



CONFIRM NOT CONFORM

SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION TO *CONFIRM NOT CONFORM*

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SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION TO *CONFIRM NOT CONFORM*

THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

Confirm not Conform encourages youth to find the bedrock of their faith—the rock that will be a firm foundation throughout their lives.

We believe that youth can't get to that bedrock without testing their beliefs to see which ones are flimsy and which ones hold up. And youth cannot test their beliefs without first looking at what those beliefs are and where they came from.

Our goal is for youth to have an active faith, one that they build for themselves using all the tools at their disposal; not a passive faith, thrust upon them with no say in the matter—a faith that is easily lost and rarely missed. Although youth may be part of this program because of a parent's wish rather than their own desire, we do not want youth to merely attend, listen, and respond as they are expected to respond. To that end, *Confirm not Conform* doesn't provide answers but instead offers lots of space for exploration and questions.

Each session of *Confirm not Conform* requires youth to speak up, debate, and discover. Initially, youth may be reluctant—all too often the church has taught them that their job is to be quiet. They may even grow frustrated when sessions fail to provide them with the immediate information and “correct” answers they're used to writing down in school.

But we're not interested in selling youth pre-fab houses of faith. We're interested in teaching them how to build, how to test, how to bring all the gifts that God has given them to bear on the valiant work of living a life of faith. It may not look like the house we live in now, but with God's grace, it will weather the storm.

This first session focuses on helping youth begin to recognize their own beliefs and to choose to explore their own convictions.

Life Lessons

- **You have a voice**
- **You act from personal belief**

Life Skills

- **Taking responsibility for your choices**
- **Listening to yourself**

PRE-SESSION CHECKLIST

Before the day of the session

- Communicate with participants and parents the time and location of the first session.
- Review all the scripted and spoken parts of the session. Remember, the provided text is merely a suggestion— improvise, add to it, or change it as you see fit.
- Review the timeline for this session. The timeline is a suggestion only, and you should feel free to adapt it if more time is needed for an activity or a high-energy discussion.
- **Make sure you have the following on hand:**
 - Session 1 DVD
 - DVD copy of the film *The Matrix*
 - DVD player and television¹
 - One long sheet (6-8 feet) of 36” butcher paper
 - Heavy duty tape
 - Different color markers
 - White board and markers or chalkboard and chalk
 - 5 sheets of flip chart paper
 - Trash can or (if you’re feeling ambitious and the location permits this) a receptacle where you can burn the piece of butcher paper

On the day of the session

- **Set up the room [approximately 30 minutes]**
 - Check the space you’ll be using. Is there enough room for everyone? Enough chairs and floor space?
 - Set up the screen and DVD player (or computer and projector). Do a dry run with the AV equipment to ensure that it is working properly, the volume is appropriate, and the screen or projection will be able to be seen by participants. Have everything set up and turned on so that it will start easily.
 - Tape the sheet of butcher paper on one wall with the heading, “I have been told to believe...” on the top, and “teachers, parents, church, television, movies, government, news, [names of clergy, youth group leader, other examples]” on the bottom with lots of empty space in between.
 - Post the 5 sheets of flip chart paper on another wall with the following headings:
 - *Rules of the Road*
 - Conform
 - Conform

¹ You can also find the scene on YouTube and use a computer and projector to show it to the youth.

- Red Pill [with two subheadings underneath:]
 - Why take it
 - Why not take it
- Blue Pill [with two subheadings underneath:]
 - Why take it
 - Why not take it
- **Breathe deeply.**
 - Step away from all the preparations. Take a moment to do what you need to do to center yourself. Say a prayer, take a walk—what do you need to do to be present for this session?

Session timeline

-0:10 – 0:05	Gathering activity
0:05 – 0:15	Welcome and introductions
0:15 – 0:30	Rules of the Road
0:30 – 0:35	Opening ritual
0:35 – 0:40	Session 1 DVD – Welcome to <i>Confirm not Conform</i>
0:40 – 0:50	Discussion: Confirmation vs. Conformation
0:50 – 0:55	DVD – The Matrix
0:55 – 1:15	Discussion: Red or Blue?
1:15 – 1:20	Questions?
1:20 – 1:30	Closing prayer: Hand Meditation

SESSION 1

GATHERING

~15 MINUTES

- Welcome youth as they arrive.
- Hand youth markers as they arrive and invite them to write or draw on the butcher paper some examples of things they have been told to believe. (You might want to add a couple of examples yourself.)
- Give everyone a few minutes to write on the butcher paper as they arrive.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

~10 MINUTES

- At about 5 minutes past the planned start time, collect the markers and ask everyone to sit down where they can see the *Rules of the Road* flip chart paper and each other.
- Introduce yourself and anyone else who will be helping with the program.
- Take care of any housekeeping (where's the bathroom, etc.)
- Ask participants to introduce themselves.
 - If you wish, add an icebreaker/fun additional piece to the introduction, such as "If I could have a superpower, it would be..." etc. If you do this, be sure to model the introduction yourself.
 - Don't take long; just make sure everyone gets a chance to speak and knows who everyone is.

RULES OF THE ROAD

~15 MINUTES

- Introduce the Rules of the Road, using your words or these:

Welcome to the first session of the *Confirm not Conform* program—also known as *CnC*. *CnC* involves a lot of group discussions and projects. The success of the program will depend a lot on how well we can work together as a group. And so it's important that, right from the start, this group decides how it wants to work together.

- Ask the youth to take a moment, in silence², to think about:
 - How they would like to be treated when they are sharing an idea or giving a report
 - If they think it's fair for some people to participate a lot and for others to just watch
 - How they think people should behave during group discussions

² Whenever you have an activity that requires silence, bear in mind those in your group who may have ADHD or otherwise do not do well with sitting quietly. Always remember that the objective is not to have participants sit silently, but to give them an opportunity to think. Consider having scratch paper for doodling, or allow people to move while they think. Bear in mind strategies that take into account the needs of these particular youth as you come up with the Rules of the Road.

Some rules to suggest:

- We will be on time for each session.
- We will start and end the session on time.
- We will participate in discussions and risk offering our thoughts and ideas.
- We will treat the thoughts and ideas offered by others with respect.
- Only one person talks at a time.

- After giving them a moment to think about this, ask the group to offer their ideal *Rules of the Road*.
- Write down each rule they suggest on the white board or chalk board. Don't make edits at this point, even if rules are repetitive, confusing, or seem off-point.
- Write down other rules *you* think should be included and explain your reasons.
- Once the rough draft list is complete, go through the list with the group. For each rule, ask whether it:
 - A) Is a good rule and should stay
 - B) Doesn't seem necessary and can be erased
 - C) Is covered by another rule already approved
- Copy the rules the group voted to keep onto the sheet titled *Rules of the Road*. **Keep this sheet to post in the room for each Confirm not Conform session.**

OPENING RITUAL

~5 MINUTES

- Invite the youth to help you take down the butcher paper on which they have written what they have been told to believe. Place it on the floor, and stand around it.
- Ask them simply to look at the many things they have been told to believe. Allow a moment of silence.
- Say:
You have been told to believe a lot of things by a lot of people. In this confirmation program, our goal is for your belief to be yours because you have thought about it, wrestled with it, and made it your own.
- Allow a moment of silence. Then read the following passage of Scripture (1 Corinthians 13:11-12, NIV):
A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians: "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became [an adult], I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."
- Lead the youth in the following prayer:
O God who knows us fully, in all our doubts and all our certainties: help us to put away childish things, to reason with all our hearts and minds so that we may know ourselves and discover you, within our hearts and within one another, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- Inform them that they may now destroy the paper! (Have the trash can handy. If you are feeling ambitious, find someplace where you can safely burn the pieces. Fire is always exciting.)

The video for this session explains some of the thinking behind the program and challenges participants to speak up, get involved, and engage.

- Introduce the DVD, using your words or these:

This program, *Confirm not Conform*, is based on a program first developed by an Episcopal Church in Oakland, California. To tell you a little about it, let's hear from some of the people who first said confirmation could be different...

DISCUSSION – CONFIRMATION VS. CONFORMATION

~10 MINUTES

Use the discussion box below to help guide a brief conversation on conforming vs. confirming. This does not have to be a detailed conversation—10 minutes should be plenty. The goal is for youth to understand the difference between conforming to the ideas of others and confirming their own belief.

You will want to have a marker and the flip chart papers labeled “Conform” and “Confirm” available during the discussion.

Note: The format for discussion questions that you see below will be used throughout the *Confirm not Conform* program. We hope that the potential follow-up questions and notes will make it easier to guide and direct discussion, but always bear in mind that you are welcome to go literally outside the box if you think that will be the most effective way to have the conversation you need.

Discussion Question	Potential Follow-up Questions	Facilitator Notes
Who can tell me what <i>CnC</i> stands for?		This is just to wake them up and make sure they were paying attention. If no one answers, start with a leading, “Confirm...”
So, what does “conform” mean? How would you define it? What does “conforming” mean to you?	Is it following the rules? Or is it doing what other people think you should do? Or is it both of these? Or something else?	Write their answers down on the flip chart paper titled “Conform.” There can be more than one definition of the word and people may have different ideas. If no one has an answer, or you want them to explore the meaning more deeply, you might want to use the follow-up questions. Overall, what you will get will probably capture the idea that conforming is “doing or believing something a larger group—your peers, your school, your church—thinks you should do or believe.”

Can you give me some examples of how people conform?	How do you conform at school? At home? At church?	Some examples might include what they wear, table manners, coming to church at all. Keep this brief; the goal is not to have a gripe session, but to get the idea.
How many of you were forced to be here because your parents insisted that you come?	Is that conforming?	The goal is to get them to see how often they are under pressure to conform. Many will have heard from parents about not giving in to peer pressure, but they are under pressure to conform from other sources, positive as well as negative.
What are the advantages of conforming?	What do you get out of conforming? Does it make life easier or harder?	<p>This question is intended to challenge the sense that conformity is always negative.</p> <p>If they can't come up with anything, here are some advantages you can cite:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Following traffic laws keeps everyone safe. -Following a dress code or wearing a uniform means you don't have to choose what to wear or worry about what other people will think of your choices. Of course it also means you don't <u>get</u> to choose what to wear. <p>The point here is that conformity, although seen as a terrible thing, can actually be comfortable, safe, and useful at times while lack of conformity can be dangerous and open a person up to criticism. The tension between conformity/safety/lack of agency and non-conformity/danger/authenticity is something that will need to be navigated throughout their lives.</p>
So, what does it mean to "confirm" something? How would you define "confirming"?	Can you give an example of when you or someone you know "confirmed" something as you would define it?	<p>Write their answers down on the flip chart paper titled "Confirm."</p> <p>There can be more than one definition of the word and people may have different ideas. They may find it harder to define in words than to give an example of what confirming looks like in real life.</p> <p>If they can't come up with anything, here are some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Someone who wears something "because they like it" even though no one else does -Someone who votes for a person of a different political party because they think that person will do the best job <p>Overall, what you will get will probably suggest that confirming is "doing or believing something because you truly believe it, whether or not anyone else does."</p>

<p>Are the Rules of the Road we just created conforming or confirming?</p>	<p>Why do you think so?</p>	<p>The argument can be made for both, but they will probably see that the material came from the group itself and not outside forces, and the group <u>confirmed</u> its willingness to abide by the rules.</p> <p>You might also point out that, had you written the rules ahead of time and required them to agree to them, they would then have been conforming to your expectations rather than confirming these rules as a group.</p>
<p>How is confirming different from conforming?</p>		<p>Write down their answers on the “Confirm” flip chart (or “Conform,” if they talk about conforming). Some answers you might be looking for:</p> <p>Confirming: -you make the choice -you take responsibility for the choice -it’s what you think for yourself</p> <p>Conforming: -you do as you are told -you let someone else set the agenda -you are passive -it’s what other people think or decide</p>

Conclude the discussion by saying the following or (if you don’t want to *conform* to the script) say in your own words:

This program is about confirming, not conforming. One of the most important principles of *Confirm not Conform* is that if you choose to be confirmed it’s because *you* chose to do it—not me, not your parents, not anyone else.

Confirmation is a chance for you to stand up and say, “This is what I believe.” Our goal is to help you explore what you believe and support you in your discoveries. Our hope is for you to determine what you believe and why you believe it.

This is a chance for you to take responsibility for yourself and think for yourself. It’s an opportunity for you to make your own choices about how you want to live and who you want to be. This isn’t the first time in your life you will make choices about whether to confirm or conform, and it certainly won’t be the last. But often those times go unnoticed, so we want to make it very clear that this is one of those times.

Let’s take a look at an example of that kind of choice from the movie *The Matrix*.

DVD – THE MATRIX**~5 MINUTES**

Using a DVD of the movie or a YouTube clip, show the scene in *The Matrix* in which Neo is given the choice of taking a red pill or a blue pill. If you are using a DVD, the suggested clip runs from 26:20 – 29:45.

- Tell the youth this clip is a scene from a movie called *The Matrix*.³ Ask if anyone has seen it.
- Let them know they will only be seeing a couple of minutes from the movie, so it might be confusing for those who don't know the movie, but even this clip will give them all the information they need for the discussion to follow.
- Show the scene.

Once the clip is over, begin the discussion. Have a marker and the flip chart pages labeled “Red Pill” and “Blue Pill” available during the discussion.

DISCUSSION – RED OR BLUE?**~20 MINUTES**

Discussion Question	Potential Follow-Up Questions	Facilitator Notes
Would you have chosen to take the red pill or the blue pill?		Ask this question of each youth in turn. While it puts them on the spot, asking directly has benefits: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Everyone must participate; they are learning to speak up. 2) It reinforces the <i>Rules of the Road</i>. If each answer is heard respectfully, it shows the rules are real and quieter youth may become more vocal. If the Rules are not followed (for example, if someone is mocked for their answer), it provides an opportunity to cite the rules and curb the behavior.
Why would someone take the red pill?	What are the benefits of taking the red pill?	Write their answers in the “why take” column on the flip chart sheet labeled Red Pill.
Why would someone take the blue pill?	What are the benefits of taking the blue pill?	Write their answers in the “why take” column on the flip chart sheet labeled Blue Pill.

³ It is very hard for us to accept that *The Matrix* (1999) came out before some of these youth were born. So, yeah, it's an old movie. We still think it's the best clip to illustrate this concept.

What are the risks involved in taking the red pill?	What would you lose or give up if you take it? What's the danger?	Write their answers in the "Why not take it" column on the Red Pill sheet.
What are the risks involved in taking the blue pill?	What would you lose or give up if you take it? What's the danger?	Write their answers in the "Why not take it" column on the Blue Pill sheet.
From what you know of Jesus, what pill do you think he would have taken?	Why?	Although the chances are high that most people will answer that Jesus, who proclaimed that "the truth will set you free," would take the "blue pill," don't worry if anyone argues otherwise. This answer may tell you a lot about what they have heard about Jesus.
Jesus said, "The truth will set you free." What tools do you use to discover the truth?	For example, is it easier for you to find out the truth when you're by yourself or when you're in a group? When you're reading a book, listening to a teacher, or talking with friends? From personal experience or from wisdom that's been handed down?	<p>If you've got some budding relativists who tell you, "There's no such thing as absolute truth," you might want to ask them if they think that's true. And if so, <u>why</u> do they think that's true: did they hear that from someone or did they experience some truth that changed over time?</p> <p>The point of this question is to show them that they have resources that they use all the time to discern whether they think something is true or not. Perhaps they can learn to apply new or different strategies. Perhaps they can apply these same strategies to new or larger questions.</p>

- Conclude the discussion by saying the following or say in your own words:
 - The *Confirm not Conform* program will challenge you to look at things you've thought were true, really think about whether you believe that or not, and ask yourself why you believe it. It will expose you to new ideas, new ways of thinking, new experiences, and new questions along the way. In the end, though, it's all up to you. What you gain from this will depend on how open you are to it—it will depend on what pill you're willing to take.

QUESTIONS

~5 MINUTES

- Ask youth if, based on what they've heard so far, they have any questions about the program or about this session.
 - If a question can be answered in the time left in the session, do so.
 - If a longer discussion is required, and only one person needs the answer, ask him/her to stay afterwards to discuss it.
 - If you don't have an answer, write down the question and tell the youth you'll have an answer for them by the next time you meet. **Before the next session, find out the answer.**
 - If you need more time for an answer, either take the time if the question seems important to answer in the moment, or save it for a follow-up email or another time.

HAND MEDITATION

~10 MINUTES

Before you leave, take a few minutes for some kind of prayer or meditation. You may wish to go to another space, such as the sanctuary, or simply stay where you are. Feel free to use the Hand Meditation, below; or if there is another prayer or tradition that you use, you can incorporate it here.

- Let youth know that this is the last activity and that they will be leaving in (relative) quiet after the meditation.
- Thank them for their participation in the first session.
- Let them know the time and location of your next session. If you know the topic of the next session, give them an idea of what they will be talking about.
- Invite the youth to sit or stand where they are comfortable and where they can hear the instructions that accompany the meditation. Then begin the meditation outlined on the following pages.

Photos	General direction	Detailed direction	Comments
	<p>“Close your eyes. Clench your hands together into a fist.”</p>	<p>“What is it you are holding on to? Is there something that is knotting you up inside? Is there something you don’t want to let go of? Is there something you are struggling with? Is there something you don’t want anyone to see? Is there something you don’t want God to see? Whatever it is, notice that it is there. Notice what it feels like, without judgment or blame, simply observing and allowing the knowledge of what you are holding to come to the surface. And if you are not sure what it is, that is fine. Simply notice whatever is there.”</p>	<p>There’s no need to hurry through this script. Allow silence between each of the questions. Allow each of the gestures time to breathe.</p>
	<p>“Now, if you wish, open your hands.”</p>	<p>“It may be that you don’t feel ready to do that, and that’s O.K. You can go through this whole meditation with your fist clenched. But know that the invitation is there for you to open your hands, whenever you are ready. When you have unclenched your fist, notice what that feels like. Does it feel freeing? Does it feel scary? Does it feel like nothing is there? What is in your hand now?”</p>	<p>In this movement of the hand meditation we recognize that in God’s eyes, whatever is hidden in our clenched fist is already known and seen and loved. At the same time, we recognize that this is a gift to be received willingly, not something to be forced on participants. As long as participants are respectful of others, they may partake of as much or as little of the hand meditation as they wish.</p>

	<p>“Push whatever your hand is holding toward God.”</p>	<p>“Whatever was worrying you or scaring you or tying you up in knots, whatever you were carrying with you, whatever you were afraid to let other people see, push it toward God and let God catch it. Let God take whatever it was from you. Let your hands be empty.”</p>	<p>Allow time for this image to sink in.</p>
	<p>“Now, hold your open hand in front of you with the palm facing upwards.”</p>	<p>“Now that your hands are empty, allow God to put a gift into your hands. This may be a gift of encouragement. It may be a challenge or an instruction. It may be a new perspective. It may be a message of love. Maybe you don’t know what it is or you’re not sure anything is there, and that’s O.K. But whatever it is that God wants to give you, allow God to place it in your hand. What does it feel like? And how does it make you feel? Take a few moments and simply notice whatever is going on for you.”</p>	<p>This gesture can be frustrating for those youth who may not sense or feel anything. Although you will want to allow some time for youth to experience whatever gift God wants to give them, you do not need to stay at this step until everyone has had a revelation of some kind.</p>

	<p>“Press the gift that God is giving you into your heart.”</p>	<p>“See this gift entering into your body, traveling through your bloodstream. What does it feel like? Allow God’s gift to spread through you. If you don’t feel like you have received a gift, or are not sure if you want to receive the gift, you can keep standing with your hands open, or, if you wish, press your open hand to your heart. It may be that you discover something in that movement that you didn’t find in your open hand.”</p>	<p>This gesture allows the youth to be active recipients of God’s gift to them. Again, allow for differences of experience and keep the pace slow and meditative, but not lugubrious.</p>
	<p>“Finally, hold out your hands to offer your thanks to God.”</p>	<p>“Whether it is for a gift you have received this evening, or for anything else, use this gesture to offer your thanks to God for anything you wish. When you have offered whatever thanks you wish, please leave quietly. Go with God.”</p>	<p>The gesture of thanks is important, even if there are no revelations. There is no formal unpacking of the experience at this point.</p>

Before you leave, find a place to keep the “Rules of the Road” sheet so that it’s available for every *Confirm not Conform* session. You can use that trash can for the rest of the flip chart pages.

POST-SESSION REVIEW

At some point before your next session, meet as a team (if there is a team) or schedule some time for yourself and spend a few minutes reviewing what went well and what could be changed. Some things to consider:

- Is this a chatty group or do they need to be drawn out? Did discussions run longer or shorter than expected?
- Given what you saw in this first session, are there any *Rules of the Road* that will need special attention?
- How did the space work for your group? Was it too big or too small? How might you need to adjust the environment to accommodate this group?
- How did the group react to the Hand Meditation (if you used that)? Is that a prayer form you would like to use again?
- If you were doing this session again, what would you do differently?
- What did you learn from leading this session?
- What affected you personally? What questions did this session raise for you? How will you address them?

Be sure to take a look at the next session. Figure out:

- What needs to happen by then?
- What materials do you need to gather or purchase?
- Who will do these things?
- When will they be done?

And congratulations! You've finished your first session!