



Effective Group Leadership

Building Rapport

Here are some tips for building rapport among group members. This is especially relevant when a group begins, or when a transition occurs (e.g., adding a new member).

- Contact your group members in advance of your first meeting to introduce yourself and let them know what to expect. Members will be much more comfortable having some idea what's going on before they come to the first group meeting.
- Be thoughtful about the space in which you meet. It is often helpful for the space to feel "homey" for the group members, which means doing your best to have comfortable seating, ability to see all other members clearly, and an atmosphere that is conducive to relaxing into good conversation. It is also a good idea to include tissues within reach, in case emotions rise up.
- Consider having the group members make nametags for themselves to be reused for the first few weeks (they can leave them behind each week, and you put them out again the next week). This helps people who aren't good with names. Stickers, colorful markers, scrapbooking paper, etc. can be used to allow some creative expression. It also gives members something to do with their hands during the first meeting, when nerves may make people more fidgety anyway.
- Be sure to address the issue of confidentiality from the get-go. Make sure members understand that the group can only be a safe place to share if members are certain no one will repeat what is said to others outside the group.
- Lay out your expectations for group participation at the beginning. Remind members that the more they put into the group, the more they will get out. This means that getting the most out of the group requires (1) attending each session, and (2) being committed to doing all the homework between sessions. Express understanding that life happens, and sometimes group members will have to miss a session or be unable to complete the homework. They should still come to the next session, as the fellowship, discussion, and video material can still be edifying.
- Openly express your enthusiasm for study materials. Group members will struggle to effectively buy into the importance of what you're doing if the group leader isn't enthusiastic and invested in it either.
- Consider paper prayer requests or a text/email thread if members prefer that over verbal requests.
- Make contact with your group members in between sessions. This can be as simple as sending a group email that outlines what the homework covers, includes prayer requests, and provides encouragement to keep spending time with God. This is also a resource for reminders (e.g., bringing snack, etc.). Sometimes it's nice to include some supplemental material, as well, such as a link to a Christian song that relates to the material or a poem or inspirational quote.
- Commit to pray regularly for your group members, regardless of whether or not they have submitted prayer requests to you. Make your prayers specific, addressing things your group members have brought up in group.