

GYC 101

The old adage is true - well begun is half done. Starting out as a new GYC is a little time consuming if you've got a lot of youth in the group, but it will pay off in saved time forever. The key is to set up the communication piece first, fill it in and get it working, and then you can do all the fun stuff.

STEP 1: SET UP THE COMMUNICATION OUTLETS

Parents report that email is their preferred method of communication, but there are a number of ways to communicate with people in today's tech-savvy world, and most of them work well. It's best to have more than just one because you are more likely to reach everyone. Look at the following and decide if they are right for you:

A. Email

As the GYC, you can get an alias email address ("giftedyouth@bestmensa.org") so that you don't have to give your personal email address away everywhere if you don't want to. Just contact your LocSec to find out how to do that. Every group has a different person in charge of it. More on this in Step 2!

B. Phone

Although time-consuming, the old-fashioned phone is another way to reach out to parents, especially if you have a small group of YMs. If your cell phone has unlimited texting, that can be very useful, so be sure to track which of your parents likes texting if this works for you.

C. Mail

Expensive and time-consuming, the best way to use mail is through the Local Group newsletter. However, it is useful sometimes to send a special invitation through the mail, and kids can get very excited to receive "real" mail. If you do send something through the regular mail, you may want to use postcards to save money on postage.

D. Facebook

Many Local Groups' GYCs find Facebook a great way to connect with families. The privacy settings should be set carefully to make sure that the privacy of Young Mensans is protected. Facebook is a great way to create conversation within the group. Here are some tips:

- It's best to create a group, rather than a page because it makes it far more likely that all of your posts will be seen (that's just the way Facebook works). It's very simple to do (see <https://www.facebook.com/help/167970719931213/> for instructions).
- This is something a parent can do for you, even if they are not a Mensan, because you won't be sharing contact information for YMs.
- See some examples here (you will need to request to join – they keep them private):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/113887191983766/> (Denver)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/RVAGiftedKids/> (Richmond)

E. Text (Remind)

Remind allows you to send text reminders to people who sign up. It's simple and free. You don't need to send the messages from your phone – you can log in to the website and do it. Find out more at <https://www.remind.com>

F. Website

You have two options here: you can build your own or you can piggyback on the Local Group's website.

If you decide to have a Gifted Youth section on your Local Group's website, here are some tips:

- Make friends with the webmaster! The key to a valuable section is to keep it updated, so you'll be asking for them fairly often. Develop a good rapport with the webmaster, so that he/she wants to help you.
- Be clear about your mission. Do you want to be a portal to other sites with great information? Do you want to have a lot of content on your site without having to click on links? Do you want to be location-specific? Do you want to be mostly about events/happenings? Decide what your purpose is, and that will help you select content.
- Look around at other Local Group's sites to get a feel for what you want/don't want. No sense re-inventing the wheel-website. Find some examples here:

<http://www.cnj.us.mensa.org/children.html> (Central New Jersey)

http://chicago.us.mensa.org/kids/gifted_kids.php (Chicago)

<http://www.denver.us.mensa.org/gifted.php> (Denver)

http://www.oregon.us.mensa.org/gifted_children/ (Oregon)

http://wny.us.mensa.org/giftedyouth_about.php (Western New York)

If you decide to build your own website, you can find free sites that have “drag and drop” simple site building tools (like <http://www.weebly.com/>), or you can get pretty sophisticated and host your own domain and use Wordpress or another program to build it. [Blogger](#) is somewhere in between. Here is an example of a site built from scratch:

<http://kids.indymensa.org/wp/> (Central Indiana)

D. Twitter

Although less common, Twitter is a great, easy way to communicate with those who use it. If you use Twitter, consider creating an account for your Gifted Youth group. This is another terrific way to use parent volunteers.

If you have a Local Group parent (or even just a member who likes Twitter) who uses Twitter, ask if he/she would be interested in running the Twitter account for the Gifted Youth. One of the benefits is that you can “follow” local attractions, museums, newspapers, etc., and keep your parents up to date on happenings in your area very quickly.



You can view a Twitter tutorial here <http://www.vimm.com/how-to-set-up-a-twitter-account/> .

STEP 2: SET UP THE DATABASE

The first month after your appointment, you will begin receiving the Young Mensan report. You need to complete the Member Data Agreement if you want to receive it (you can find it at www.us.mensa.org/mda).

When you receive it, do the following:

- Look for missing information. If an email address is missing, call and ask for it.
- If a phone number is missing, email and ask. If there is no phone and no email or can't reach them, mail a letter or card (see Step 3 below).
- Create an Excel spreadsheet or Word table with the information. Add a notes section. This takes time, particularly if you have a large group, but it will pay off in the long run.
- Copy the email addresses out of this database and create an email group for them.
- Every month, compare the list you receive to the list you created. Members who have joined in the last month will be marked "new" to the left. Add in the new members to your database and email group.
- Look carefully at the May report so you remove any members who did not renew or who turned 18 and are no longer Young Mensans.

STEP 3: REACH OUT

Once you've gotten all of your communication streams selected and set up, it's time to reach out to the YMs and their families. An initial letter (sent as an email or a real letter) is a great way to introduce yourself, share your communication streams, and set the tone and expectation they can have for the Gifted Youth program. Even if you intend to do no more than pass on information from the national office, let them know they can come to you for that information. It may be useful to include a version of the initial letter in the Local Group newsletter as well, as you are also trying to find the children of Mensans. If you email, you should send each initial email individually, so that servers don't think you're spam. After that, you can send to the whole group at one time (use "bcc" rather than "cc" to protect the email addresses).

Here's an example of an initial letter:

Dear _____,

My name is _____, and I'm a new Gifted Youth Coordinator for _____ Mensa. I hope to make _____ Mensa a great place for gifted youth. I would love to find out what method of communication works best for you, and I've set up some ways to connect with our Local Group's Gifted Youth program.

CONNECT!

- We have a website at _____ (or, we have a Gifted Youth section of the Local Group website at _____)
- We have an email address: _____
- Follow us on Twitter @_____
- We have a Facebook Group we'd love for you to join at _____. It's hidden for privacy, so you need this link to find us. Teens 13 and over are welcome to join this group also.

Please connect with us in the best way(s) for you. We will make sure that all important information goes out all ways.

Please make sure that your email is happy with our email address, so that it doesn't think we're spam! I'm sending this email to everyone personally to make sure that a mass email doesn't get seen as junk, but in the future, I will send to the whole group at one time.

We plan to have one event per quarter, so be sure to stay tuned to find out our latest plan. Additionally, I will keep you informed of Local Group activities that are particularly appropriate for kids. OR Although we not likely have actual events due to scheduling and distance constraints, I will help you keep current on what is being offered to Young Mensans from the national office, as well as local happenings that may be great for bright young minds.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Here are some stats you might find interesting:

Number of youth in our Local Group: ____

Number ages 7 – 10: ____

Number ages 11 – 14: ____

Number ages 15 – 17: ____

The rest are under the age of ____!

Best wishes, and I look forward to meeting you!

STEP 4: Gather Your Posse.

Who are your helpers? It's so much harder by yourself. Knowing those in the Local Group who have youth at home (regardless of the child's member status), as well as the Young Mensans will tap you in to a group of interested people. Don't forget grandparents! If you want to find a lot of gifted children, just ask a grandparent – they think all of their grandchildren are gifted, and among Mensans, they probably are. Don't overlook them as possible helpers for you.

Remember that Local Groups may have more than one GYC. Duties can be split by geographical area, by duty (one gathers resources, one organizes events/activities, etc.), or by time (one does one month's newsletter and activity, the other does the next). Knowing this may help in recruiting a friend to volunteer with you. Often it is easier when they know they will not be the sole oracle of youth truth!

Secondly, non-Mensan parents can help in many ways, although they may not serve as GYC's. Many groups are using parent volunteers very effectively.

Here are the different roles for adults who are interested in serving youth.

1. The Local Secretary Position vis-à-vis youth

Local Secretaries have two choices when it comes to connection with youth in the local group.

The first choice is that they may simply be background checked and receive the YM report each month. There is a box on the application that indicates that the person is a LocSec. I'm attaching

that form here in case you are interested. This does not allow LocSecs to engage with youth – only to know who they are. Many LocSecs want this, as it lets them know how many youth they have and where they are so they can understand the level of need for GYC(s).

The second choice is that they may serve as a GYC or Assistant GYC. This allows them to contact youth directly, host events and be involved in the youth program. Although the LocSecs are supposed to fill in for any vacant position, that requires additional steps if a LocSec wishes to be identified as the GYC.

To do that, they must do these additional steps:

- a) View the youth protection video at <http://bit.ly/YMsafety> and email back that you did (I would recommend that all LocSecs watch this to better understand youth protection guidelines)
- b) have RVC Approval
- c) obtain Gifted Youth Committee Chair Approval (this is done on our end after the Background Check is completed)

A LocSec who has taken the additional steps and does not wish to serve as GYC will be identified as an Assistant GYC in our database. It is how we distinguish those who are simply background checked versus those who are authorized to contact youth and supervise events with them. Each LocSec is welcome to identify him/herself as such in the Local Group or not. That is for our purposes in making sure we are following the youth protection protocols we have set. This approval is good for three years, at which time the background check must be repeated.

2. The GYC/Assistant GYC role in the local group

Every group may have 2 background checks performed at Mensa's expense for every 20 youth in the Local Group every three years. This includes background checks done for the LocSec. A group may have as many adults background checked as it wishes, and the Local Group will simply pay for those in excess of the 2 per 20 described above. Currently, a background check costs \$25 if the person has not lived in a municipality that requires an additional check. The cost can be as high as \$68.

In the local group, there are two roles for members of Mensa who desire to serve youth in the group: Gifted Youth Coordinator and Assistant Gifted Youth Coordinator. A group may have more than one GYC serving simultaneously. A group may have as many Assistant GYCs as it wishes (please note the guideline in the sentence above about the cost of background checks for them).

The Gifted Youth Coordinator(s) serve(s) under the direction and with the approval of the Local Secretary. A change of Local Secretary does not necessitate a change or new approval for a currently serving GYC unless the LocSec wishes to appoint a new GYC.

GYCs and Assistant GYCs receive the Young Mensan report. The member data agreement is required.

GYCs are asked to commit to serve for three years, to agree to regular contact, and occasional events. Needs and options for local groups will vary due to distances and unique needs. All GYCs should respond to parent inquiries in a timely fashion, stay abreast of benefits and services Mensa offers and convey those to Young Mensans, and supply information to the local group newsletter regarding current opportunities (contests, etc.) for youth. GYCs may have Assistant GYCs perform any of these tasks. Parent volunteers are also available (see #3 below).

To help GYCs in this role, the National Gifted Youth Committee, Mensa and the Foundation provide the following resources:

- GYC-announce and GYC-talk lists that share information
- News & Notes: a monthly column with content for the newsletter
- A section of Young Mensan Magazine called YM Happenings that highlights what different local groups are doing with youth
- A Facebook group just for GYCs and GY Committee Members
- A spreadsheet of ideas GYCs can add to and search
- The Foundation supplies annual matching grants of up to \$200 for youth events
- Every new GYC receives a comprehensive email containing "GYC 101" with initial steps
- The Young Mensan Report is sent monthly
- The Officers Sharehouse contains valuable information and all documents (photo release, permission forms, etc.) that GYCs might need

3. The parent volunteer role

In order to allow local groups to better serve Young Mensans, non-Mensan parents of current Young Mensan members may serve as volunteers in the youth programs of Mensa.

If a local group has a currently serving Gifted Youth Coordinator, that GYC will supervise the volunteer's efforts. In the event that a local group has no Gifted Youth Coordinator, parents may assist the Local Secretary. Volunteers must have Local Secretary approval.

This is not a position or office and has no title associated with it. Parents wishing to serve as volunteers must undergo the same background check protocol that exists for Gifted Youth Coordinators (as detailed above). Non-Mensan parents will receive a monthly Young Mensan report. They may be listed on the local group's website as parent volunteers upon approval.

Parent volunteers may host and organize events, assist with sharing information, as well perform other tasks currently performed by Gifted Youth Coordinators. Parents serve with the understanding that they assist the elected and appointed officers.

A parent wishing to serve as a volunteer should contact the Gifted Youth Coordinator, if applicable, and the Local Secretary to express a desire to serve. The Local Secretary should notify the national office at GiftedYouth@americanmensa.org that the parent has approval to serve as a volunteer.

The parent should then complete and return the background check form.

Once the background check is complete and clear, the parent will be notified that he/she is approved as a volunteer. This approval must be renewed every three years, and will not be renewed once the parent no longer has children under the age of 18 who are current members of Mensa.

Volunteers will be added to the Gifted Youth Announce and Talk e-lists, and may join the GYC Facebook group.

Step 5: Find Ideas

There is a spreadsheet any GYC can add to with ideas for events. You can find it at <http://bit.ly/gyc-ideas>.

Step 6: Get Money