**GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL LIFEGROUP**

**Preparing and Planning for Success**

1. **Spend time in prayer in preparation for each meeting.** Review the material/video and select or create discussion questions. If a discussion guide is used, it will usually have much more material than can be covered at each meeting. Decide which questions you want to use and inform the group that the rest of the questions can be answered at home in their personal devotional time.
2. **Create a warm, welcoming environment.** If your home is the setting, spend time to clean and straighten up. Create a seating arrangement that enhances discussion. If using a video, have the seating face the tv screen and if possible, use an enhanced audio sound system or Bluetooth speaker. If you are using the church facilities or other public location, arrive ahead of time to set up.
3. **Refreshments.** Have water, coffee or hot tea available at the start. It’s optional whether food items are served at the beginning or the end of the meeting. Most prefer at the start as it may become part of the getting to know you part of the meeting. Have serving utensils, plates, paper napkins, forks or spoons ready for use prior to the group arrival.
4. **Start on time** (refreshments and conversations are a part of the first phase), but don’t start early. **End on time.** Many may have other obligations or child care issues. However, if the discussion is lively and you’re aware that some of the members may want to continue discussion, say, “We’ve reached our end time.” It’s okay to leave, but if you want to continue discussion and have some time, we’ll resume our conversation in a few minutes. Say good-bye to those who have to leave and return to the discussion.
5. **Name tags.** For the first meeting or with large groups, have an area set aside for name tags.
6. **Supplies.** Have available pens, pencils or highlighters for use by the group. If you meet at the church or other location outside of your home, store the supplies in a re-sealable plastic bag.

**Keys to Stimulating Better Discussions**

1. **Don’t dominate the conversation.** As a facilitator, your job is to get others to share and keep the flow of discussion on topic.
2. **If a video is being used.** Ask, what are your first thoughts about what you just saw? Then, move to discussion questions you prepared.
3. **Use guiding statements**, simple modifications that can be added right after the question.  For example:
	1. “Let’s each take 30 seconds to respond to this question.”
	2. “What one word summarizes your feelings?”
	3. “ In one sentence, what does this verse say to you?”
4. **Rephrase the question and ask it again**.  If the discussion drifts off topic, rephrase the question.
5. **Make sure that every member has a chance to share.** If one person is responding much more than others, turn to someone who isn’t sharing as much and say,
	1. “What do you think about…..?”
	2. “Anyone else want to add to that?”
6. **If someone is dominating the discussion or is off topic.** You may have to interrupt and say,
	1. “Thanks for sharing that. Let’s hear from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”
	2. ”Getting back on topic,” then restate the question.
	3. “That sounds like something we should discuss another time.”
	4. Turn to someone else and say, “What are your thoughts about….?”
7. **Silence is ok.** Sometimes members don’t feel comfortable in sharing until trust is developed among members. Every one is thinking, but not everyone may feel comfortable sharing. Give them time to develop trust.
8. **If the group has 6 or more members, do several Pair Shares.** Ask members to pair up and share their thoughts with one another. Give them a time limit, usually 1-2 minutes. Tell them that some will be called to share what their partner said (in other words, they need to be good listeners). At the halfway point, say, “The second person should now be sharing.” Call on 2-3 members to share. Call on others who didn’t have a chance to share after the next several Pair-Shares. This keeps sharing on topic, concise and everyone eventually gets to share.

**Praying Together**

**Pray at the start of your meeting.** As the leader, take the lead and open with prayer. As the sessions progress, privately ask one of the members who is comfortable in praying out loud to open with prayer or you may continue to lead.

**Praying together at the end of a meeting** may be one a real challenge for LifeGroups.  Many have a fear of public speaking (including the leader) or the fear of not saying the “right” words.Assure the group that prayer is just talking to God and using their own words. There is no right way. Here are a few ideas to help members (and leaders) learn to pray together:

1. Set aside the last 10 minutes of your meeting time for prayer. Program your cell phone alarm to sound at that time each week.
2. State that the information shared by members means its okay to say it out loud for members to hear. If they don’t want to share the topic with the group, have them save it for their own private prayers.
3. Don’t expect each person to pray out loud every week. State that anyone who wishes to pray may do so, but it’s not mandatory. The leader offers to be the one who will pray last so that members know when prayers have been completed.
4. Make a list. Ask members for their prayer requests. Write their names and requests on a small whiteboard or on a sheet of paper with a marker. Date the sheet. Have other members use the list to pray for other member’s request, not their own. Take a cell phone photo of the list that can be used the following week for a progress report to see how God answered prayers.
5. Distribute index cards and pens and ask each person to write out a simple one sentence prayer request.  Have them read their prayer request or swap cards and have someone else read their requests.
6. Since Jesus said, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:20). In tonight’s meeting let’s speak to Jesus as if He was right here with us.” (Of course he’s already there.)
7. One sentence prayers with one idea only.  For example, “God help me with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”  “God I’m thankful for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”  “God be with Joe tonight in a way he can sense.”
8. Pray for a *personal* concern only.  Nothing for your sister’s husband’s co-worker’s daughter.
9. If you have 6 or more members, ask them to get into groups of 2-3.
10. Read a verse about prayer (for example, Philippians 4:6-7. Ask members to simply express to God: “God, I’m anxious about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.  Thank you for being a God who cares.”

Some ideas paraphrased from Mark Howell

**Keep in Contact**

1. Ask members to fill in their contact information on a LifeGroup Roster.
2. Create a group email and/or a text message group. Email the group periodically for encouragement, reminders or prayers. Periodically, send emails or texts to individual members thanking them for their contribution to the group, personal concerns or uplifting them in prayer.

**LifeGroup Agreement**

**We agree to the following expectations:**

* LifeGroup \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Leader{s}\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Leader’s Email \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Leader’s Phone \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Meeting day of the week \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_ weekly \_\_ every other week \_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Meeting location \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Start date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ End date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Not meeting on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Start time \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ End time \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Refreshments \_\_ provided by host \_\_rotated \_\_ none
* Childcare \_\_ arranged by host \_\_shared cost by group members with children \_\_none

**We agree to the following values:**

* **Clear Purpose:** To grow healthy spiritual lives by building a healthy LifeGroup community
* **Group Attendance:** To give priority to the group meeting (call if I will be late or absent)
* **Safe Environment:** To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved
* **Confidentiality:** To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group
* **Sharing Time:** To give all group members the opportunity to share their thoughts without dominating discussion.
* **Inviting People:** To keep an open chair in our group by inviting newcomers
* **Spiritual Partners:** To pair up with one other group member whom I can pray for, support and help grow spiritually

Spiritual Partner \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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