WyldLife Program Theory:
9 Basic Principles

Variety and Diversity
- Because middle schoolers are growing and changing very rapidly, and at varying rates, an activity appropriate for one young person might turn off another. Therefore, during the course of an event, offer a variety of different activities to appeal to a cross-section of kids. We don’t want them to know what to expect next. Try to avoid a routine. We want kids to exclaim, “I can’t believe they just did that!” at every club.
- Avoid pauses – 30 seconds of dead requires five minutes to regain their attention

Experience and Participation
- Middle schoolers learn best experientially. Help them do things to discover truth.
- Plan an active program where everyone is almost always involved (melodrama, use the crowd; mixers and games instead of skits with only a few kids in them).
- Use a theme to tie the various parts of the event together so it seems to flow and be connected. Unrelated games can seem to have purpose when you call it “Olympics Night,” for instance.

Positive Interaction with Peers and Adults
- The best WyldLife teams are those with a diversity of leaders serving on them. Young teens are blessed by the mature influence of other parents taking an interest in them, while at the same time they are encouraged by high school kids – their heroes and role models investing themselves in their lives. When we build into our clubs and programs intentional time to interact and build upon these relationships, it is a win/win experience.
- Give each kid a personal touch: touch is important…wrestling with guys, arm on the shoulder of the girls. Also, try strategic welcomes: team and campaigners prepared to welcome each kid. Have run through a high-five line. AND, each parent dropping their kid off should be personally welcomed by a team parent or committee member.
- Plan and use clubs, as well as special events, to deepen relationships between kids and leaders. Let kids laugh at you, as well as at themselves. Be involved in the program. And when you’re not, take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy them while in the audience. Don’t sit in the back or on the sidelines watching. Force yourself to be involved.
- One method to keep them engaged, and make them feel like a part of it is to break the group down into teams. This allows the leaders to serve as coaches who work exclusively with their small group of kids throughout the club or event. Scavenger hunts are great for this.
Physical Activity
- Middle schoolers are well known for their bursts of energy as well as periods of laziness. They need plenty of opportunities to stretch and exercise their rapidly growing bodies. This is one reason their attention spans are relatively short.
- I recommend a change of pace every 6-10 minutes. The timely insertion of a game, an audiovisual, a song, or even moving to another location will do wonders to keep kids interested and involved. Competitive games that include physical activity are very popular with both guys and girls.

Keep it Short
- Short attention spans, so keep things short and moving.
- Fun and laughter are essential. Life is way too stressful today. Club should be a place to let go and laugh. This breaks down not only social barriers, but spiritual barriers as well. This will be what they think about as they decide whether or not to come the next time.

Be Vulnerable
- Let them laugh at you or hit you with a pie once in a while.

Be Visual
- Use videos, video wake ups, etc. They love to see themselves!
- Employ object lessons in most messages. Hold up common objects to illustrate gospel points so they will remember them the next time they see the object.

Create a Safe Environment
- Set them up for success, not mockery – tennis racquet baseball where everyone gets a hit! Also, be careful with guys vs. girls events. Don’t want to embarrass or put kids on the spot. They shouldn’t get nervous before a skit out of fear they might get picked.
- In urban settings, a safe place also means protection and tight supervision. Put adults by the doors for security. Arrange transportation for kids needing to walk through uncomfortable neighborhoods. Just as we would hate for a kid to miss camp due to a lack of funds, we also would hate for a kid to miss club due to a lack of transportation.
- Controlled pick-ups are important to parents

Think Creatively
- Take risks and experiment – don’t be afraid to fail. If the kids know you care about them, they are very forgiving.
- With a potential of 7 years of involvement, it is OK to not give them everything in our arsenal their first year or two. What we do give them should be excellent, but doesn’t have to be exhaustive. We are finding that establishing some rites of passage help kids maximize their experience with us.