

Oremus

Group Discussion Guidelines

The Role of a Facilitator

Remember, the role of a facilitator is not to teach—or even to answer questions—but rather, to welcome group members and guide them through the lesson, aiming to give everyone a chance to participate. *The facilitator does not make a discussion good; he or she makes a good discussion possible.*

Preparing for Each Session

Before each session, review the session outlines in the Student Workbook. This will give you a general overview of the themes that Fr. Toups will present. Also read through the Discussion Questions and spend some time considering how people may respond to them. This will help you to be prepared for some of the paths the discussion may take. Some facilitators may choose to preview the DVD or CD presentation ahead of time, but this is not required.

The most important preparation for you as a facilitator is to go through the study yourself. Be sure to spend time looking over the weekly prayer and journaling assignments. Your personal participation in the study will help you relate to and understand the experiences of your group members.

Tips for Managing Your Group

The facilitator's role is crucial to the success of the study. Remember, it is not the facilitator's job to answer every question that comes up; in fact, *a facilitator should answer a question only if no one else will answer or after everyone has spoken.* Whenever possible, he or she should attempt to point the participants toward a response instead of giving one directly. Here are a few other tips to help you guide your group in a fruitful, enjoyable discussion.

- **Set the right tone** from the beginning. Be welcoming and enthusiastic. Explain that group discussion helps clarify and fill in gaps that participants may have missed in the presentation, allows them to share what they have learned, and prepares them to go deeper. Your goal will be to spend sufficient time on each question to do those things.
- **Stay on time and on topic.** Some find it helpful to have a second person in the group who is responsible for giving them a ten-minute “warning” signal, to allow ample time to finish the discussion and close with prayer. You may also want to note the halfway point of your discussion period, and mark the question you would like to have reached five or ten minutes before the end of the session. Finishing the discussion period (and the session) promptly is essential and shows respect for your students' time. Losing the confidence of students through late wrap-ups may discourage them from coming back or from signing up for future studies.

- ♦ **Take control.** You are the discussion leader; the group will expect you to keep the discussion moving along:
 - † Watch for clues that a timid person has something to say, and encourage that person without putting him or her on the spot.
 - † Kindly “rein in” any participants who dominate the group so that others have a chance to speak. If they continue, ask them privately to help you get others to participate.
 - † Gently redirect tangential remarks or questions.
- ♦ **Remind the group of the “ABCs of Good Group Discussion”:** *Be audible, brief, and Christ-centered ...* and don’t “double dip”! (That is, those who have had a chance to share should hold back until others have had a chance.)
- ♦ **Don’t be afraid of silence**—but don’t let it continue too long.

TEN COMMANDMENTS

FOR GREAT SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. Be prepared.
2. Come on time.
3. If you did not prepare, allow others to speak before you do.
4. Listen to others.
5. Stick to the topic and questions at hand.
6. Never ridicule or cut down another’s answer.
7. When you disagree, do so with respect and charity.
8. Don’t fear silence.
9. Don’t share confidences outside the group.
10. Enjoy yourself!