

## Leading Discussions

The following suggestions will aid you in leading discussions and fostering healthy group dynamics:

- Arrange the group in a circle, if possible, so that everyone can see each other. If someone separates him/herself from the group, encourage them to join in (“Make some room so John can squeeze in here.” etc.).
- Let the group know that you don’t have all the answers. If a question is asked to which you do not know the answer, tell the person you don’t know. Offer to do some research (or ask a member to research the question) and come back the next time with a response for that person.
- Let the group know that it’s okay to interrupt you at any time if they have a question and that there is no such thing as a dumb question.
- Ask for input and feedback to what you have shared.
- Direct responses or questions back to the group when they are initially directed only to you (“*Let me hear what some of the rest of you think about that first. Anyone care to respond? Betty, what would you say?*”).
- Try to include everyone. Ask a more reserved person what they think about the topic you are discussing. Let them know they don’t have to share if they don’t want to (“Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t had the chance to share yet... Linda, how about you?” etc.).
- Ask “open-ended” questions as opposed to “yes or no” questions. Not, “*Did you like the Bible passage for this week?*” but, “*What did you like about the Bible passage for this week? or What did you get out of it?*” Open-ended questions tend to promote discussion.
- Ask for clarification or dig deeper into an answer to make it come alive (“*Does that work in a different situation too?*” or “*That’s a good answer, but how easy is it to really do that?*” or “*Do any of the rest of you find that hard to do?*” or “*How does that work in everyday life?*”).

- Allow tangents, but refocus if necessary. The group may wander off from the material, but the discussion may be what's on the heart of the group at that time. If the tangent is trivial, refocus the group back to the material (*"Well, let's get back to our material... what do you think..."*).
- Acknowledge everyone who participates (a nod, eye contact, or verbal encouragement, etc.).
- Refer back to a point that someone else made ("That's similar to what Jane said a little while ago about letting God have control...").
- Use summary statements to clarify discussion ("So, what I hear you saying is..." etc.).
- Ask questions in a conversational tone. Do not simply read them out of a book, or say, "What did you put for question five?" Rephrase the question to be the same thing in a different way.
- **Icbreakers and Introductory Exercises:**
  1. "Peaks and Pits" Have everyone share the best and worst part of their week.
  2. "The Penny Game" Bring 20 pennies (dated in the last 25 years), have everyone randomly pick a penny and share something significant that happened to them that year.
  3. "Three Truths and a Lie" Each person answers four questions, with one of the answers being false and the others true. The group guesses which is false. (Easy examples: "My favorite movie, food, hobby, vacation, time of day, etc.)
  4. What was your favorite room in your house when you were a kid? Why?
  5. Break into pairs and give each person 60 seconds to tell something interesting about themselves. Then come together and have the listener share that.
  6. Share with the group: (for first time gatherings)
    - a. What you hope to get out of this group experience, or
    - b. Why you decided to participate in this group.