

Small Group Leader

Training - Session #1

Thank you for committing your time and effort to being a small group leader. You will find that there are few ministries as personally rewarding as being a small group leader. These training videos are being provided Online to allow you to watch them at a time that is convenient for you. There will also be a training session for all group leaders before the rotation starts. Check with Kenneth to find out the time of the next session. Please be sure you have watched all the training videos before the live training session.

Session #1 is the longest of the sessions and contains a general overview of how we want our small groups to work, what we hope to accomplish through our groups, and what the responsibilities of the group leader are. The following training sessions are all shorter and focus in on just one or two aspects at a time. If at any time you have questions or concerns regarding this material please contact Kenneth.

1. Why small groups?
 - a. Back to our roots - The earliest Christians (for over 300 years) met primarily in each others homes.
 - b. It wasn't until the time of Emperor Constantine that everything changed and Christianity became the state religion of Rome.
2. Some things that small groups (or home groups) do well that "big church" doesn't do as well:
 - c. Discipleship - the purposeful mentoring of one Christian by another. Think of it as a spiritual apprenticeship.
 - d. Fellowship - the deeper life sharing that is part of being the family of God (*Koinonia*).
 - e. Evangelism - embracing the process of cultivating, planting and then reaping the Spirit's work in a person's life.
 - f. Spiritual Giftedness - providing opportunity for all Christians to use the gifts which the Spirit has given to them.
 - g. Greater accountability between members - which strengthens the Christians.

How a small group meeting should be organized

- Meeting should last 1 to 1.5 hours.
- Begin with 10-15 minutes of snacks and sharing (How's your week been?)
- 10-15 minutes of worship and devotion (singing, etc.) End this time with a prayer. This sets the mood for everything that follows.
- 30-40 minutes of discussion (application of the week's Sunday morning sermon).
 - During this time a special devotional time should be provided for the younger children in another room. This should be led by two group members each week, all group members should take turns with the children. That material will be provided.
 - The discussion time for adults will begin with the sharing of a passage or two out of the sermon and some discussion questions.

- Once the discussion gets going, as long as it is spiritually focused and is about the lives of the members then let the conversation go.
- Never be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- End this time with a prayer over the concerns and the struggles that have been brought up.

Special Tip Embrace the silence! Don't answer your own questions, make your group answer, even if you have to wait what feels like an eternity. If you lose this battle of the wills it will reduce the quality of the conversation in your group. If you're consistent with this it will make the conversation that much better.

Some basic information about small groups and how they will be organized.

- 10 to 12 people (not including small children).
- Mixed up as much as possible (different ages, families, etc.).
- Groups run September through May.
- Groups will re-shuffle each Summer.
- Groups should meet in homes whenever possible.
- Groups do not have to meet in the leader's home.
- Groups can rotate between homes.
- Teens should be included with the adults.
- Groups can meet any time, though Sunday evening is being set aside as a good opportunity.
- Group leaders will meet once a month to support and discussion.

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Training - Session #2

In this session we are going to look at ways to create a healthy environment for your small group. For a small group to truly be successful it needs a healthy environment in which to live and operate. This is one of the primary reasons we strongly urge all the groups, whenever possible to meet in homes instead of at the church building, or even restaurants or any other public places.

Some key aspects of a healthy small group environment:

- Confidentiality. What gets said in the small group stays in the small group. This can not be over-stressed. Gossip can sink a small group faster than anything else. In order to help emphasize this point you will be given a confidentiality agreement for each member of the group the week of your first meeting. You need to ask all the members of the group to sign it. Allow them to keep it - we're not looking at it as a legal contract, but a social contract between the members of the group. A small group can not thrive where trust doesn't exist, and it's the responsibility of every member of the group to protect the trust and confidentiality of the group.
- A place without judgment. Everyone in the group needs to understand you are all on the same side, even when you might disagree on issues and ideas. Everyone wants everyone else to succeed. When someone shares a struggle or a problem the immediate response should be that of support and concern, never judgment.
- A place of open communication. The small group needs to be a place where anything can be said or shared and where every opinion is welcome to the discussion. This doesn't mean every opinion or comment is correct, but that every members opinions and comments will be valued.
- A place where no-one is dominate. Everyone should have equal opportunity to talk and share their ideas and opinions. No one in the group has the right to dominate the discussion or dictate what the ultimate answer to the discussion is. Not even ministers or elders. In small groups we are all children of the Father together, equal at the foot of the cross. The small group should strive to be the perfect representation of Paul's vision of the Christian Kingdom: neither rich nor poor, Jew nor gentile, male nor female, etc.
- A place of encouragement and acceptance. We all struggle in different ways, but when we struggle together, accepting and encouraging one another we all find strength and hope.

Creating a healthy small group environment can be challenging, but with consistent effort it is practically guaranteed.

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Training - Session #3

In this session we are going to look at some tips on how to cultivate healthy discussion in your small group. Since the center of the small group meeting revolves around discussion, the better the discussion the stronger the small group will end up. Below are 10 tips for cultivating healthy discussion in your group.

1. Know your material. In this case your material is your discussion questions. Read over them ahead of time and decide what you think the question is asking. Seeming confused or lost will only make your group more hesitant to engage.
2. Limit your explanations and input. Your job is to get everyone else talking. Don't use your position to dominate the discussion yourself.
3. Use inclusive language like "we," "us," and "our," whenever possible.
4. Avoid generalizations. When a member makes a generalized comment ask for specifics. It's hard to apply generalizations, so specific examples are always better.
5. When the discussion is working, let it work. Don't feel pressure to jump in just because you are the group leader. Once the discussion gets going feel free to only intercede when necessary.
6. Be willing to admit your own ignorance or confusion. Part of getting people to open up is assuring them that it's safe. When the leader feels safe to admit struggles and short comings then everyone else is given permission to do the same.
7. Be an "active listener," especially with members that are more introverted or shy. This means, when they do make a comment, respond in some positive way to it. It can be as easy as summarizing their point. For example, "What I hear you saying is..."
8. Don't be afraid to ask members directly for their input and opinion. If they don't want to talk, that's okay, but come back to them again later in the meeting and give them another chance.
9. Cut off arguments before they start (which is very rare). Simply validate both opinions then move to a new question.
10. Embrace the silence.

Fostering conversation is a skill, not a talent. that means it can be learned, strengthened and perfected with nothing but practice and hard work. Before you know it you will be an expert facilitator.

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Training - Session #4

For a small group to thrive there needs to be a strong level of intimacy and closeness between the members. When members feel close to each other they are more willing to share, they feel a sense of responsibility for other members. In short, the closer we are the easier it is to love each other the way Jesus loves us. As a group leader there are some things you can do to promote this closeness and give more opportunity for the intimacy to grow.

1. Don't miss. If you are not together you can't grow closer. You need to stress the need for regular attendance to small groups. One of the things that can wreck it the quickest is if half the group isn't there half the time. Stress from the very beginning that everyone's presence is needed. When someone misses call them and encourage them for the next week. This is called "positive peer pressure." In fact, get multiple members to call when someone is absent. Also, don't cancel a small group meeting unless absolutely necessary.
2. Don't forget the snacks! Psychologically there is something about eating together that draws people closer. Eating snacks before a meeting is also a great ice-breaker. Remember, it doesn't need to be fancy or expensive. Just a few cookies, tea, cool-aid and some water and you are good to go.
3. Occasionally eat a bigger meal together. Make it special. Let everyone provide part of the meal and share the meal like family. In many parts of the world sharing your food is equal to calling someone family. Eating in the home together is best, but meeting at a restaurant can't be good too.
4. Don't skip the worship time in your small group. As you worship you open your hearts to the Spirit of our Father, which in turn opens us up to the people around us.
5. Make the prayer journal a serious part of your time. Each group should keep a prayer journal of requests and answers. Use the journal to check back up on previous requests. Encourage members to keep their own copy of the prayer journal so that they can pray for each other daily.
6. Acknowledge special days and accomplishments. It can be as simple as remembering birthdays and anniversaries. Also try to acknowledge special events and accomplishments in each other's lives.

Growing together takes time, but if you try to follow these tips you will find it will start to happen sooner rather than later, and the bonds of family will grow stronger in your small group than you previously thought possible.