

Leading a Small Group

Art or Science? Leading Effective Small Groups

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Overview

Small group leadership is a key part of most youth ministry roles—but, we often feel unprepared for the task. Leading a small group is not easy, but everyone can learn to do it well. We won’t guarantee that your middle school boys will love every small group, but this session will introduce the basic ideas and skills necessary for leading a small group

Big Ideas We Hope To Get Across

- Small group leadership is a vital part of a caring adult’s job description
- Effective small group leaders have particular attributes and skills
- Leading small groups is not easy, but everyone can learn to do it well.

Introduction

5 minutes

Say something like: “Today’s topic is on leading small groups. All of us have probably been involved in small groups of one kind or another. Quickly—let’s list some small groups we have been a part of.”

Have people just quickly share some of the different types of small groups they have been a part of. (Ex: Sunday School, Bible Study, Work Group, etc.) Note the variety—from study groups to support groups to work groups to influence groups.

“There are many different kinds of small groups—and today, we will not be looking at a lot of theory about small groups. Whether you do this every week, or you are giving leadership to a particular event like a mission trip—leading a small group is a part of every adult leader’s role. We want to help you with the practical realities of being the adult leader when your young people sit around for conversations. It can be challenging, can’t it? Let’s pray as we begin together.”

Open in Prayer

Small Group Experiences

10-15 minutes

Now, let’s think about your experience in the small groups you listed. Get in groups of 4-6.

Leader Note: Ask the small groups to discuss these questions:

To keep the groups on task, ask one question at a time, give time for discussion, and then move the small groups on to the next question.

1. Describe a positive experience you had in a small group. What was it like?
What made the group effective?
2. Now, describe a negative experience you had in a small group....what was THAT like?
What was the difference?
3. As you think about leading a small group with teenagers—what are some of your fears or concerns about that?

Leader Note: *Have the groups quickly share some of their positive and negative experiences with the large group. You will find a wide variety and you can note that as you listen. You may want to record the elements that made the group either effective or ineffective on a whiteboard.*

Also—be sure to record their fears or concerns when they think about leading a group. We will get to them again after the video

Video Segment: Tiger

5-7 minutes

Introduce the video: “Now, let’s watch a short video by Tiger McLuen to see what he says about this issue of leading small groups.”

Highlights of the video:

- Small Groups are places for real connection, not just information
- There are different reasons for small groups—be clear about yours.
- 10 tips for leading small groups. See handout

Response and Reflections:

10-15 minutes

In their small groups of 4-6, have the participants discuss the video:

- Any thoughts or reactions to what Tiger said?
 - What are some key ideas from the video that you remember?

After a few minutes, bring the small groups back to the large group and ask the small groups to share a few of their responses before transitioning to the next section. Note any themes you hear being shared.

Ten Tips for Leading Small Groups

10 minutes

Pass out the “10 Tips for Leading a Small Group” handout.

Leader Note: Use the Leader’s Guide for the “10 Tips” handout as a guide to add to the key ideas the group has shared. Supplement each tip with personal examples if possible.

Discuss with the group:

- How might you apply these tips to the groups you are or will be leading?
- How do these help you think about the different aspects of leading a group?

This may take a little time if the group is really engaged—or it might go quickly. Don’t panic with either one. It may focus on the Ten Tips...or they may have other thoughts from the video.

Fears and Concerns

10 minutes

Return to your small groups to discuss the following:

- Remember your fears and concerns about leading a small group that we talked about before the video? How did the video help you with these concerns, shed light on some of them—or cause you more concern?
- On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most comfortable), how would you rate yourself when it comes to leading a small group bible study—versus a discussion that does not include the bible? Why?
- What makes bible study difficult for you as a leader?

After a few minutes, bring the small groups back to the large group and facilitate a follow up discussion to these questions.

First— look at the list of fears and concerns shared by the leaders.

- Are there any you would add? Note any themes you see.
- Encourage them to pray about these and think about ways they can address these.
- Think about one thing you will do to change or improve in the area of leading a small group.

Secondly—focus on the issue of leading a study that includes the bible.

- What about Bible Study makes adults nervous?
- Do they see it as any harder/easier than leading a “topical” discussion or a non-bible related discussion?

If possible, you can reference the session on “How Lutherans Read the Bible” and encourage some areas of self growth.

Pass out Appendix A, B, C and D. These are additional resources to equip participants to lead small groups.

Practice in Small Groups

30 minutes

If there is time (try to make time!) have participants return to their small groups to practice what we have talked about.

Use Appendix A as a guide to practice facilitating discussion.

- Assign each participant a question (#1 - #6) to lead. Give participants 2-3 minutes to prepare.
- Have one person in each small group serve as a timekeeper. Give each participant 5-6 minutes to lead, more or less depending on the number of participants and available time.
- Use Ephesians 2: 14-20 or other passage you have selected.

After all participants have led, discuss in your small group:

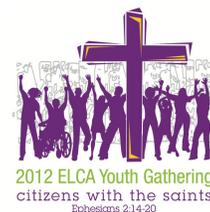
- How hard/easy was it to lead?
- Go around the circle. Try to give feedback to each participant: one thing they did well, and one thing they could work on.

Conclusion:

5 minutes

Bring participants back to the large group. End your session with a time of prayer for the small groups that will happen in the upcoming events. Highlight how important the relationships are that can develop because teenagers are sharing faith conversations in caring small groups. Pray for the leaders who will facilitate these conversations.

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10 Tips for Leading a Small Group: Leader's Guide

Tiger McLuen

1. Remember: Atmosphere is crucial to any small group.

It is the subjective FEELING that matters to most people. This is the key.

Do I feel welcomed and noticed? Do people care about me? Does the leader notice if I am here or not? Are my ideas welcomed or rejected?

2. Relationships are more important than content.

At the end of the day—groups are about the people who come. Don't let the worksheet, content or curriculum get in the way of this crucial fact. Affirm them, encourage them and look them in the eye whenever they speak.

3. Always remember the purpose.

Small groups are not just about running a meeting—they are about the reason for the group. Remind yourself that some groups are there primarily to accomplish a TASK—to get something done. Other groups are there to study CONTENT. Some groups exist primarily for RELATIONSHIPS. While others are there to INFLUENCE each other (AA groups for example). A leader has to know why this group exists. Be sure it matches the group's goal.

4. Preparation is essential.

Spontaneity works best after you are prepared. Know your goals and content. Have a plan for your time together.

5. Be graceful.

Tread lightly on people and ideas they share. Honor their involvement

6. Discipline and control is a key issue in leading a small group.

If you aren't in charge—someone else is. You are a facilitator, but your role includes keeping the group focused. Youth "check out" of groups with behavior issues or participants who dominate the discussion. Affirm in public—Discipline in private.

7. Don't be afraid of silence.

Rephrase the question if necessary, but don't panic with silence. We often answer our own questions rather than give the kids time to think. Smile and wait.

8. Routines and rituals are a part of a good small group.

Develop patterns in your group—to start and stop for example. Ways to share. Be sure to include prayer as one of the rituals of your group.

9. Work hard to create good questions.

Encourage discussion rather than simply fill in the blank. Use open-ended questions if possible. Vary how you ask them. Prepare your questions. Ask follow-up questions for clarification and to go deeper.

10. The small group leader is a big factor. You Matter.

You set the tone and atmosphere. Be affirming.

Handout: 10 Tips for Leading a Small Group

Tiger McLuen

- 1. Remember: Atmosphere is crucial to any small group.**
- 2. Relationships are more important than content.**
- 3. Always remember the purpose.**
 - a. Small groups are not just about running a meeting--they are about the reason for the group.
- 4. Preparation is essential.**
 - a. Spontaneity works best after you are prepared
- 5. Be graceful.**
 - a. Tread lightly on people and ideas they share. Honor their involvement.
- 6. Discipline and control is a key issue in leading a small group.**
 - a. If you aren't in charge—someone else is.
- 7. Don't be afraid of silence.**
 - a. Rephrase the question if necessary, but don't panic with silence.
- 8. Routines and rituals are a part of a good small group.**
 - a. Develop patterns.
 - b. Include prayer in the rituals of your group
- 9. Work hard to create good questions.**
 - a. Encourage discussion rather than simply fill in the blank.
- 10. The small group leader is a big factor.**
 - a. You Matter.

Appendix A: Bible Study Questions

These discovery questions will help guide your discussion through a passage of Scripture. They are designed to let everyone participate and help set a relational tone to the group. These help set up the idea that everyone can share instead of going back to the leader teaching all the time.

1. What did you like best in this passage we looked at?
 - a. What did you find encouraging?
 - b. What did you find helpful?
 - c. What was the best part (of this story) for you?
2. What did you like least?
 - a. What was disturbing?
 - b. What was surprising or hard to follow?
3. What did you not understand?
 - a. Discuss anything in which you find confusing.
 - b. Is there anything you would like to know more about?
 - c. Which part puzzles you?
4. What did you learn about God?
 - a. How does this change or add to your picture of God?
 - b. What impression of God do you get from God in this reading?
5. What do you personally need to do about it?
 - a. If this is true, what is your next move?
 - b. Is there something you have learned about yourself that needs to change?
 - c. What are some practical ways in which you can respond?
6. Pick a phrase or verse to take with you and think about this week.
 - a. What nugget of truth will you take with you this week?
 - b. Which part of this story will make a difference and how?
 - c. What do you most need to remember and how will you apply it?

Appendix B: Creative Ice Breakers

1. What room was your favorite as a kid?
2. Describe your relationship with your parents. What about your family do you like? What parts are hard?
3. What is your favorite way of spending your spare time?
4. Describe a time when you have felt close to God?
5. What makes you feel loved? What makes you happy? What can make you cry?
6. What characteristic in a person irritates you and why?
7. What kind of vehicle would you like to drive if cost were not a factor?
8. What would you like to be said at your funeral?
9. What were your best and worst moments this week?
10. What would be an ideal vacation?
11. Share a story from elementary school that helps us know you a little better.
12. What is a favorite family vacation memory?
13. Where would you like to vacation?
14. Tell us one thing about you that we may not know.
15. What is something you like to watch on TV.

Appendix C: Connectors to the World--Application Questions

These applications questions will help you think with your students about the key part of any study group—to begin to ask how it applies into the real world. Students need to know more than the content; they need to wonder about its application to their lives. You can help in the process.

Remember, there are different applications you might find. For example;

Applying a Truth.

When the Bible says something like “God is with you always” or when Jesus says “I and the Father are one”, that opens up this category.

1. What does this truth mean to me right now?
2. How would this affect my life if I REALLY believed it?
3. What would be different if I acted as if this were true?

Applying an Instruction.

In many places, the Bible simply states an instruction. Application of these can lead to great discussions. Things like: Let the children come to me. Take care of widows. Feed the hungry. Watch your tongue.

1. How could I respond to this instruction?
2. What would that look like in my life?
3. Why do I resist simply acting this out?

Applying a Promise.

The Bible is full of promises. When we come across one, what can we do to apply it?

1. What part of this statement/promise makes sense to you?
2. Summarize what you hear in this promise?
3. How can that apply to your life right now?

Applying an Example.

There are so many examples of faith in the Bible. Don't just have them read the information about a person and their situation—get students to wonder how that act of faith or person of character can speak to them today.

1. What did you see in this person or experience?
2. What would a similar situation look like today?
3. How could you live out your faith in a similar way?
4. What gets in the way of you being that kind of God follower?

Some of the questions in Appendix A will also work to application.

Appendix D: An Outline

Introduction: Something to capture their attention and point to the subject.

How will you bring them in?

The Main Thing: The key idea you want to discuss. The main topic/section of scripture.

What will you cover?

Remember—don't try to cover EVERYTHING. Focus on some key points.

Application: That transition to their real world.

How will you help them apply it?