

IPC Student Ministry
SMALL GROUPS

Why are small groups a priority in our ministry plans to youth? Three answers:

1. **Sin is deceitful.** We are told to 'encourage one another daily...so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness' (Hebrews 3:13). I believe small groups are a critical opportunity in for our students to be looked in the eye by their peers and leaders who pray for them, and have their heart examined and their walk held up to the scrutiny of God's Word.
2. **Sanctification is messy.** Proverbs 14:4 points to the fact that a real harvest in sanctification comes by a willingness to get 'dirty'. We must learn to communicate with others, to pray for them, to serve them, love them when they hurt, confront them on their sin and counsel them for wisdom. I believe small groups are a great opportunity for our kids to be sanctified as they learn to relate deeply to one another.
3. **Wisdom is to be prized.** Proverbs 15:22 and 24:6 both reveal the benefit of an *abundance* of counselors. I have seen small group leaders powerfully used as counsel in the lives of young people. I believe it to be a fantastic testimony for a kid to look back on their teenage years and be thankful for the wisdom and love given them from a persevering small group leader. Small group leaders aren't Jesus, they are not even parents, but they have the privileged access to affect spiritual maturation and provide spiritual counsel, through a partnership with, and supervision by, parental and ecclesiastical authority.

However, while the potential good of small groups is great, the potential misuse and even danger of this ministry is great as well. To wisely conduct effective small groups, I suggest three spectrums must be kept in mind and balanced appropriately:

Spectrum One - The Bible Study/Accountability Group Balance

We want small group volunteer leaders to focus their energy not on preparation but on relational connection and follow-up. As such, we do not want to be 'curriculum' driven per se. But at the same time, this is not merely a time to dump truck our emotional baggage and inner-most thoughts and sins. We need a content (curriculum) to guard against indulgence of the flesh, while maintaining a goal of vulnerability, confession and genuine group correction and counsel.

Spectrum Two - The Transparent/Indulgent Balance

We want students to share and open up about their struggles and temptations but not all is appropriate for this environment. Advice:

- *Leaders should seek opportunities to invite others to speak*
- *One-on-one, help someone see their tendency to dominate the group and what that may say about their gospel un-belief.*
- *One-on-one, help someone see their tendency to be withdrawn and not disclose anything, and what that may say about their gospel un-belief.*
- *Halt the group and ask that something not be discussed but that follow-up at another time would be more appropriate.*

Spectrum Three - **The Discrete and Relationally Connected vs. In-the-Light Balance**

As small group leaders, we have been given a privileged access into the heart of a child. We want this access, we believe the child needs this mentoring/discipling. However we MUST keep in mind:

- The student **must** understand, and be reminded, that our highest commitment is to their parents, not to them. If we should become aware of dangerous or unhealthy situations or behaviors, we have a duty to speak with the parents. Discretion and privacy are high values, but commitment to the family unit is higher. Therefore, a student should never expect **secrecy** but **discretion** from their volunteer leaders. IPC's **Director of Youth and Family Ministries** is also available to counsel volunteers as to when communication with parents is warranted or the authority of the parents is being subverted.*
- We will be faced with opportunities to interact with students that could call into question the appropriateness of our motives/actions. These situations must be prevented at all costs. We **must** be above reproach and operate in the light. To this end we are creating policies to protect the youth from inappropriate interaction as well as volunteers from accusations of such.*

A content of study is desired for small groups. Please see *Recommended Curriculum*. The following structure is encouraged to facilitate everyone's participation, openness, and conversation over the study material. Everyone in the group should have a length of time to share their answers to these questions or similar ones. Group leaders need to be prepared to adapt these questions if time won't permit discussion of all of these points.

Suggested Questions:

- 1. What occupied/dominated my mind & emotions this week?*
- 2. How did I do spiritually this week? Describe my prayer life and time in the Word.*
- 3. Where was I encouraged this week? Where was my joy?*
- 4. How was I discouraged this week? Where did I sin/grieve the Holy Spirit or struggle with temptation? Where am I hurting?*
- 5. What was one thing impactful from our assigned reading or what was one thing that I agreed/disagreed strongly with? Why?*
- 6. Speak into my life and help me be wise. What question(s) or advice can the others in the group give me?*