

10 Tips to Strengthen Group Conversations

These are some ideas to keep discussions moving. Try a few out! Remember, it's a good idea to change things up occasionally, instead of going around in a circle every time.

1. Think, Pair, Share

After reading Scripture, asking a question, or watching a video clip, set aside a few minutes for silent reflection. Then have everyone pair up to discuss. Finally, bring the whole group back together, and have each pair share. (Bonus active listening points for partners who highlight the other person's response!) This allows for everyone to engage and process the question and can be a time-saver as individuals have already thought of something to say.

2. Journal Time

Give everyone a few minutes to write down their thoughts in their journals or on their phones before asking them to share with the whole group. This is helpful for internal processors, so they have something ready and feel better prepared to share.

3. Go around the Circle

Invoke the power of the circle or at least the order in which people are sitting around the circle/room/table. After sharing your question or response, indicate that responses will then continue to the left or right around the circle. This also indicates that you hope for everyone to partake in the discussion and sharing.

4. Call Next

After one person shares, they call on the next person. This keeps things moving, helps communicate that all will have space to share, and avoids the dead space of waiting for someone to go next.

5. I'll Go First

Especially with more vulnerable topics, it's always good for you, the leader, to set the example and let people know that you're not expecting them to do something that you're not willing to do yourself.

6. Speaking Stick

If you notice a consistent theme of several group members speaking over one another, you can opt for a speaking stick/wand/whatever random object you want to signify who's the one speaking to avoid more interruptions.

7. Let's Hear from Everybody

Invitations like "Let's hear from someone who hasn't shared yet" can be a gentle nudge to quieter members of the group, letting them know that you want to hear them, too, and signaling to those who often share to pause and give others space to speak. You may choose to be a little more direct by saying something like, "I wanna give [name] a chance to share if they want." Just be careful not to push too much and make people feel like you're picking on them.

8. Be Cool with Quiet

People may not be raring to jump in and answer your question right away (or you have a lot of internal processors in the group). Instead of immediately trying to clarify what you mean or calling on someone, just count to 10 in your head. Let the silence build a little. Often in that time, someone will start talking on their own.

9. Sticky Notes

Pass out sticky notes and invite people jot down their thoughts then post them somewhere, like on a wall or window. The group can review them all and observe what stands out.

10. Consider Internal & External Processors

Take time to learn about how members of your group process best and provide space for both experiences. Create a hospitable space for both kinds of processors to bring their whole selves.

Internal Processor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally benefits from time and space to think before talking • It's common for internal processors to walk away from a conversation and later think of what they wanted to say • It's not that they can't respond immediately • Taking time to process their thoughts helps them organize their thoughts. This helps them feel seen and benefits the overall discussion, too.
External Processor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally benefits from the opportunity to talk through their thoughts aloud • It's like taking a walk verbally. To reach the final destination (their best ideas), they have to talk it out to get there. • It's not that they can't think silently • Verbalizing their thoughts helps them develop their ideas more fully