

TIPS FOR LEADING  
A SMALL GROUP



Whether you are an experienced small-group leader or venturing into new territory, here are a few tips to point you toward success.

**Define the purpose of your group.** In church circles, “small group” means different things to different people. Some groups are primarily get-to-know-each-other gatherings. Some focus on serious Bible teaching, some on a more interactive exploration of scripture. Others are accountability groups where participants should expect to get down and personal. Groups may gather people around a common interest or cause. All of these options have relational and ministry value. Clarify the purpose of your particular group so people know what to expect when they join.

**Get to know your group members.** In the vast majority of cases, people are in a small group because they want to be there. Why? Spend some time exploring what motivates the women in your group to be there. Some have deep Bible background, and others are just getting to know Jesus. Some women thrive on talking, while others like to listen. Some are ready to be friends immediately, but others need some time to feel secure. The spectrum is wide, so find out where the people in your group would put themselves, and be sensitive as you leave room for everyone to grow.

**Set the parameters.** A group of about eight to twelve is conducive to good conversation and building relationships. However, if your group’s purpose is accountability, you will want a smaller, more intimate group. Once you decide when to meet, respect the schedule. Making a lot of changes in meeting dates can discourage participation because it’s too unpredictable. Women are busy people, especially if they have families. Respect their time. Start when you say you plan to start, and finish when you said you would finish. When the group gets into a groove, you’ll discover what level of flexibility the group can tolerate.

**Make room for all personalities.** Leaders tend to lead in the style that is most comfortable to them. Teachers tend to teach according to their own

learning style. Recognize this going in, and intentionally try to make room for personalities different from your own. Be careful not to show preference to people who jump in with an answer to every question you ask or with whom you seem to click more naturally.

**Encourage participation.** Personality affects participation, especially if your group is discussion based. Some people are quick to talk while others may need some time to process before speaking. Avoid putting people on the spot in ways that make them uncomfortable, but make a point to invite participation. Changes in body language may indicate that someone is ready to speak, but a quiet person likely won't interrupt a more vocal person. As the leader, you can turn to someone and say, "I wonder what you think, Lindsay," or, "Marianne, you're looking thoughtful." Another way to encourage participation from quieter group members is to ask them to read aloud a Bible passage or other material you're using.

**Be prepared.** While it's true that some people are gifted to facilitate a discussion and have the background and experience to be spontaneous, most of us need to prepare. If you're studying a book or a Bible passage, be sure to study ahead of time. If you're leading a discussion, take a few minutes to plan some questions that will prompt discussion. Your preparation will show, and seeing that the leader is putting something into the group will encourage group members to do the same.