

Helping Parents Connect Before, During and After the Trip

This free resource is an excerpt from the post mission trip resource called Mission Life. If you want to help your students get the most out of their mission trip experience check out Mission Life in the LeaderTreks store.

Many of us have experienced highs and lows in our spiritual life. Through those experiences we learn much about ourselves and how we should move forward in our world. However, students have a harder time with this process. For many of them, this mission trip might be the first time they have experienced these emotions. Coming home can be a difficult process for them. As adults, thinking through how to help them deal with this transition before, during and after the trip is important. For you as parents, it can be difficult to find ways to help your student communicate about the experience. Here are a few ideas to think about as your student goes on this mission trip.

Before:

As your student prepares for the upcoming mission trip, there are many ways you can help them in that process. Here are some ideas:

- » **Pray with your student.** By praying with them you will become a spiritual partner for the trip and help them solidify this discipline in their lives.
- » **Help them raise money.** This trip is an opportunity for your student to see God provide for their needs. Encourage them to take ownership in paying for the trip. Help them create a list of people to send support letters to or start saving some of their own money to put toward the trip. Use this opportunity to teach your child that all resources are God's resources.
- » **Help the trip organizer.** Running a mission trip is a big responsibility. Ask the trip organizer if there's a way you can help.
- » **Research the trip.** Help your student research the trip. One idea is to research the town and culture your student is going to. The more you learn, the more prepared both you and your student will be.
- » **Challenge your student.** You have a good handle on the strengths and weaknesses of your student. Set a challenge for them on this trip. How could he or she grow spiritually? Relationally? In teamwork? In communication? In responsibility? A mission trip isn't just an opportunity to travel and experience a new place or culture; it's an opportunity to grow.

During:

Just as your student is on a journey with God during this trip, God has lessons for you to learn as well. Consider some of these ideas to help you and your student get the most out of this experience during the trip.

- » **Study the same Scripture passages.** Find out what Bible passages your student will be studying during the trip. Buy the devotional book or get a copy from the trip organizer. By participating in the same study, you will be able to better understand what God is teaching your student.
- » **Develop a prayer team.** Consider getting together with the parents of the other students on the trip and praying for the team. You may only have time to do this once while they are gone, or you could do it several times. This will create unity that goes beyond the students to include the parents as well.
- » **Keep a journal of your prayers.** Another great idea is to keep a journal of the prayers you prayed for your student while they were away. When they return you can share it with them and see how many of those prayers were answered.
- » **Allow them space.** Be sure to allow your student to experience the trip without having to think about home all the time. Try to keep your contact with them to a minimum during the trip. They will have a more meaningful experience if they feel free from their normal life at home.

After:

The transition after a mission trip can be very difficult for students. They will need help understanding and applying the lessons they have learned. As a parent, you can play a vital role in this process. Here are some ideas to consider.

- » **Allow your student time to process.** Don't expect to get all the answers to your question right away. It takes students time to understand and apply their experience. Be patient with them.
- » **Plan time to communicate about the trip.** Ask your student for an hour or two to spend with you talking about the trip. Do this within the first three days of returning home. This will allow you to focus on your student and allow them uninterrupted time to tell their story.
- » **Ask questions about what they learned, not what they did.** The easy stories to tell are the ones that deal with what your student saw, ate, or did. The hard – but more meaningful – interaction encourages your student to tell you what they learned and how they changed. Ask how they saw God at work.

Some sample questions:

- § What did you learn about yourself?

- § What did you see God do in and through you?
 - § What Bible study method did you like the best?
 - § What applications did you make from the Bible studies?
 - § How did teamwork play a part in accomplishing your mission?
 - § How did you see God at work? How did He intervene? Answer prayer? Show His faithfulness?
 - § What is your plan for staying connected to God?
 - § How has this experience changed your mission at home, at school, at youth group?
- » **Ask the deeper question.** When your student tells you about the work project or the ministry project, ask a deeper follow up question. This will help your student come to a deeper understanding of their experience. A good place to start is by asking questions such as: How did that make you feel? What did you learn from that? What did that motivate you to do?
 - » **Realize the difficulty of re-entry.** Understand that your student will not only be struggling from culture shock as he or she returns, they will also be mourning the loss of their team. Being alone for the first time in several weeks is difficult after living on a mission with a team of great people. Don't be surprised if they want to continue to spend time with their teammates. Be sure to allow them time to readjust to family life as they come off the trip.
 - » **Plan to process the experience with them more than once.** It is important to realize that the learning for a student can happen weeks after the experience is over. Be sure to ask your student what they are still learning from their trip one to three months after the trip is over. This will force the student to reconsider what they have learned and how the trip has had a lasting impact on his or her life.