



SMALL GROUPS

KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

Small groups is a great time to get to know your students individually. You will have the opportunity to understand where they are spiritually and, over time, learn how to encourage growth.

GUIDE THE DISCUSSION


As we mentioned in the video, our goal is to facilitate rather than teach during small groups. You will want to stick with asking questions and letting them answer as much as possible. The best questions to ask them are ones that they cannot give a yes or no answer to!

HOW SMALL GROUPS WORK

- You will be placed as a co-leader into a small group of students. Over time, you will naturally build relationships with students and they will become your own small group. You may also be asked to be intentional about building a relationship with students that are in need of a leader but have not developed a relationship with any leader on their own.
 - Once you have identified your small group of students, be sure to get their contact information as well as their parent's. The best way to do this is to ask the students for it directly. This signals to them that you really want to be a part of their life outside of youth group. However, if you ever need help, reach out to the youth director.
 - Invest in your students every week! Just like Jesus invested in and spent time with his 12 disciples, we want you to treat your small group of students the same. Spend time with them, walk alongside of them, and reach out to them.
 - In addition to spending time with your students, you will also facilitate discussions after the message to help them process what they learned so that they can apply it to their daily lives.
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IMPORTANT GUIDELINES

You may consider implementing as you facilitate your group discussion.

- Be flexible and let them laugh.
 - Mix up your discussion
 - Let there be silence and don't talk too much!
 - Make sure all students are sharing
 - Affirm all responses-right or wrong.
 - Set goals and ground rules.
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WHY GUIDELINES ARE IMPORTANT

Be flexible and let them laugh.

Whoever is teaching that night will provide group questions. If the conversation goes in a different direction that's okay! But be sure to assess the needs of the group. If this new direction of conversation is compelling to the students, the students are engaged, and it is an important topic to discuss then you should go with it! Oftentimes, these are the best conversations because it's what the students actually *want* to talk about. Although you may not have prepared, asked God to help guide you as you facilitate the new direction of conversation.

If, however, you find that only one student is engaged, or it feels like a random tangent, gently bring the discussion back to the planned goals. One way to do this is to say something like "hey, let's meet up this week and we can talk about that more. I want to make sure that everyone gets a chance to share their input." But I also want to give you the freedom to allow some laughter in the discussion as it helps create community and serves as a good ice-breaker. After all, God created us with a sense of humor, we want to model that to students! So if someone wants to share a funny story about their week, make some room for it in your small group time. Just keep it from getting too inappropriate!

Mix up your discussion


Group discussions do not have to always be people sitting in a circle, talking. For instance, you can give students a list of questions and have them write in their answers first, and then come together to share (this is a great option if you have a group of introverted students. It's easier to look down at a paper and read something you wrote!) You can also ask a silly icebreaker question to get everyone comfortable and talking and then go into deeper discussion.

You can also play a game that incorporates discussion. For example: One of the best discussions I had with a group was playing the concentric circle game. It only requires three different sizes of rope (making them into small, medium, and large circles on the floor) and candy. As group members throw their candy into one of the rope circles, they share something about themselves or the topic at hand. The smaller the circle the candy lands on, the more personal the sharing.

Go somewhere or do something! A great group discussion can take place while playing a game of basketball or just walking around a park. Don't feel confined to sitting in a room. Oftentimes, discussions in these more natural settings can lead to members feeling more comfortable, which in turn might allow for more sharing.

Let there be silence and don't talk too much!

I know we talked about this on the video but it is so important, I just want to say it again. Allowing silence in group conversation creates a space where the quiet kids can share and students can think. After you throw out a question allow time for them to answer. DON'T fill in silence with YOU



talking. Remember: small groups are for the students, not a chance for you to process or share your views. After a student shares, thank them and then allow for silence again! Sometimes students will piggyback on what another student said. Limit you're talking to asking questions or sharing minimal input. Think of it this way: students should be talking 85% of the time, leaders should be sharing only 15% of the time.

Make sure all students are sharing

Be aware of who shares and who doesn't and work at making it so that all students have the chance to share. Seek out the quieter kids and keep the talkers from monopolizing the conversation. If you notice that a student hasn't shared, approach them after group ends and ask them about it. If you put them on the spot in front of their peers during discussion it may feel attacking. (Didn't you hate it when teachers did that to you, anyway?) But, approaching them one on one after group ends and saying, "hey I notice you haven't really shared much in group. I just wanted to check in and see if everything was ok." Lets them know you care. Then, let them respond. If they are afraid of sharing, challenge them. Ask them if it would be ok for you to call them out in group from time to time. You can encourage them by telling them that they have a lot to offer and the rest of the group could really learn from them.

Affirm all responses-right or wrong.

Students will have varying opinions, make sure not to take one side or another. Students can easily pick up on this. Remind yourself that you aren't trying to get students to respond a certain way. You are trying to get students to respond *authentically*. You promote authenticity by affirming authentic, honest remarks from the students even if they are not the answer we were expecting. We don't just want church answers, we want real answers, especially when it comes to personal questions. If you only affirm the answers you were looking for kids will answer what they think they should say instead of what they really think. And remember that you are a facilitator not the teacher. Let kids voice opinions without being corrected. If a kid throws out an opinion that seems theologically inaccurate ask, "where do you see that in the bible, or what does everyone else think about that?" And, one of the best statements you can make in response to a thought or question is, "I don't know the answer to that, but I will look into that and we can talk about it next week."

Set goals and ground rules.

These goals are for you; you don't need to share these with students. Spend time in prayer and set goals for where you want the group to go. If there are students who never share, set your goal for them to share. It is, start where you are at and set where you want the group to go. Celebrate wins when a goal comes to fruition. If you have chosen to share your goals with your fellow leaders, share your wins with them, too! It's awesome when you see God moving your group and growing it deeper and we want to rejoice with you.

Sometimes our students are just not focused. If you begin having issues or anticipate that you might, it might be a good idea to develop ground rules with your students. You can create these on your own but it might be beneficial to have your small group create them together. Ultimately, you want to make sure everyone feels safe and confident to share. Your rules can revolve around keeping what is discussed within the group or helping everyone feel respected by not talking over one another or it



can even include not having your cell phone out if they are a distraction for your group. Establishing ground rules and then reviewing them as needed will aid in producing meaningful discussions.

DISCUSSION

Which guidelines from above do you think you might have to work on? For example: I can talk a lot, I am not flexible in the moment, I'm not good at discipline, etc.

Which guidelines from above do you think you are going to excel at?

Is there anything you are nervous about thinking about having your own small group?

What would you ideally want the culture of your small group to be like?

