

Tips for Journey Group Leaders/Facilitators

Note: You may prefer to consider yourself a facilitator (versus leader): one who coordinates the flow of the discussion and assists in the progress of the members of your group. We will use the term facilitator in this guide. You should adapt these tips to the needs/desires of your group. Words that are underlined and in blue type are links to additional support information. If you are viewing this on your computer, press your control key and click on the link to go to that document.

1. Logistics
 - 1.1. Aim for groups between 6 and 12 people. Consider dividing your group when you have 12 or more in your group.
 - 1.2. Have one primary facilitator within the small group along with a co-facilitator.
 - 1.3. Prior to your first meeting, send an email or notice to group members with the time, length of meeting, location, and any resources they need to bring with them. On the day before subsequent meetings, send a reminder email or text.
2. Facilitator preparations
 - 2.1. Pray for the members of your group before you begin your study.
 - 2.2. Come to the group prepared to guide them through the lesson. If there is a video to be shown, view it ahead of time and make your own notes and observations. If there is a reading assignment to be made, read it before assigning it and then after it is assigned, review it and write down notes and observations.
 - 2.3. Plan for how you will begin the meeting. Plan on welcoming members individually as they arrive. Consider using an [icebreaker](#), especially the first few times you meet, so group members can open up and get more comfortable with speaking aloud and with each other.
 - 2.4. Prepare name tags for the members of your group. Hand out at the first meeting a group member attends.
 - 2.5. Arrive early. Prepare the meeting place so that it is comfortable. Consider having one extra chair, and make a point to at the beginning of the meeting to mention that the open chair is there to remind them that we are prepared if they invite someone. Encourage them to include those they know from diverse backgrounds (whether or not they are members of Countryside Church) to be a part of your group. If you are using a video or computer, test it. Make sure there is a place for refreshments if someone is bringing them. Check on the location of restrooms so you can provide that information at the first meeting a group member attends.
3. Welcoming atmosphere
 - 3.1. At the first meeting, be sure you begin the meeting by making sure everyone knows each other's name and something about them. Consider using an [icebreaker](#) that emphasizes this. Another option is to have each one share with the group something about themselves.
 - 3.2. For the first few meetings consider using an icebreaker. Plan on allowing time for people to catch up with each other. Encourage members during this time to share things that would be of interest to other members to encourage a sense of community for your group. At the end of the sharing time, spend a few minutes reflecting on last week's lesson before beginning the lesson for that meeting.
4. Group Agreement (Covenant)

- 4.1. Consider having group members, at the first meeting, compose a group agreement. Elements that could be included are: when and where you meet, child-care arrangements if needed, punctuality, notification about attendance, confidentiality, length of this study, elements desired for each meeting (e.g. worship time, sharing with the group at the beginning of each meeting, sharing in pairs--2 or 3), ways to participate so everyone is included in the discussion, whether food and drink for each meeting is desired, etc. [Sample agreements](#) are available. You might consider giving them a sample agreement and ask them to modify it as needed.
- 4.2. When adding new group members, review the agreement with them.
5. Worship
 - 5.1. Consider a worship portion of the meeting that focuses the group on God. It can include singing, a poem or prayer.
6. The lesson
 - 6.1. Use diverse methods to orient the group to the lesson (video, overview, link to prior lesson).
 - 6.2. Provide background for the topic or scripture.
 - 6.3. Ask the right questions Use probing [questions](#) to guide the group through the lesson. Don't just think the question; write it down. Choose words carefully and read them over a few times to make sure that the question asks what you want it to ask in a clear way.
 - 6.3.1. Use [open-ended questions](#). These are questions that allow group members to share any answer or relevant thoughts on the passage or subject being studied.
 - 6.3.2. [Avoid closed questions](#). These are questions that are obvious or imply the answer that is expected by the facilitator
 - 6.3.3. [Use limiting questions](#) to guide the discussion, summarize a point or get back on track.
 - 6.3.4. [Encourage more than one answer](#) to each question. A good question should have more than one possible answer, and each person can share his or her unique perspective.
 - 6.3.5. [Become a Better Listener](#). When you listen as a leader, it shows you value and appreciate the opinions and input of the group. Try seeing the situation from their perspective, making sure you understand what the other person is communicating, and maintaining eye contact with the person speaking and being aware of your posture.
 - 6.3.6. [Don't be afraid of silence](#). It usually seems longer to you than to the other members of the group.
 - 6.3.7. [Resist the temptation to answer your own question](#). Rephrase the question until the group understands what you are asking.
 - 6.3.8. [Never reject an answer](#), even if you think it is wrong. When you reject people's answers, they feel rejected as well, and they may decide it is too risky to give their opinion again. Listen first—evaluate later.
 - 6.4. End the lesson on time. A healthy small group will do more than study together, so leave enough time for other activities such as sharing and prayer.
7. Have a sharing time. Have members pair up in twos or threes and sit apart from the others. Suggest they share their individual concerns, challenges, and dreams, and conclude by praying for each other.
8. When appropriate suggest a service project for the group to do together. Close the meeting with reminders and prayer (vary prayer methods: facilitator led, sentence prayers, silent prayer, etc.).