



Tips for Facilitating Small Groups

Potential problematic “types” - Recognize seven types of individuals or groups and know how to deal with them in a positive, life-giving manner.

1. The dominant member
2. The eager Christian who “shares” too much
3. The quiet member
4. The quiet group
5. The chaotic group
6. The person who concentrates on personal problems
7. The person who becomes the group “project”

1. The dominant member

- Try not to make eye contact with the person
- Sit next to them rather than opposite
- Politely interrupt the person with statements such as: “What do the rest of you think?” “Let’s hear from some other people too.”
- Look directly at and gesture toward the other guests
- Talk to them privately about giving others a chance to share
- Be affirming when talking with them

2. The eager Christian who “shares” too much

- Question their answers by saying:
“That’s a great answer for a Christian, but what would we say to someone who didn’t believe the Bible?”
- Clarify texts and language used
- Express the fears/reactions other group members may be experiencing
- Talk to them privately after the session (or by phone) and affirm their knowledge
- Explain the Alpha philosophy and ask them to help draw people out

3. The quiet member

- Talk to them at meal times. Ask,
“What do you hope to get out of the course?” “What sorts of questions do you have?” “Are we meeting your expectations?”
- Make use of a comment or question they told you at supper and ask them for permission to repeat it in the group discussion
- Affirm them and their contributions

4. The quiet group

- Be proactive
- Get them to write questions down. (Take home a question sheet)
Have an icebreaker every week
- Don’t be afraid of silence
- Don’t fill silence with your voice then they’ll always stay quiet!
- Ask if your question makes sense
- Avoid right/wrong questions or “threatening” questions
- Ask questions to which you don’t know the answer

- Ask questions that allow or encourage “negative” responses: “What do you find the hardest about praying?”
“What is the thing you fear most about sharing your faith?”

5. The chaotic group

- Remind the group it is best to have only one conversation going at a time
- Address topics that are raised, but don’t stay off the topic too long
- Suggest some reading and come back to the subject over the next meal
- Be aware of topics coming up later in the course
- Continue having fun, don’t clamp down on the group too much
- Aim to ensure a degree of helpful discussion and information

6. The person who concentrates on personal problems

- Be interested, sympathize and listen to them, but after awhile steer the conversation back to the topic or toward others
- Offer to meet, talk or pray with them during the week
- Direct them to counseling or an appropriate small group
- Don’t sit opposite them (see #1)

7. The person who becomes the group “project”

- Deflect attention from the person to their question/issue. Rephrase if necessary
- Find ways to affirm his/her contributions: don’t let them always get “corrected” or “straightened out”
- Direct questions to other people
- Take the more enthusiastic Christians in the group aside and explain the situation and the Alpha philosophy of no pressure

Remember to...

- Affirm each person and their contribution to the small group time, even if you do not agree with their position. Listening with acceptance to each person and what they have to say is the most effective way to help a guest feel safe and welcome.
- Come to the Prayer and Administration meetings at the start of each Alpha evening. It is important time for worship, prayer, connecting with the overall vision and adequate preparation for the evening ahead.
- Pray throughout the week for your guests, Alpha co-workers and the Alpha Ministry.
- Avoid pressuring a guest to speak, pray or directly asking them to participate.
- Steer clear of slandering any opinion, religious view or person.
- Be okay with a few minutes of silence. Resist the temptation to answer your own question.
- Model humility. An effective small group Leader will resist giving the “right” or “biblical” answer and may even look foolish sometimes. However, if the guest’s answers are far off the mark, it is acceptable at the end of the evening for the Leader to summarize the discussion and gently say something like “this is what I have come to understand”.
- Be attentive to the guest who seems to be progressing at the slowest rate. Make every effort for them to feel safe and cared for.
- Resist arguments. No one is won into the kingdom through an argument.
- Keep away from using Christian jargon or references that may be unknown to the guests.

- Cultivate a safe and comfortable environment. Encourage guests to ask questions.
- Stay spiritually strong, in regular worship, Bible study and prayer time. Take advantage of evangelization or small group training events in your area.
- Stay attentive in the large group worship and teaching time.
- Listen to the Holy Spirit and remember it is His job to reveal the love of Jesus to your group.