

The Role of the Game Director

What Is Awana?

Welcome to one of the most exciting and rewarding leadership roles you can fill! Children and youth are the richest mission field in the world. Did you know that the probability of a person accepting Christ as Savior is highest between the ages of 5 and 12? And that a person's moral foundation is largely set by age 9 (*Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, George Barna, 2003).

God has given children and youth workers a unique opportunity to further the kingdom of God in our world by leading kids into a personal relationship with Jesus. What better adventure could we invite children and students to join us on than that?

Awana® is a global, non-profit ministry committed to the belief that the greatest impact for Christ starts with kids who know, love, and serve Him. Reaching over 2.8 million kids and youth each week with the gospel, Awana equips parents, volunteers, and church leaders with proven integrated programs, tools, and training in evangelism and biblical discipleship. Evidenced by stories of life, family, and community transformation, God is changing the world through the ministry of Awana. Today Awana ministry takes place in more than 30,000 churches and 100 countries worldwide with more than 400,000 volunteer leaders. We are so pleased that you are joining us on this journey!

The name Awana comes from the first letters of the phrase “approved workmen are not ashamed.” Look up 2 Timothy 2:15 in the King James Version to see why it is our key verse.

Awana began in the 1950s as a boys' club in a non-denominational church in Chicago. As pastors, Lance Latham and Art Rorheim, saw the neighborhood children line up outside the local movie theatre, they asked “How can we get those kids as excited about learning God's Word as they are about the movies?” Using a combination of energetic games, Bible-based teaching, and small groups led by loving, well-equipped leaders, the church was soon bursting at the seams with children! Word quickly spread to surrounding churches. God has been blessing and expanding the ministry ever since

Awana Mission

The Awana mission is to reach children everywhere with the gospel of Jesus Christ and engage them in lifelong discipleship. Our prayer is that all children and youth throughout the world will come to know, love, and serve Him. This starts with equipping leaders. That's you. That's

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now. Congratulations on taking the first step toward becoming the leader God meant for you to be.

Let's look closer at what it means to lead a child to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Know – Our desire is that each child will know who God is and know that they can have eternal life when they put their trust in the fact that Jesus died for their sins and rose again. See Philippians 3:10, John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Colossians 1:9-10.

Love – The Lord desires intimacy with us. Our desire is to disciple kids and students to grow in their love towards God and others. See Ephesians 3:19, 1 John 4:7-12.

Serve – Serving Christ is a supernatural by-product of loving Him. Our desire is that all believers will experience the joy of serving God and others. See Mark 10:45, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Ephesians 2:10.

Ultimately, children and youth will come to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit works in their hearts. But God has invited us to play a role in sharing the good news of Christ with others. The Awana ministry is a tool that can help us to do just that.

Instilling a missional heart in kids is an essential part of creating lifelong disciples. Awana encourages kids in this spiritual journey in a couple of ways. First, the handbook curriculum lays a strong foundation of biblical truths and introduces kids to missions. Next, Awana GO™ (Global Outreach) connects kids here with kids around the world through creative lessons and various activities that can make a huge impact for the kingdom. Children are both inspired and challenged to help reach more kids with the gospel of Christ and at the same time deepen their relationship with God.

The Principles of Awana

The Awana ministry can be adapted to fit the unique culture and needs of each church and community. While it may look different from church to church, it's proven to effectively reach kids for Christ when the following six principles are in place.

1. An Awana ministry is centered on the gospel.
2. It has high scriptural content.
3. It is fun and exciting for young people.
4. It is built on strong leadership.
5. It trains children and youth to serve.
6. It strengthens the church/parent partnership.

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Read Deuteronomy 32:46. This passage contains Moses' final directions to the children of Israel: *And he said unto them, "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law"* (KJV).

Moses wanted the Israelites to remember their responsibility to obey God's Word and teach future generations to do the same. The programs in Awana seek to follow this pattern in God's Word. We seek to know God's Word and understand it, in order to change how we live. So each week children spend time memorizing the Scriptures and learning how to apply them in their lives.

The principles of Awana clubs are rooted in the idea that children can have fun while learning God's Word – that capturing a child's sense of fun enhances his learning. This is why we use games to attract children. Bible teaching and small-group interactions can be exciting and attractive to kids too, by incorporating high-energy songs, creative drama, object lessons, and by having engaged, equipped leaders who love the children. Awana is committed to providing you with a variety of learning opportunities to help you grow in your relationship with Christ and develop your ministry skills. These range from online training to books, conferences and events.

In Awana, children of all ages learn about serving God. Our materials teach about missions and serving others. And your Awana ministry is a great place for kids to begin serving in the church.

As important as children's and youth workers are, parents have the greatest opportunity to influence the spiritual development of children. The Awana curriculum encourages parental involvement. Awana also offers biblical training resources so your church can come alongside parents and partner with them in this critical responsibility.

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Game Director Role

Kids often view the game director as the hero of Awana. One of the six main principles of Awana is that it is attractive to young people and in no segment of Awana should this be truer than in Game Time. The whole point is to attract kids so they can come to club to hear the gospel and learn God's Word. The more attractive Game Time is, the more likely kids are to keep coming and to invite their friends.

The game director leads Game Time. The game director is responsible for planning games, organizing game equipment, and directing actual game play. Because your attitude toward Game Time rubs off on other adults and kids, always be positive. If you enjoy yourself, others will enjoy themselves too. Encourage everyone to have fun during Game Time.

Planning

The success of Game Time depends on your planning; it's really where the majority of your time and effort should be spent. Sometimes a game will flop or a line leader won't show. When you're prepared this will disappoint, but not derail, you.

Before the club year begins:

- Make sure you know where Game Time will meet and whether your church has, or is installing, an Awana Game Square.
- Find out who is responsible for forming teams.
- Set a time before club begins to meet with those who will be your line leaders so you can help them understand their role.
- Know all of the game equipment you have available to you and request more if necessary.
- Recruit a scorekeeper.
- Read this role book thoroughly.
- Create plans for the first several weeks.
- Purchase needed equipment.

Each week:

- Make a list of games to be played — at least five per night and a few extras in case you finish early.
- List the equipment you will need for each game.

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- Ask yourself, “Where will I stand? What will I say while explaining the game? What will the players do? What possibly can go wrong?”
- Arrive at club early to set out game supplies before club gets started.

Running out of games because of poor planning produces a less than ideal experience for your kids. Announcing a game and then realizing you don’t have the necessary equipment is another indication of poor planning. Always be sure that equipment is available before Game Time begins. If you have planned thoroughly, you will have more of an ability to deal with situations you cannot control, such as an absent line leader or an unusual number of first-time kids. If you’re not prepared, these things can derail you and result in a chaotic Game Time.

How to Pick Great Games

There’s certainly no shortage of potential games. Awana has publications that will keep your club running for years, and you’ll find other former and current game directors all over the country and world that are eager to share their own inventions with you. And you may come up with a few no one has yet thought of!

You will find a full library of club resources, including game ideas, in Mozo, the web-based technology tool for club ministries. For Trek and Journey Interaction Time, there is the AwanaYM Games App that is the only app of its kind for planning and running activities for middle school and high school students.

Plan Age-Appropriate Games

Game Time looks completely different with each age group. You won’t lead anything for Puggles and may not have anything to do with Cubbies, but we’re going to include Cubbies in these sections just in case.

Cubbies are different from Sparkies who are different from T&T kids. Given the differences in the way kids play games at different ages, you will have to make sure you have a plan for each age group. It really is best to run the Game Times separately for each club. And, because of the following characteristics, don’t try to include Cubbies in Game Time with older kids.

Characteristics of Cubbies

- Cubbies are constantly active — they always seem to be moving.
- Cubbies play hard and tire easily, so vary the intensity of play.

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- Cubbies are developing their large and small muscle control. Play Time should include games that provide fun ways to practice muscle control.

Characteristics of Sparkies

Though Sparkies grow rapidly in uneven spurts, their physical strength is relatively consistent. This doesn't mean, however, that all Sparkies excel equally in athletic skills. As with all children, some Sparkies may be exceptional runners, while others may be good at throwing straight. Though God gives children a variety of gifts, His ultimate desire is for these gifts to complement one another in group interactions. Plan a variety of games to provide opportunities for everyone to excel and contribute.

- Sparkies are full of energy but tire easily. Keeping this in mind, you should follow more intense games with less intense ones to avoid overexertion.
- Sparkies have difficulty sitting still for long periods of time. Use games that give Sparkies opportunities to stretch their muscles.

Characteristics of T&T Clubbers

- Third- and fourth-graders are growing steadily, not in spurts. Their finer muscles are developing, and they are active and energetic.
- Fifth- and sixth-graders usually are strong, healthy, and active. They are becoming competitive, but afraid of failure. They notice physical accomplishments of others and compare themselves.
- Fifth- and sixth-graders are also beginning to experience physical changes. Boys tend to be noisy and restless, and love to wrestle and fight. Girls may be tomboyish or very girly at this age.
- Fifth-graders may be in a period of slower growth just before the adolescent spurt in the sixth through eighth grades.

So:

- Play active games and progress rapidly from one game to the next.
- Involve each clubber. Encourage them not to be spectators.
- Challenge kids with activities that expand their abilities in speed, control, and endurance.
- Recognize clubbers for specific abilities, and help each one develop.

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- Provide constructive activities with goals to accomplish.
- Depending on the number of T&T clubbers:
 - » Consider having separate Game Times for boys and girls.
 - » Consider having separate Game Times for third and fourth grades and for fifth and sixth grades.

Plan a Variety of Games

Regularly-played games have an advantage of being easily understood and familiar and require less time and explanation. But new games bring new challenges as well as the anticipation and excitement of something different.

Variety ensures all kids can use their skills. Running games tend to favor more athletic kids, but games of chance with little skill required provide opportunities for even non-athletic clubbers to win an event. Vary the games so both athletic and non-athletic kids have equal opportunity to win. If a child doesn't want to participate don't force him, but encourage him to try the next game. Game Time should offer something for everyone.

Four essentials of a great Game Time are the following:

- Fast-paced
- Variety of games
- Disciplined
- Organized/prepared

See the online training module, Game Time Essentials on Mozo.

Implementing Games

All the planning is complete. Now it's time to have fun!

Prepare Equipment

Get to club early so you have time to set up equipment. Often kids will be playing in the gym before club starts, so make sure you plan to be there early enough.

Form Teams

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This is only relevant a few times a year, but it will be the first thing you have to do if this task belongs to you. (In some clubs, the directors assign teams because it's part of handbook group assignments. In other clubs you may be the one to create teams.)

If you are the one to create the teams, Awana suggests the following method:

- Get all kids in each club lined up on the Awana Game Square, tallest to shortest (or just in a large circle if you don't have a game square).
- Count them off by pointing at each child and telling them their team color.
- Go in the following order: red, blue, green, and yellow. Then yellow, green, blue, and red. This will prevent the red team from ending up with most of the tallest players.
- Then have them organize by height on their team lines, tallest to shortest. This will help play to be somewhat fair by keeping kids of like size competing against one another.

We do not want kids in Awana to relive our elementary gym days when we anxiously waited as team captains picked the best athletes, leaving the rest of us to squirm uncomfortably until the last of us was taken with a roll of the eyes. The system proposed here is equal opportunity and shows each child on what line, and even where on that line, to be when you do the five-count to start Game Time.

If you don't have a big club, consider having two or three teams instead of four. Fewer larger teams can be more fun for everyone than four small teams.

Keep Leaders Involved and Participating

Game Time is not the place for leaders to take a break. At the very least, each team line needs one leader, called a line leader. Ideally, each line will have at least two dedicated leaders — one to organize the kids and one to be at the start line clarifying instructions and getting kids started with games. But all leaders should participate in Game Time — helping the line leaders, cheering and sometimes even playing games.

The best way to keep leaders participating is to give them assignments. For example: cheer for the blue team, place equipment at the beginning of each game, put equipment away, look for kids who need help, etc.

Communicate and Demonstrate Game Rules

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Keep game explanations as brief as possible. A quick demonstration of a new game is much more effective than a long explanation. When a lot of time is spent on game instructions, kids get restless and stop listening.

Keep Score

Recruit a dedicated scorekeeper. It's difficult to keep score while you're directing the games, and someone whose job it is to keep score can also be monitoring ups and downs in teams and either stoking a competitive edge or encouraging a lagging team.

Make Sure Everyone Has a Chance to Play

When running quick games, repeat the event with heats so most or all kids can play at least once. On smaller teams, some players will participate more than once. This way each child is involved in some of the games. Don't try to do this with every game though. The point is not that everyone plays every game, but that they all participate in Game Time. Some kids many really not want to play certain games. Encourage, but never force or shame a child into playing.

Be specific when asking for kids to participate in the next game. Rather than telling your leaders to send two kids to the center of the circle and having every child from each team shouting to be picked, ask your leaders to send the first two kids from each team line to come to the center of the circle. This way there is no question as to who is going to be participating in the next event. When the first two kids have finished participating, they go to the back of the line and sit down, and the next two are ready to go. By having kids sit after they play, it's easy to tell who has and hasn't played each game.

Discipline Consistently

Maintain positive control. Rather than deducting points when someone violates a rule, give positive points to the team who listens and obeys instructions.

We always speak of awarding, not deducting, points. You want to encourage good behavior. The intent is not that you ignore bad behavior, but it's not kind or respectful to draw attention to misbehavior in a group setting or penalize an entire team for one or two children's choices.

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So, when do you use positive points? Obviously teams are awarded points for winning games, but you also can award points for cheering, responding to the five-count, a team being enthusiastic even when it loses, or for any number of reasons.

Another time you can use positive points is to reward teams that are well behaved. Every once in a while, a team may not be paying attention to you, cheating or being otherwise inappropriate. Instead of deducting points from that team, simply award all of the other teams with points for paying attention or for making sure to run around the outside of all of the cones, or whatever it might be.

Use the five-count when calling for the group's attention. Give one blast of the whistle, followed by a five-count, with the expectation of perfect order before you get to "five."

Model Good Sportsmanship

A huge part of your responsibility is to make sure clubbers are learning good sportsmanship. Game Time is not just meant to be fun, but as a legitimate inroad to clubber's spiritual growth. Kids of all ages can learn good sportsmanship. As the director, call out clubbers when you see exceptionally good sportsmanship.

Most of your T&T-aged kids are learning about and growing in grace. Relationships are becoming central for kids in their later elementary years so they're consciously grappling with how to treat others and how they're being treated. This is a prime opportunity to encourage kids to act with kindness and to be appropriately competitive while also displaying grace towards others.

After Game Time

Take some time each week after club is over to make sure your game equipment is in good shape. Check for things like tears in beanbags and cracks in the pins. Having to repair equipment while Game Time is going on will make for a rough Game Time for both you and the kids.

Put all the equipment away carefully in a secure place so it lasts as long as possible and so that you can easily find what you need each week.

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At the end of club, spend some time reflecting. How did Game Time go? Did you do anything particularly well that you want to continue to do? Did a game go better than expected? Did you figure out a way to reach a particular kid? Did you choose games with enough variation?

Take time to thank God for your role and for allowing you to participate in spreading the gospel and helping to build the Church.