

Facilitating Great Discussions

Hallmarks of Healthy Conversations

What is a Healthy Conversation?



In our small groups, we want to have good, healthy conversations about important topics, while loving and honoring those involved.

Three elements of healthy conversation:

- **Welcome** – Foster an environment where everyone can share their thoughts openly and honestly
- **Inclusivity** – Consider what everyone might need to flourish in the conversation and community
- **Deep Connection** – Take the opportunity to model vulnerability and invite people to go deeper

Setting the Stage: Group Guidelines

Group guidelines are an agreement that you all make to help everyone feel comfortable, listen better, and enhance the discussion. Try to set these at the beginning of your small group. Consider creating them as a group.

Sample Group Guidelines

1. We agree to be as open and honest as we feel safe.
2. We agree that what's shared in the group stays in the group.
3. We agree to put electronic devices down when others are sharing.
4. We agree to listen to each other without judging, interrupting, or giving unsolicited advice.

Who, Me?

God doesn't always call the "qualified" to carry out his ministry. No matter where you're coming from, Jesus will honor your yes. Here are a couple tips as you consider the benefits and risks of leadership:

- Focus on the potential benefits and vision, rather than only the risks.
- Don't overwhelm yourself. Focus on just one small thing to improve at a time.

Leading Healthy Conversations

Key Transition Points

As a discussion leader, you can serve your group by making smooth transitions that help your group members know how to engage. This requires some preparation, so you can be succinct and clear.

Welcome & Vision Casting

The goal is to make sure that everyone (new/returning members, Christians/non-Christians) feels welcome, feels part of the group, and knows why you've gathered.

Hey everyone, thanks for coming tonight! I'm excited to hang out with you. This group's all about two things: building friendships and letting God transform us.

Sharing

A big part of small group is sharing openly our thoughts and questions. So we want to make sure we communicate that explicitly and welcome people into that opportunity.

We'd love to hear from everyone in the group. Your thoughts are valuable to us as a community.

Closing & Prayer

Wrap things up by restating your group's vision and how this week's discussion relates to that. Include any important action steps.

Thanks for coming tonight! The way everyone shared about [week's topic] was really helpful. Remember to be praying for those two friends you identified tonight. And registration for that Global Program to Nepal opens tomorrow!

Tips to Strengthen Convos

- **Strive for a multilogue.** This is where everyone interacts with each other, rather than one person dominating the conversation.
- **Create space for both internal & external processors.** Acknowledge the different needs of the group members and create times quiet reflection as well as external processing.

Here are some additional ideas to get things moving when you're stuck:

- Think, Pair, Share
- Journal Time
- Go around the Circle
- Popcorn (Choose who shares next)
- I'll Go First
- Speaking Stick
- Let's Hear from Everybody
- Be Cool with Quiet
- Sticky Notes

Going Deeper Questions

Here's some tips to help you go deeper!

- **Start Simple** – It helps people get warmed up and build momentum. These can also hint at the deeper topic you want to discuss while still giving people a chance to share about their own lives. *Example: Before studying Mark 6 together (Jesus feeding the 5,000), ask the group, "When's a time when something turned out way better than you could've imagined? How did you react?"*
- **Open-ended Questions** – Ask questions that will provoke deeper thought, tap into past experiences, or riff off abstract principles. Avoid yes/no questions or leading questions that have only one "right" answer. *Example: How can Jesus' command in John 15:4 to "Remain in me, as I also remain in you" affect our lives? What could that look like on a daily basis?*
- **Facilitator Questions** – As the leader, you can help steer the conversation with questions that can help unpack complex ideas and underlying thoughts or assumptions the speaker might not even be aware of. *Example: That's an interesting point! Can you say more on that?*

Leading Online

Life-giving, relevant discussions can happen online, too! Try posting icebreaker questions in the chat, delegating tasks to others, calling on people to start discussions, and using features like Breakout Rooms.

Navigating Conversation Speedbumps

What makes facilitating small group discussions challenging is also one of the greatest benefits: you can't control them fully. While this means you have to be prepared to help guide conversations, it also means that you'll never know when the discussion will go much deeper and end up being far more encouraging than you expected. Theological disagreements, uncomfortable moments, and tangents may come up, and there are ways to effectively respond to these challenges. Use the course case studies as examples.



Related Resources

- [10 Tips to Strengthen Group Conversations](#)

Recommended Courses

- [Growing Authentic Community](#)
- [Cultivating Intimacy with God Together](#)
- [Stepping Into Small Group Leadership](#)

Visit the Ministry Playbook to learn more about leading, planting, and building Kingdom movements on college campuses: <https://www.theministryplaybook.com/>