

3. What the year looks like — honors, campouts, service projects, and the spiritual themes running through it.

4. How you'll communicate — what to expect, how often, and the best way to reach you.
5. One open question: "Is there anything happening with your Pathfinder this year that would help me lead them well?"

Keep Parents in the Loop All Year

- **Brief note or text after key meetings:** the theme, one thing discussed, and a conversation starter for the car ride home.
- **Family worship support:** pass along the same "going deeper" questions from circle time so the conversation can continue at home.

Celebrate What You See — Specifically

Instead of This	Try This
"He's doing great."	"He's the one who always makes sure the younger Pathfinders aren't left out on hikes — that's real leadership."
"She's a good kid."	"She asked a genuinely hard question about suffering this week — she's thinking seriously about her faith."

When You Need to Raise a Concern

If something needs to be addressed — a behavior pattern, a wellbeing concern — you may want to talk with your pastor first for guidance and to make sure protocols are followed. Then approach the parent with an observation, not a label, and always bring a suggested next step, not just a problem.

TRY THIS NOW (3 minutes)

Think of one Pathfinder in your unit. Draft one specific, genuine observation you could share with their parent this week. Read it to your table.

SEGMENT 5 · 5 min

Commitment & Send-Off

Ask each counselor to circle just one practice from today to try in the next two weeks:

- One open, no-easy-answer debrief question
- The 10-second pause in unit discussion
- Connecting questions and emotions to a Bible character's experience in a story
- One "this week I..." story, kept honest and pointed at God
- One specific-observation note home to a parent

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Pray specifically for the counselors' own walk with God — that as they model a relationship with Him, it would be a real one their Pathfinders can trust. Then send them off with their one written commitment in hand.

Adventurer Counselor Card

Keep this in your binder. Pull it out before you plan an activity or lead circle time.

PLEDGE & LAW

Because Jesus loves me, I will always do my best.

Be obedient · pure · true · kind · respectful · attentive · helpful · cheerful · thoughtful · reverent

THE ONE QUESTION FOR ANY ACTIVITY

"What does this activity show us about what God is like?"

THE DEBRIEF FORMULA

Pledge → worship thought → one small-circle question tied to the theme, before the activity begins.

EMOTIONS VOCABULARY

- Teach one emotion a week. Show how a Bible character experienced that emotion and tie it to how a child experiences the emotion.

Share your personal testimonies.

"This week I _____, and here's what it showed me about God:
_____."

FAMILY NOTE

- **Weekly note home (3–5 sentences):** the theme, the Bible story, one emotion word, and one question to ask at home.
- **Family worship support:** send the same conversation-starter questions you used in circle, so the connection continues at the dinner table or in a car ride.

My one commitment this month: _____