

## How To Call A Young Person To Their Rite Of Passage

At Cascadia Quest, we believe that a meaningful, effective rite of passage is critical for the healthy maturation of the individual and for the health of the family, community, and society. A healthy family and community require the engagement of their members. We are requesting that you engage with the young people in your life to *call* them to their rite of passage, or initiation into adulthood.

In the past, when elders or others saw a child going through the changes of adolescence, they stepped up to bring the child to his or her rite of passage. There was no question about it. The child was told or simply taken away. Everyone knew it would happen. Everyone knew it was necessary for that child's well-being and healthy transition into adulthood. We believe that a call, more like telling than inviting, is a way that we can approximate that level of importance in our modern context. The following are suggested steps to call a young person in your life to their rite of passage into adulthood.

1. Make a list of the young people in your life who are making or have recently made the transition to adolescence. Some signs of readiness are:

- Physical changes, onset of or recently moved through puberty
- Much greater self-awareness
- Much greater pushing and testing of boundaries
- Individuating. Claiming of selfhood.
- Looking for their individual self within their social scene (dying hair, radical shifts in clothing, trying on personalities, etc.)
- Interest in romantic relationships
- Figuring out their social scene without parents
- Figuring out personal interests separate from parental interests
- Seeking risk and adventure

See the Youth Rites of Passage page at [CascadiaQuest.org](http://CascadiaQuest.org) for more signs of readiness.

2. Internally, recognize your importance to each young person, their family, and your community in making this calling.
3. Review the talking points below as well as other relevant information to prepare. The Cascadia Quest website has videos and written information that may be helpful.
4. Make an appointment to have a conversation with the young person's parents. Preferably, this will be an in-person meeting.
5. Have a frank conversation with their parents. Be authentic and direct. Express your care in a heartfelt way. For example:  
"I see that your son/daughter is becoming a strong young man/woman. S/He has so many gifts and talents. I really care about them and their future as an adult. I know a rite of passage is pivotal to that change happening in a good way and I believe they are ready to do one. I am willing to help."
6. If parents are supportive, then prepare and deliver a calling letter to the teen. You can amend the one below or write your own. It is best to have a printed, physical letter in an envelope that you deliver by hand, rather than an electronic communication that may get skimmed or ignored. Include a "reply by" date. One week is usually plenty. If you are able to offer support such as a financial contribution, preparation assistance, gear to lend or

gift, etc., state that clearly in the letter. It is important not to underestimate just how impactful a gesture of tangible support can be.

7. Have a follow-up conversation with the young person. Remember you are *calling* them to their rite of passage. They don't have to be enthusiastic; they only need to be willing to go along. Of course, some will be highly enthusiastic or deeply touched by the fact that someone sees them and cares about them. The nature of the conversation should be direct and supportive. It should provide witness of their changes as well as their strengths. It should encourage them to do the rite of passage for their transition to healthy adulthood.

For example:

“I see the changes you are going through. I am proud of the young man/woman you are becoming. I really want to support you in becoming a strong and empowered adult. I believe this rite of passage will do that. I know it may be difficult or scary, but I believe you have what it takes to make it through.”

8. If they accept, (e.g., they display a willingness to go along, or merely say “well, I guess I’ll do it”) then go back to their parents and get the enrollment process started. Be sure to give any support you offered in a timely manner.
9. If they say no, then thank them sincerely. Assure them that whether they do the rite of passage or not, you are there for them.

*“Life doesn’t let children choose adolescence. Community shouldn’t let them refuse initiation.”*

–Tim Corcoran, Twin Eagles Wilderness School

### Talking Points For Conversations With Parents and Youth

- Traditional cultures across the world and throughout time have done rites of passage to temper their children into healthy adults and community members.
- At adolescence, there exists a deeply embedded need for challenge. This challenge serves young people to gain self-knowledge and to prove themselves to themselves. If we do not provide an appropriate yet sufficiently risky challenge, young people will often seek it out. These attempts to self-initiate can have harsh or devastating results.
- Initiation must come from adults—hopefully related and initiated themselves—and *not* the parents. The initiation or rite of passage is about separating from the parent. The adolescent is leaving behind their relationship of daughter/son “the child” to return as daughter/son “the adult.”
- This rite of passage into *young adulthood* means that their feet are now firmly at the beginning of the path of adulthood. *Full adulthood* is not much farther away, and it is critical that it is clear to the young person and parents that their sights are now focused in that direction, not childhood. Though the gifts of childhood remain, child-like behavior and psychology are no longer appropriate.
- The rite of passage is as much for the parents as for the youth, perhaps more.
- Initiation into adulthood is a major life event, similar in importance to a marriage. It will take time, forethought, effort, and money.

- It is important for a young person to face their deep fears (cold, aloneness, the fragility of life, etc.). By moving through a substantial challenge such as that provided the rite of passage, they will find previously untapped strengths and inner resources.
- It is important for the parents to recognize that the young person is changing. They are no longer a child. They *will* become an adult. The rite of passage helps that change happen in a way that is clear and conscious for them, their family and community.
- Young people (and their parents) need confident, competent, caring adults other than their parents such as mentors especially at this time of life.
- The window when a rite of passage into adulthood is appropriate the first time is brief. Depending on the maturity of the young person, as early as 13 and late as 17 or possibly more. The benefits are life-long. The searching for that missed rite of passage can also be life-long. If it is at all possible, take the opportunity to provide one when that window of opportunity is open.

### Considerations

- Be authentic
- Speak from your heart.
- Be curious.
- Listen well.
- Don't try to "sell" it. Make an honest and sincere offering.
- This does involve money. However, the money is not the issue. The rite of passage is. If a strong *calling* is there, the money will follow.
- Cascadia Quest can provide fundraising support and has limited scholarships.

*Use the below letter as a template to call a young person in your life to their rite of passage. Personalize it. Put it on your own letterhead. Instances of "child" or "adult" can be made gender specific if appropriate. There is tremendous power and pride in moving from "girl" to "young woman" or "boy" to "young man." Your offer of tangible help and support is a critical display of how important they are to you, and your belief in the rite of passage. There are a few instances of italicized instructions within the letter. Follow them, then delete the instructions.*

### Sample Calling Letter to a Youth

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Wilderness is calling you. The desert is calling you. And I am calling you.

I am calling you to your rite of passage into young adulthood. We—your family, friends, and parents—have been witnessing you grow and change. We see that you are no longer a child. You have many strengths, talents and gifts such as \_\_\_\_\_. We see you are ready to step into the next phase of your life as a young adult. We care about you and wish for you to step into your adulthood in the best way possible.

This call may come as a surprise, but that is how life is—we are challenged, confronted, called to step into the unknown when we don't expect it. This rite of passage will help you meet those challenges and step into something much bigger in your life. It will help you to step more fully into your life as a young adult and for the community to acknowledge your new status.

Rites of passage are as ancient as the first humans. They are ancient, necessary, and live deep inside of us. Humans have always had a way of challenging a young person and acknowledging their transition into adulthood in a strong way. It's not just for the young person, but also for the family, community, and society.

Seeking out adventure or even danger, pushing boundaries, feeling that there is more to life, longing to know who you are, pushing away from your parents, being interested in sex and relationships, wanting more freedoms and responsibilities, pushing yourself beyond what you have previously done—these are all signs of your change. Have you felt any of these? It is the ancient call. A rite of passage is the way to meet that call.

When that call is not met, the result can be disappointing and destructive later in life. Perhaps you've seen that already in some adults.

I know that the rite of passage is challenging. It may even be difficult or scary at times. I believe that you've got what it takes to prevail. I also know that the rite of passage is a fun adventure. I've seen the huge, knowing smiles of past participants when they return, saying things like, "It's the most awesome thing I've ever done in my life." I want that for you!

The rite of passage I am calling you to is Cascadia Quest's (*choose one*) Young Women's Rite of Passage/Young Men's Rite of Passage in the Central Oregon desert. It will begin with a cord-cutting ceremony with your parents to officially acknowledge the end of childhood and your transition into young adulthood. Then you'll be in the desert with the group of initiates and guides for nine days, including two days of solo time. You can look at the enclosed flyer or CascadiaQuest.org for more information.

I have already spoken to your parents and they are ready to support you on this journey. I am willing to support you with (*choose one or some*) a contribution of \$\_\_\_\_ toward your registration, preparation assistance, lending you a backpack or necessary camping gear/something else\_\_\_\_\_.

So now we need to know that you are ready to answer this call. Take some time to sit outside by yourself without any distractions. Feel into it. Pay attention to Nature. Are you ready to be challenged and to have it acknowledged that you are not a kid anymore and that you are beginning young adulthood? Are you feeling the call?

I will contact you in one week for your answer. You can contact me sooner with questions or your response.

Trust yourself and listen well!

Best wishes,