

## Small Group Guidelines

1. **Communicate with the parents:** Mentors are there to support and reinforce parents in their role as the primary catechist of their children, not take their place. Communicating with parents after every small group gathering, sharing an overview of the discussion, and discussing any changes/additional opportunities.
2. **Location matters:** The small group space and environment is your battle ground, hold the space. All on the same level, in a circle, in a comfortable, and hospitable location. The kids that talk a lot should be next to you. The kids that are quiet should be across from you.
3. **Knowing names is a non-negotiable:** Learning every teen's name in your small group before the second meeting is a must.
4. **Pretend like you don't know what you're doing:** But you really do, you just did the research before. Only bring the group journal and if needed, an LJM curricula as a reference. Do not read directly from a paper.
5. **Express small group privacy:** *"As we kick off this small group, hopefully build up some amazing spiritual friendships, and grow in faith, we really want to cultivate an environment of brutally honest sharing with one another. With that said, an expectation I'd like to set is that we will never share anything discussed in our small group with those who don't need to know it. Yes, we are all human and sometimes we slip up, but let's do our best to build trust and respect between one another and make this a safe space to share honestly. Also, if at any time someone shares that they are in a situation where harm is being caused to them or someone else, that is something we would expect everyone to keep private and as leaders, we would work with you and those we need to get you the help needed."* (Ask them all if this sounds good to them)(Reiterate this occasionally with your group).
6. **Affirm brutally honest sharing:** When a teen shares something brutally honest, thank that teen for sharing and for being vulnerable. A common response by the group when someone is brutally honest is shock and silence. You affirming that person's honesty will quickly change the group's reaction to openness.
7. **It's all about the second question:** It's good to ask an easy question to begin with, but make sure a deeper, intentional question follows.
8. **Ask good questions:** Do not ask questions that you would find boring to answer. Ask a question with built in tension to engage them (i.e. how do you know if you are loving someone or using someone? NOT is it better to love someone or to use someone.)
9. **Follow-up afterwards:** A teen may start sharing something that demands follow-up outside of a small group. Make time for the one on one follow-up as their faith mentor.
10. **Be patient with them:** Waiting to respond to a question or struggle can be an effective approach to discipleship. Teens are used to immediate correction and instruction when they mess up or need something. Be patient, stay in it with them, and call upon the Holy Spirit to inspire you when to respond, even if it takes several gatherings.
11. **Be sure to include everyone in the conversation:** Hear at least twice from each teen.
12. **Be attentive to your body language:** Body language speaks volumes, especially when others seem distracted. Eye contact is important. They want to be SEEN and HEARD.
13. **Hold back stronger personalities:** Use positive acknowledgement with stronger personalities and state a desire to hear what the others have to share.
14. **Do not allow or permit sarcasm, taunting, or bullying of any kind.**
15. **Do not be in haste:** Show up early, pray often for your teens, be gentle and calm with them, prepare well, and do not be in a rush to leave.