

Small Group Leaders: Building Basics for Community Building

Both personal growth and community building occur when a small group functions successfully. The group should be an environment of acceptance, love, and trust where members feel a part of each other and can minister to each other as the body of Christ. The New Testament term for this is “koinonia.” The group should facilitate building covenant relationships and guard against promoting individualism. A group does not become a group merely by sitting down together. It takes time and transparency and the work of the Holy Spirit for “koinonia” to happen. The small group leader plays an important part in helping create the climate for the best results to occur.

Keep these guidelines in mind as you lead a small group:

1. Be strategic on how your small group is arranged. A small circle with everyone facing each other is typically best. Everyone should be able to see and hear each other. In a given situation, it may also be necessary to move your group to a location where distractions do not occur.
2. Group members should never be forced to participate in an activity! The group leader should encourage total participation, but with the attitude that anyone might choose to refrain from sharing or participating in any question or activity that appears too uncomfortable. It can be helpful to verbalize this at the onset of establishing a small group.
3. Unless otherwise agreed upon, any information shared during any small group time should be considered confidential. Any time someone shares personal information, it should be treated with great care.
4. The small group leader is an important role model for the members. Active participation and willingness to share first if needed may help reduce members' initial inhibitions and thus encourage all to participate.
5. The small group leader should be aware that the discussion questions and activities are primarily a tool for building community and may need to be abandoned should some greater need arise during the small group time. Stay prayerfully alert for those times when it is more important to deal with someone's questions or concerns than to finish the “assignment.”
6. The small group leader should always maintain a vigilant awareness of the development of the members and of the group community itself. Be sensitive to issues regarding trust, team building, confidentiality, risk-taking, control, or aloofness among the members.
7. The small group leader should step up as needed to prevent members from monopolizing time, interrupting others, giving unsolicited advice, casting judgment, being a difficult personality, or just not being good listeners. While this seems obvious, articulating these guidelines is helpful to include early on, but will most likely need to be reinforced, and time may be even needed to speak individually to someone who is not “getting it.”
8. The small group leader should set the tone for cooperation regarding time and attitude of the given assignments or activities. Get “on board” even if something appears “silly.” It is probably intentional for the big picture!
9. Pray for your group faithfully. Expect God to do a work with your group and enjoy being part of a process that glorifies God as its ultimate goal.

—Teri Anderson