

# Basic Small Group Do's and Don'ts

## **Don't ...be afraid of silence**

Let the students sit for a moment and think. Most of the time, when we as leaders stay quiet, students will eventually speak up and say things that they never would have if we were talking. Wait 'em out—it's worth it!

## **Do ...value student input**

Do whatever it takes to affirm the comments of a student's input, but do not be artificial with your praise. Be delicate with answers that are clearly wrong (you probably don't want to put a big red "idiot" stamp on their forehead). Do not feel like you have to finish, complete, or correct a student's answer. Whatever you choose to say, do it with a lot of grace and love.

## **Don't ...feel like you have to know all the answers**

Reality check: you're human! You aren't all-knowing, but many students will think otherwise. It's good for your students to see that you have limitations. When you really don't know, say so. Then, let the students know that you will either find the answer, seek for the answer with them, or have one of them find the answer and bring it back to the group. Whatever option you choose, seek the answer out yourself and learn a little more than you knew before!

## **Don't ...read questions off the leader's guide**

Understand the questions and be prepared to ask them in your own words. Listen carefully to the Holy Spirit in your preparation and even on the spot—He may have a better question to ask or another way to ask it. Bottom line: speak as one who cares about what you're asking!

## **Don't ...talk more than the students**

Ask questions to generate discussion, to clarify students' answers, or to explore their answers further. Allow multiple students to respond, even if the first person gets the "right" answer. The more the students do the talking in healthy, guided ways—the more fruitful the small group will become.

## **Do ...ask students if they have questions**

Encourage students to deal with the material on their own terms. Create a climate where people feel free to ask hard questions. Encourage other students to give answers and feel free to challenge students do some digging without always providing some kind of answer for them.

## **Do ...echo some responses to your questions**

If a student's answer or comment is long-winded or unclear, repeat it back (summarize it) for clarity. Clarifying signals to the student that you are listening and keeps the rest of the group, as well as the conversation, focused.

### **Don't ...move to a new question too quickly**

After a student answers a question, ask, "Would anyone like to add to that?" or "Does everyone agree/disagree with that?" Again, wait 'em out a bit.

### **Do ...keep the group focused and balanced**

Rabbit trails are fun to travel but often lead far away from more meaningful roads. Outside of the Holy Spirit's leading, do your best to stay on subject. Occasionally, something difficult (like a personal or family issue/crisis) or something needing clarified (a larger context to a story or Bible passage) takes you away. That's fine. Just make sure good leadership isn't giving way to poor time management. No need to be uptight or anxious about getting off track. When this happens, lovingly lead the group back as needed. One good way to regroup is to direct questions to certain students. Often, the quietest ones have the most to say. A well-placed question or simply and lovingly admitting, "Here we go again down that bunny trail!" often does the trick in getting things back on track.

### **Do ...require and maintain confidentiality**

Students share more deeply when they sense they are safe to do so. Talk about what is appropriate to share among the group and what should be shared privately with adult leaders (such as: intense personal issues, sin confessions that might cause others to stumble, and issues involving others that might be considered hearsay). Don't keep potentially dangerous information to yourself (e.g. abuse, suicide, destructive intentions, etc.) and *never* promise a student that you will be totally confidential. Tell students that they need to trust that you will do the right thing with the information they share with you.

### **Don't... be discouraged**

Groups can be very awkward and messy. Relationships and groups are somewhat organic and take on a life of their own. You can't *make* people grow and connect. God will orchestrate what needs to happen. Some groups connect right away, some take a while before they connect, and others never really do connect. You're job is to simply provide space for things to grow and allow God to do the growing. "Good" nights and "bad" nights are all a part of the process. Just smile and keep watering!

### **Do ...rejoice in the opportunity**

Small groups provide the opportunity for authentic, meaningful, and deepening relationships with God and others to occur. All that is required of you is to be uniquely yourself, love those in your small group faithfully, and give God thanks for whatever happens.