

FACILITATION GUIDE for L!FE GROUPS

PURPOSE

L!FE Groups are designed to provide and foster opportunities for deeper connections with God and others, resulting in spiritual and relational growth.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

FACILITATORS

L!FE Group Facilitators are those in partnership who have completed Equip or Launch training and show spiritual maturity, leadership qualities, and facilitating capabilities. Facilitators are expected to live a lifestyle that is Christ-like and can be imitated by those they are leading. Facilitators are responsible to create a warm, welcoming, interactive, focused learning environment that is Christ-centered. Facilitators will be evaluated periodically and encouraged to maximize their potential. In most cases, a Facilitator is best suited for certain styles of groups and needs to choose a focus suited to his or her capabilities.

ASSISTANT FACILITATORS

Assistant Facilitators are those in partnership with L!FE Church who have completed Equip or Launch training and show potential leadership abilities. An individual is required to serve as an Assistant prior to being a lead Facilitator. Some individuals may be better suited to serve as Assistants long-term.

FOCUS

All materials chosen must support the vision, priorities and doctrine of L!FE Church. Facilitators need to thoroughly review curriculum before choosing to use it. After reviewing the curriculum, the Facilitator will suggest the goal, format and description of the group, to be reviewed by the assigned leadership coach. All such information will be submitted on a group request form.

ESTABLISHING A GROUP

CONTACT THE LIFE GROUP DIRECTOR

Potential group facilitators need to reach out the Jillian Patrick approximately 2 months prior to the anticipated start date of the group. The potential facilitator will be notified of the decision to proceed or not with the group idea (contingent upon season, calendar planning, perceived needs, etc.).

PROMOTE THE GROUP

Group descriptions will be offered via the Gathering and the website approximately six weeks before the group begins.

We also encourage Facilitators to approach and invite individuals they feel may be a fit for their group. We eagerly welcome those outside of LIFE to join a group as an inlet to a relationship with Christ; however, we generally encourage those in commitment to another church to make that their primary avenue of relational and spiritual investment.

Individuals will be given opportunities to sign up on Planning Center. We discourage people being involved in more than one high-commitment group per season.

For optimal relational dynamics, groups should be no larger than a dozen members in regular attendance; the exception is large teaching-style groups which break into smaller groups for application and connection.

CONNECT WITH POTENTIAL GROUP MEMBERS

To connect with potential group members, the Facilitator needs to:

- Email each potential participant as soon as you receive personal information
- Introduce yourself
- Answer any questions about the group
- Confirm person's interest in the group ("Can we plan to see you there?")
- Provide all necessary details: location, parking, supplies/cost, etc.

CONNECT WITH THE HOME OPENER (if applicable)

To connect with the Home Opener, the Facilitator needs to:

- Discuss the time frames the home is open to the group (for instance, 15 minutes before and 30 minutes after)
- Decide on seating arrangements
- Choose plan for refreshments; typically the host will provide beverages, and the snacks will be provided by group members on a rotating basis (sign-ups are great!)
- Check for pets or other potential allergies that group members may need to be aware of. (Remind owners that pets need to be confined as a courtesy to all)
- Confirm directions and a parking plan
- See if there are any other concerns you need to be aware of (noise level, shoes, plumbing, etc.)

FOR GROUPS MEETING AT LIFE CHURCH

- Connect with Jillian and check the calendar to be sure of which space your group will be using
- If you do not have a key fob to open the building, please connect with Jillian at least 2 weeks prior to your group starting to gain access.
- Assign someone (preferably a co-leader or someone in partnership) to greet and welcome group members as they arrive at the front door
- Unlock doors and set up standing sign with group location information in the cafe area (or outside Community Room door if this is the space you are assigned to use)
- Once your group has finished please use the checklist to clean up the space you used (located on a clipboard inside the storage room next to the Community Room)

FACILITATING A GROUP

CREATE ATMOSPHERE

Facilitators need to be aware of and supportive of the following guidelines to create a comfortable pleasant experience:

- Please keep the temperature at a comfortable setting
- Please arrange food and drink neatly (if applicable)
- Please provide a clean restroom with a clean, accessible hand towel
- Please make facial tissues available
- Please keep the environment free from alcoholic beverages

BE WELCOMING

-Facilitators need to work together to greet group members as they arrive. The Facilitator should arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the start time. Welcome people as they come in the door, and connect members with one another.

-At the first group, have a name tag ready for each member. By having names written in advance, members will know you were expecting them. If necessary, continue with tags for a few weeks, until names are learned.

-If you are an “open” group, meaning people can join during the duration of the group, be sure to very deliberately integrate newcomers

BEGIN THE GROUP

Introduction

-Once everyone is seated, begin by introducing yourself and letting the group know how excited you are to facilitate this group.

-Get to know each other: You can be creative, or just have everyone introduce themselves by name.

-Establish and welcome the diversity of the group. Make mention that everyone is at a different place in the journey with God and that is an element of a healthy group. Perhaps you could say: “Some may be exploring a relationship with God, others may have recently made Jesus the Leader of their life, and some may have been in a relationship with Him for years. We learn and grow from each other.”

Icebreaker

-Begin each week with an icebreaker to help the group relax, unwind, and begin communicating. Depending on the group, it can be lighthearted, topical, or completely irrelevant. You may have each person share in a large group setting, or divide into smaller groups of two’s or three’s. For example, “Turn to the person next to you and share with them one highlight of your week.” Keep the mood positive and light. Unless it pertains to the topic at hand, keep the icebreaker short and sweet.

Goal & Objective

-Next, state the goal of the group and also the objective of the meeting at hand. This will bring focus and purpose to your time together.

For example: “The goal of this group is to learn and apply the principles of

Look Great, Feel Great. Tonight we are going to spend some time reviewing the last two chapters we read. Then we'll break down into smaller groups and share the action we have committed to. We'll end by spending some time in prayer."

Guidelines

- Let the group know the guidelines and thereby give them a sense of security.
- Time: We will end at _____. If you choose to stay a little later, you may.
- Confidentiality: Everything shared in a group stays in a group. Let the participants know they may share general information like, "The group was awesome. Everyone is really growing and learning to manage their finances." Specific information should not be shared, like: "I'm so glad Sally and Sam are in this marriage group. He has a lot of issues, and she's really selfish, so it's really helping them."

Opening Prayer

Open in a concise prayer. *Do not* spontaneously ask someone to open in prayer. Instead, if you want someone else to lead in prayer, ask in advance and let the group know the participant has agreed in advance, lest the remainder of the group fears being asked on the spot.

Content of Group

How you lead the group will be largely based on your curriculum and format. Whatever the content, we will promote a format conducive to interactive discussion.

Possible formats

Message Based: Review and apply the weekly Gathering message

Curriculum Based: Follow the small group leader's guide/dvd, etc.

Book Based: Review of past chapters, discussion, application, and prayer (your outline for book groups will need to be passed by your coach)

Instructional Group: Content is developed and taught by facilitator/instructor; members break into groups for application & prayer

Support Group: Guided discussion and support around a specific need

Facilitating discussion

-Be specific! Instead of asking a general question like, “So how was chapter 5?” Try something like, “Let’s reflect on chapter 5. I’d like to go around and have everyone share one key sentence that really hit home with you.” Using words like “briefly,” “quickly” or “specifically” can help matters along.

-Be affirming! Thank people for participating. Let them see you are listening and appreciate their contribution. You are responsible to help tie thoughts together or to clarify any comments that are vague.

-No conversation monopolizing! By letting outspoken individuals share too much, you will miss out on good contributions by those less talkative. If problems persist, address over-talkers privately. Let them know that while you appreciate their input, you are missing the participation of others. We suggest designing at least a couple of non-threatening questions to be answered by everyone each week.

-No tangents! It is your job to keep the group focused! If conversation trails off say something like; “I’m sure that’s a great story, but we need to stay on track.”

-No debating or arguing! If things get ugly, remind the group that it’s okay to have a difference of opinion, but this isn’t a debate group. Let the group know you can finish discussions outside of group, but the group needs to stay on course. Stay positive!!!

-Remember your role! The Facilitator’s role is not to dominate the conversation, but to facilitate discussion. If you come across as having all the answers, the participants may not think their input is needed.

Incorporating Prayer

The participants, format and time will determine how prayer should be integrated into the group. Besides opening and closing in prayer you may choose to:

-Divide into **groups of 3-5**, share requests and pray for each other. When doing this, establish a leader ahead of time for each mini-group (someone who is comfortable praying for the requests).

-Assign **on-going prayer partners**. Requests can be shared weekly by phone or email.

-Have people write **requests on note cards** at the start of the group. Have

one person pray over the cards at the start or end of the group, and then email out the requests as reminders to the group.

WORKING WITH AN ASSISTANT FACILITATOR

If you have an Assistant Facilitator who is only interested in Assisting

- Include your Assistant in as much as possible, beginning with the initial emails.
- Give your assistant responsibilities, starting small and gradually increasing.
- Shared responsibilities could be: initiating icebreaker; opening or closing in prayer; leading a sub-group if you divide the group at any point in the meeting.

If you have an Assistant Facilitator who is being trained to Facilitate

- If your Assistant is working with you to train as a Primary Facilitator, the goal is to allow the Assistant to watch you, join you, and then fly solo.
- By the time your group is through, your assistant should be given the opportunity to lead a session and receive affirmation and advice from you.

CULTIVATING A STRONG, HEALTHY GROUP

KEEP THE GROUP CONNECTED

- Between meetings, we strongly suggest following these ideas:
- Make preparing for the group a priority
 - Faithfully pray for each member of your group
 - Set up a prayer or encouragement connection by email
 - Remind snack person to bring the snack
 - Contact any group members that were absent to let them know they were missed
 - Encourage members to let you know if they cannot make a group
 - Meet practical needs within the group (prayer, meals, moving, etc.).
 - Plan a “just to be together” activity or a serving project with your group
 - Contact your leadership coach with any questions or concerns

CANCELLATIONS OR SUBSTITUTES

- If you need to cancel a group, cancellations need to be made as soon as possible to value your group members' time and schedules
- In case of your absence, your Assistant or Co-Facilitator may oversee the group

FOLLOW UP WITH YOUR COACH

WEEKLY REPORTING IN PLANNING CENTER

After each group meets be sure to update the attendance in your group in Planning Center. You will also be expected to send a quick email to your coach to let her/him know how your group went and how he/she can be praying for you. This is also a great time to ask questions! Your coach is happy to work through any issues with you. Communication is the key. Please be in touch as needed.

Thank you for your desire to walk with others into greater measures of life in Christ!