

What's the Goal of Your Small Group?

1. Create a safe place to process, grow, and heal.
2. Create a microcosm of healthy community.
3. Create the opportunity to receive prayer.
4. Create the opportunity to receive insight, care, and love from others.
5. Perhaps most importantly, to create a place where we invite the power of God on behalf of others.
6. Create a place to receive support in their marriages.
7. The goal is NOT to be a therapist or marriage counselor.

As a leader, your job is to...

1. Establish clearly defined boundaries, rules, and expectations. What time do you start and finish each time you meet? What are you expecting of those who come (show up on time, communicate when they're not coming, do the reading, have self-awareness, etc.)? What are the expectations of the leader and the participants? Will everyone have a chance to share and/or receive prayer every week? No cell phone use during meeting. Decide your availability ahead of time (meaning can folks call or text you mid week?). Etc.
2. Be consistent. Consistency helps to establish trust.
3. Be present. Come in with energy rather than being exhausted and distracted.
4. Be prepared. This includes praying for those in the group. 15-30 minutes of prep time is generally enough.
5. Avoid the temptation to say too much. Don't take on the responsibility to make something happen. By asking a few salient questions and gently guiding the conversation, good things will happen.
6. Deal with issues or problems (e.g., conflict) effectively and efficiently. (See note below.)
7. Get help when you need it. Doing a small group on marriage (or anything else that's intimate and vulnerable) can raise deep issues (such as anger, confession of infidelity, or transference). Make sure you have experienced friends/pastors you can go to when you feel over your head. Come with a few referrals for counsellors/therapists. (I'm totally serious about the last one.)
8. Maintain safe boundaries with the participants. Intimacy can breed temptation so be aware of this.

9. Repeatedly communicate confidentiality guidelines. “What happens in the group stays in the group.” (With the exception of a confession to harm themselves or another. That must be disclosed to authorities.) No sharing with others outside the group, even under the guise of asking others to pray for whatever. If you think that this is a given, it will always come back to haunt you.
10. Have good closure. If the group goes for a set time, make it clear what’s happening as the group comes to a close. Are you still available to them? Is it OK for group members to hang out? This might seem like micromanaging but it’s not uncommon for a few folks to have expectations that lead to conflict here.

NOTE: In almost every group, there will be a members or members who tend to bring the conversation back to them (“Oh! That happens with me too! And when it does, I always...”), engage in cross talk, give advice, or make light of some else’s difficulty by making a joke. This needs to be discussed in advance and clipped when it happens. See my example in chapter 10.

Ten questions to ask about your community:

1. Are you allowed to feel and discuss a whole range of emotions or only positive ones?
2. Are conflicts processed quickly and in a fashion that honors both sides?
3. Are men and women, rich and poor, all races and all ages equally valued?
4. Is there accountability in place for those in power?
5. Is there a commitment talk directly to one another in the event of problems or issues or do folks tend to triangulate and/or gossip?
6. Is forgiveness and ownership of wrongs mutual or do you find yourself always apologizing and forgiving?
7. Do others in the community value and honor who you are or do you feel taken advantage of or overlooked?
8. Is the community diverse—economically, racially, educationally, and inter-generationally?
9. Does the community routinely point you to Jesus?
10. Does the community routinely encourage you to grow and mature?