

IMPACT GROUP LEADER TIPS & TRICKS

Simple Ideas for Leading Great Groups!

TROUBLESHOOTING ISSUES

Human beings are broken, so everywhere there are people, there will be problems. Below are a few tips that address some of the challenges that might arise in your group.

Constant Talker:

- Ask, "What does someone else think?"
- Use body language to address other people.
- Direct questions to other people by name.
- Talk privately with the person and ask them to help get others involved.

People Never Talk:

- Ask easier questions.
- Direct easy questions their way.
- Enlist the help of other group members to draw them out.
- Express appreciation (both publicly and privately) for the contributions they make.

The Group is Not Engaging in the Discussion:

- Play "Devil's Advocate".
- Ask "Why?" questions.

A Group Member Reaches an Obviously Wrong Conclusion:

- Ask, "What does someone else think?"
- Redirect their attention to Scripture which leads to a correct conclusion.
- Speak with them one-on-one if the wrong conclusion is still held.

The Group Drifts into Irrelevant Tangents:

- Be flexible; sometimes, the issues need to be discussed even though they are not scheduled.
- Explicitly bring the discussion back on topic.
- Parking Lot it and agree to discuss the topic later.

A Difficult Question is Raised:

- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- Agree to research the question and bring an answer next time.

A Controversial Question is Raised:

- Set ground rules before the discussion begins.
- Unity, Liberty, Charity.
- Acknowledge that Christians hold different views on a variety of topics.
- Scripture must substantiate all viewpoints.
- We will not settle this question for all Christians for all time in this one discussion.
- Focus on what the divergent opinions have in common.

6 WAYS TO BETTER LISTENING

Listening skills are critical for Impact Group Leaders. As you utilize them, they will become habits, and you will be an even better leader and builder of community! Make sure to exercise the following skills when meeting with your group.

1. Stop talking. You can't talk and listen at the same time.
2. Don't interrupt. Interrupting people discourages them and makes it less likely that they will contribute to your group's conversations.
3. Use body language. Sit or stand up straight and look the other person in the eyes.
4. Actively listen. Don't think about what you'll say while the other person is talking. Ex. "What I heard you say was..."

5. Listen for themes. Try to identify and understand the speaker's main idea.
6. Be alert. Watch for nonverbal cues that indicate a speaker's mood.

FACILITATING BETTER DISCUSSION

While the curriculum is a great place to start with group discussions, it is also helpful to know these tips to keep a good conversation going as well as to handle awkward or difficult questions that may arise:

- Ask open-ended questions. For example, "How does that make you feel?" or "What would you do if...?"
- Avoid closed-ended questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no". They tend to stop discussion rather than promote discussion.
- Ask "Why" questions. These make people start to evaluate their feelings and thoughts. For example, "Why do you think Jesus said that?"
- Be ready to share first. As the leader, be prepared to be the first person to share. Your vulnerability will encourage others to open up as well. However, do not feel the need to always go first.
- Don't be afraid of silence; let the group think through what has been said or viewed.
- Practice the art of listening.
- Do your best not to interrupt. Interrupting people makes their future input less likely.
- Thank people for sharing, especially the introverts in your group. This will encourage them to share again.
- Preview the video or printed materials beforehand. Being familiar with the discussion material ahead is vital to keeping the group focused during the discussion period. It should be a part of leader preparation.
- Be flexible. Sometimes other issues need to be discussed even though they are not scheduled; listen to the Spirit's direction.
- Keep the discussion on topic when needed. Say, "Let's refocus for just a minute and talk about this week's topic."
- Treat others with respect. Treat everyone's comments and questions with consistency. Remember that there's no such thing as a "dumb" question or comment.
- Don't think you have to be an expert. Remember, leading a Group does not require you to be a Bible scholar, theologian, counselor, or any other kind of expert.
- Be willing to say, "I don't know." No one expects you to know everything, so be prepared to admit when you don't have an answer.
- Look it up. When you don't know the answer to a question, tell the group that you will do a little research and attempt to find an answer next week.
- Ask for help. Don't hesitate to ask a pastor or church staff person for advice or insight.

TIPS FOR PREVENTING CONFLICT

- Address issues quickly. If you have an issue with someone, talk to them quickly rather than allowing the issue to grow.
- Use "I" statements when talking about what you are feeling and experiencing. Say, "I get angry when...." Rather than saying, "You make me mad."
- Listen closely for underlying messages. Remember that someone's tone and body language communicates as much, if not more, than the words.
- Communicate in person. Try to avoid the use of e-mail or phones when conflicts occur.

TIPS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT

Conflict is the natural result of people spending time together. In Groups, conflict should be embraced rather than avoided. Group members will experience conflict with people outside the group. Conflict can spur groups to a deeper level of intimacy and community when adequately handled.

Colossians 3:13-14: "Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony."

Use the following questions to gain perspective when working through conflict in your group:

- Who is involved?
- What is the issue or concern?
- What are the needs of the individuals involved?
- What are the needs of the whole group?

How can this be an opportunity for growth in the following areas?

- Relationship with God
- Relationship with One Another
- Relationship with Self
- Relationship with the World
- What Scripture(s) are relevant to this situation?
- How can I pray for this situation?

TIPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

While dealing with conflict is difficult to do at times, when handled properly, conflict can build intimacy within your group. Matthew 18 serves as our guide for conflict resolution within groups.

Step One: One-on-One Meeting to Seek Reconciliation (Matt 18:15)

If you have a conflict with someone, go to him or her one-on-one to seek reconciliation (Rom 12:18). If someone in your group comes to you to talk about a conflict, they have with someone else in the group, your first question should be "Have you talked to them about it?" If they say no, don't even listen to the issue before they go and attempt to make it right. You can move to step two if they have talked to them.

Step Two: Mediator is Included (Matt 18:16)

Someone should be included if the problem is not resolved in a one-on-one meeting (or several one-on-one meetings). You, the leader, should serve as a mediator for unresolved conflicts among your group members. If you, the leader, are involved in the conflict, then the mediator should be a pastor.

Step Three: Offense is Made Public (Matt 18:17)

In the rare case that the problem cannot be resolved with outside mediation, the offense should be brought out into public. This can be a discussion among the group as a whole. This should be considered a last resort to restore the relationship, and this step should not be taken without gaining consent from a pastor.