

Helps for HOSTS

Congratulations! As the host of your life group, you have responded to the call to help shepherd Jesus' flock. Few other tasks in the family of God surpass the contribution you will be making. As you prepare to facilitate your group, whether it is one session or the entire series, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

Remember you are not alone. God knows everything about you, and he knew you would be asked to host a group. Even though you may not feel ready, this is common for all good hosts. God promises, *"I will never leave you; I will never abandon you"* (Hebrews 13:5 TEV). Whether you are hosting for one evening, several weeks, or a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

- 1. Don't try to do it alone.** Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy team. If you can enlist a co-host to help you shepherd the group, you will find your experience much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is ask people to help. You'll be surprised at the response.
- 2. Be friendly and be yourself.** God wants to use your unique gifts and temperament. Be sure to greet people at the door with a big smile...this can set the mood for the whole gathering. Remember, they are taking a big step to show up as you are to host a life group! Don't try to do things exactly like another host; do them in a way that fits you. Admit when you don't have an answer and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it and you'll sleep better at night.
- 3. Prepare for your meeting ahead of time.** Preview the session and write down your responses to each question.
- 4. Pray for your group members by name.** Before your group arrives, take a few minutes to pray for each member by name. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of each person in your group. Expect God to lead you to whomever he wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead.
- 5. Provide transitions between questions.** Ask if anyone would like to read the next session or question. Don't call on anyone, but ask for a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

- 6. Break into smaller groups occasionally.** With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning, and ultimately get more out of their life group experience. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member.
- 7. Small circles are also helpful during prayer time.** People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on prayer requests from their subgroups. The other great aspect of subgrouping is that it fosters leadership development. As you ask people in the group to facilitate discussion or to lead a prayer circle, it gives them a small leadership step that can build their confidence.
- 8. Rotate facilitators occasionally.** You may be perfectly capable of hosting each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to host the group.

How do I...

- 1. How do I re-direct talkative members?** When one or two group members seem to be monopolizing the discussion, calling for contributions from others often helps: "What do the rest of you think?" or "Jenny, what ideas do you have about this?"

In some situations you may have to take control of the discussion more strongly, and you may have to talk privately with the "talker," explaining the necessity of group participation. You may be able to enlist him to help you draw others in. This will help him become more sensitive to the contributions of other people.

- 2. How do I get back on track?** A verbal recognition of the fact that the discussion has gotten off on a tangent can usually help you get back to more relevant topics. You could say, "This is interesting. However, we've left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this further after the group, but for now..." Or you may present a thought-provoking question to draw the discussion back to the initial topic. Having an attitude of acceptance toward the tangent is important. Maintain the respect for each member's opinions.

- 3. How do I handle "wrong" answers?** If someone says something that you are quite sure is inaccurate or unbiblical, you may want to solicit a view point from someone else: "Okay,

what do others think?” or “Does anyone know other Scripture passages that may help us here?” You may want to restate the issue, or ask another question that would help clarify or stimulate further thought. Always try to keep the person from losing “face” or becoming embarrassed if possible.

4. How do I handle silence? Don’t be afraid of pauses, or try to fill silent moments. If you give everyone time to think, they will bring up good points and ask good questions as the discussion progresses. By being patient, you may be surprised with the number of excellent thoughts the group comes up with. These silent times may seem uncomfortable, but don’t be embarrassed or feel as if you must say something.

5. How do I handle difficult questions? Don’t be afraid of saying, “I don’t know” when a difficult question is asked. If you don’t know the answer, don’t pretend. You can always look for the answer later, or ask someone else in the group to research it. There is no merit in being thought of as a supposed “know it all”, only to find out you don’t.

In their book, *Growing Young*, Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin give us some great language to use when handling difficult questions. “Here are four words we recommend (you use when faced with a difficult question): *“I don’t know, but...”*”

“We can complete that sentence with any number of helpful phrases to communicate that questions are not only allowed but even welcomed. *I don’t know, but . . .*”

- ...that’s an important question.
- ...let’s find out together.
- ...I wonder that too.
- ...I bet you’re not the first person to ask that.
- ...who do you think we could ask about that?
- ...I wonder what stirred up that question just now?
- ...God is big enough to take that question.
- ...here’s what I have experienced about God.
- ...thanks for sharing this with us.

You might, of course, have an answer to their question. Even if you do, though, it might be wise to step back and probe a bit before unleashing your “right” answer. Being heard can at times be as—or even more—important than the answer itself.”

Children In A Life Group

Caring for children is often a concern for life groups. Even though the group meeting and life group primarily benefits the adults, kids can also form community with the other children in the group. We believe there are tremendous benefits in including children in your life group, but there are numerous ways of doing this. Here are some of the main ones:

- 1. Hire a sitter to oversee the children.** Often this can be a teenager. It's important to explain expectations to them and make clear any house rules. EVERYONE should help finance this – even those without kids. Pass a jar each week and pay the sitter a pre-determined amount. If there isn't enough cash coming in, then bring it up and challenge the group (not just those with children) to do more. If you have more than enough, just keep the extra in the jar for future weeks.
- 2. Ask a responsible older brother or sister from the group.** Everything from option #1 usually applies, though you might pay them less. This can lead to tension if there are problems with their performance but deal with it directly.
- 3. Take turns caring for the children.** It is important that this be the agreed responsibility of EVERYONE in the group, not just the women or just the ones with children. If someone is not especially good with kids be sure to team them up with someone who's experienced, but everyone needs to shoulder the responsibility.
- 4. Don't do any childcare.** Some groups don't do childcare because everyone in the group has children that are older or perhaps the group is made up of single adults without children or young married couples with no children yet. But once children are involved it is important that you make a plan that makes it possible for these people to be involved with your life group.
- 5. Take an offering.** If just one or two families in your life group have children you can decide to pass an offering plate each week to help them care for the expense of hiring a sitter at their home. It's unrealistic for most families to absorb the full expense on their own, but in some cases this is a good option as long as you are dealing with just one or two families.
- 6. Include the children.** Involve the children for part of your group time. Let them answer an icebreaker or two, be a part of the snack time or prayer. Have a plan for the remainder of your group time, perhaps utilizing one of the other options mentioned, though it's for a shorter period of time.
- 7. Have childcare in a different home nearby.** This can often be a good option if you can arrange it for children that have trouble leaving their parents alone or if you have a LOT of kids. Give the sitters everyone's cell numbers or the number for the host home and if there's

a problem Mom or Dad are just a call away! This can really work well with 2 groups that might share a babysitting home.

8. If kids are old enough to monitor themselves, have them play in a separate room.

Some helpful tips when deciding childcare plans:

- Your group needs to agree on your childcare approach.
- The childcare arrangements you make today may need to be revised over time.
- Select a willing childcare coordinator. Usually this is a Mom who's really organized! It's not her (or his) job to do all the childcare, just to keep it organized and communicated. **The goal is always for the entire group to be sharing the load of caring well for the children.**
- Make HOUSE RULES wherever you meet. Talk with the host regularly about this. If you rotate homes then each new home has new house rules. Some people don't want children in the bedrooms, while others don't care. Communicate clearly the expectations to all the children and parents as well as whoever is caring for the kids.
- **Having children in your life group will bring tension!** That's okay! The goal of a group is not to avoid conflict but to work through conflict! This brings about community!! So, expect problems and expect to work through them. This will bring you closer together as a life group.