

Leading a Small Group

CORE COMPETENCIES

essential tools
for youth workers

Key Idea:

*When you increase your skills as a group leader, you increase the likelihood that teens will form a **genuine community** and discover an **authentic faith**.*

6 Essentials

Facilitate a Conversation

You're not a Sunday School teacher, you're a small group leader.

- A teacher's end goal is knowledge
- An SGL's end goal is relationship
- A teacher transmits information
- An SGL helps process information

Ideas:

Help them find their voice

- Connect relationally in advance of your small group experience
- Provide a safe way to begin talking in the group
 - Icebreaker questions (have these ready in advance)
 - "Storyteller's ball" ([find it here](#))
- Don't start with group discussion all the time.
 - Provide paper and pens and utilize personal reflection time, followed by each person getting a chance to share what they wrote (helps introverts process and get a chance to speak)

Imaginary conversations

- Before you facilitate a real conversation, facilitate an imaginary one
- Prepare in advance but stay flexible in the moment



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Know the distractions

- Prepare the physical space in advance and know which elements are likely to distract your group (e.g. some groups really can't handle pillows)
- Idea: Small Group in the Dark

Designate who can respond to each question

- Use a small ball, or other item, to determine who gets to talk.
- Utilize a deck of cards. E.g. "Only the clubs can answer this next question."

Ask Good Questions

Jesus asked 307 questions. He got asked 183 different questions. He only answered three directly.

You will have far more impact with a good question than with a good answer.

Ideas:

Know where you're going

- Don't read questions off the page. Paraphrase and memorize the most important questions in advance. Nothing feels more uninspired, and more like a classroom, than trying to make it through a worksheet.

Change where you're going

- Allow yourself the flexibility to change course if a useful rabbit trail comes up.
- Respond to what is happening in the moment rather than simply getting through a list of questions

Keep the ball in their court

- Rather than having a series of 1:1 conversations between teens and the leader, try to keep the conversation happening among the group
- Utilize *Group Engagement Questions*
 - E.g. What do the rest of you think about that? Has anyone else experienced something like that? What have the rest of you heard about that?

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Engage their imaginations

- Ask questions that allow for visualized responses
- E.g. "Jesus is in the house"
 - Ask teens to imagine a house and that Jesus is sitting in a specific place in that house. Ask questions like, "Where in this place do you find yourself? On the road, walking up the driveway, sitting on the deck, in the next room, or sitting right beside him? If you are farther away, what is it that keeps you from entering the room with Jesus?"
- Use photos and images to help teens reflect and process.
 - E.g. "Every Picture Tells a Story" ([find it here](#)).

Role Plays and Debates

- Ask your group to play out certain scenarios (e.g. having a conversation about faith with someone who doesn't follow Jesus).
- Try a debate format where members are assigned to defend certain viewpoints.

Rely on the Work of the Holy Spirit

What you do as a leader matters, but you can't do everything.

The most important work that happens in your group will be accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

Ideas:

Pray for your group

- Set an alarm and pray for them every week. Pray that the Spirit accomplishes his vision for your group and for each person's life.
- Keep a prayer notebook and jot down areas to pray for every time after you meet with your group.

Connect to the bigger story

- Your small group experience is only a small part of a much bigger story that God is writing for each of your group members.
- Connect them to other positive influences besides yourself. Expand their circle (e.g. introduce them to new people on a Sunday morning, help them find a spot to volunteer, connect them to the church).

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Introduce spiritual disciplines

- Practise different styles of connecting with God together with your group (e.g. Lectio Divina, drawing, prayer walks, fasting, memorization, journaling, etc.).
- Teach them to be “self-feeders”.

Protect the Space

“When it is safe, you can say anything” – [Crucial Conversations](#)

Ideas:

Help teens feel known

- 5 Questions teens are asking - from [It's Personal](#)
 - Do you know my name?
 - Do you know what matters to me?
 - Do you know where I live?
 - Do you know what I've done?
 - Do you know what I can do?
- Help them to know themselves in the process. E.g. take a personality test together as a group (try www.16personalities.com)
- Always invite your group to events. Never assume everyone knows where they're welcome (especially after they've missed a few group experiences).

Connect them to each other

- Recognize divisions in the group and work towards unity (e.g. different schools, different interests, different ages, etc.).
- Help everyone discover the common interests in the group. Turn it into a game.
 - Put 5 min on a timer and challenge them to make as long a list as possible of everything they have in common (when in doubt, play an epic fail video compilation – loving those is something everyone has in common) – from [The Art of Group Talk](#)
- Give them a mission. Nothing forms community faster than giving them a common goal to work towards.

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Create (and enforce) clear expectations

- Clear guidelines and structure minimizes feelings of chaos and ambiguity, which eliminates stress and unnecessary question marks around what will happen in the group setting.
- Create guidelines together as a group so that everyone feels like they own them.
- Don't just focus on rules and limits, but also on the vision of what your group could become. Help them see where you're going and why that's important.
 - E.g. pray with your group for God to accomplish that vision.
- Know in advance how you will handle discipline. Know your ministry's policies and guidelines around this.

Embrace Questions

- Teens need a place to be honest about faith. Doubts and questions are not a danger to faith formation, they are a part of the process.
- Create tension and don't always provide solutions.
- Ideas from [*Sticky Faith*](#)
 - Bible Fight Club. One youth leader created times when teens could launch the hardest questions, attacks, and criticisms they could against the Bible and faith, without any negative repercussions, and with no expectation that the leaders would have the right responses.
 - Honesty box. Provide a way for teens to anonymously ask tough questions.

Be a safe person

- To create a safe place, you have to be a safe person. Safe people:
 - Are not easily threatened or offended.
 - Curb their criticism and negativity.
 - Affirm others regularly.

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Trust the Process

Relationship and spiritual formation take time. Be realistic and respect the process.

Ideas:

Show up weekly

- Be consistent. Prove to your group that they can rely on you.

Show up randomly

- Show up outside of programming times.
 - Send messages, go to school events, go for ice cream, etc.

Move them out

- Help them to transition to what's next (e.g. grad, college, career, church)
- Ignore programmatic finish lines and stay connected (e.g. be intentional about reaching out after grade 12 grad).
- Recruit your replacement if you need to step down.

Help People See Jesus More Clearly

Your teens get a front row seat to what God is doing in your life and they want to know, "Is this real for you?"

Ideas:

Inspire their faith by your example

- Ideas from [Lead Small](#)
 - Live in community. Show your teens the importance of connecting with the family of God and discovering together what it means to follow Jesus
 - Set priorities. Let them see your spiritual and relational priorities.
 - Be real. It's ok to let them know you're still in process.

Love your few

- Affirm, encourage, and speak words of life into each of your teens.
- Model a loving presence and create a culture of love within your group.