



**Yes2Love**

Sherwood Oaks Christian Church

[socc.org/lifegroups](http://socc.org/lifegroups)

# life groups

## guidebook

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## What if a member or members have an issue that the leader or group cannot handle?

If issues arise which require professional help surface, leaders should confidentially contact the appropriate Sherwood Oaks minister or professional resource. There is a list of these resources on the Life Groups website. If you cannot find the right resource, the Core Team can help you identify the right person.

### Notes:

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*We would like to give special thanks to our sustainable small group benchmark churches who provided advice, content and validation:*

1. Northview Church, Carmel, IN
2. North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, GA
3. Terrace Lake Community Church, Columbus, IN
4. Xenos Christian Fellowship, Columbus, OH

It is common for people to miss how God is at work in their lives. Sometimes people think that if they cannot share a major event or story then it is not worth sharing. Modeling how God is working in your own life in simple, tangible ways will help to set the stage. Encourage the group to start praying that God would reveal Himself to them throughout the week. Pray for this together as a group.

### **Should we have dinner with our meeting?**

Ultimately, this is a group decision. Be aware that having a dinner will typically add significantly to the meeting time. If you have a dinner together, decide beforehand as a group how the evening will flow (i.e. Have dinner from 5pm to 6pm and then have the normal meeting time from 6pm to 8pm). In general, we would recommend not having a dinner with every meeting. Instead, consider having a dinner periodically throughout the year. Some groups will have a special dinner together after they finish a particular curriculum.

### **When should I call the Life Group Core Team for help?**

Don't feel like it has to be something big or really important to call us. We love to be a sound board for you. Call us early. Call us often.

### **If I lead a Life Group, do we have to meet in my home?**

No. In many groups another member will take on the role of host or members will share the role of having the group in their homes.

### **Is it all right to invite someone to our group that doesn't go to our church?**

If the person has a home church, ideally they would get connected in their own church. One of the benefits of people joining a Life Group is it provides a way to get to know people they go to church with on a deeper level. While this is the general principle, there are times when it may be appropriate to make an exception. If the person does not have a home church, Life Group can be a great 'on-ramp' to the Christian faith and to getting connected to a local church.

## **Life Groups at Sherwood Oaks**

I want to thank the leaders, hosts and all the team members who are taking their valuable time to form and expand our menu of group choices. The more groups we have the better we are able to find a good fit for everyone who wants to participate.

Life Groups are designed to enable our members to better teach, encourage and disciple participants in close-knit communities. With that in mind, this Guidebook is a valuable storehouse of explanations and resources to empower our groups.

I want to stress that Life Groups are not just another "program" but are a way of developing relationships. The close relationships that are formed will lead to discipleship advancement, which in turn will inspire and equip our members to reach out and help others find Jesus Christ and thus impact their eternal lives.

Humanity is lost without Jesus Christ; we need to make sure we do our utmost to ensure that they discover Him. Life Groups are a major step in developing the relationships that will do just that. Life Groups will help our church be the best it can be in serving Christ.

The Life Groups ministry has my full support and encouragement here at Sherwood Oaks because it is my firm belief that these groups are essential to the life of our congregation.



God bless your work,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom".

Tom Ellsworth

## Life Groups Core Team

Life Groups Core Team is a small group of believers from Sherwood Oaks with small group experience and a passion for Life Groups offering a way for any one that wants to get connected a vehicle to find a close-knit spiritual community.

### Core Team's Purpose:

- Equip & Encourage Leaders (Training & On Going Support)
- Connect people to groups which fit their needs
- Communicate Life Groups are a priority (Culture Shift)
- Resource for issues, materials, mentoring, guidance

Please feel free to contact the Core Team members with questions, ideas or for support:

Name	Focus Area	Email	Phone #
Nancy Barrow	Systems Support	nbarrow@socc.org	812.334.0206
Jeff Brummett	Marketing Support	jbrumt@gmail.com	317.281.0502
Steve Dyer	New Leaders, Reporting	home4dyers@aol.com	908.656.4076
Scott Fuson	Marriage Ministry Liaison	scott.e.fuson@gmail.com	812.345.5182
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Mitzi Wickersham	GroupConnect	mitzi.wick@gmail.com	574.527.3811
Tim Woodbridge	Leader Training	woodbridge.tim@gmail.com	812.340.5916

and fellowship and then break into two groups of nine, for example, once the discussion starts. This strategy allows a group to ease into multiplying.

### How do I become a leader?

If you are interested in becoming a leader, let someone on the Life Group Core Team know. A great way to try out the leadership role is to launch a group. Another effective way to try out the leadership role is to ask your Life Group leader if you can co-lead with them. This provides on-the-job training for leading a Life Group well.

### What do I do if our group is doing a study that requires homework and nobody is doing it?

If an upcoming study requires homework, talk up front about expectations. However, keep in mind that it is a common issue that a group will “bite off more than they can chew” when it comes to doing homework. Minimize a potentially frustrating situation by choosing curriculum where the homework is optional. Have different people responsible for leading discussion during the study. At least they will do the homework when it is their week to do the lesson. Err on the side of grace.

### What do I do if people aren't showing up consistently?

Define mutual expectations early on with the Life Group Grounds Rules. If attendance becomes an issue in the group, address it with them in person, not via email. Contact someone in the Life Group Core Team prior to approaching the person to develop a plan and to have someone praying for you. Again, in this type of situation, err on the side of grace. Be in a place emotionally where you are more saddened that you didn't get to see the person at group than you are frustrated that they didn't show up.

### We spend a huge amount of time on prayer requests. Do you have any suggestions?

Have people pre-send their prayer requests via email prior to the meeting. Emphasize the idea of praying for each other during the week. Explain that in the interest of time, everyone will pray for the one or two more pressing things for each person, but a more comprehensive email will be sent out so that the group can pray more thoroughly throughout the week.

### When I ask people what God is doing in their lives, I am met with silence. How should I handle this?

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How do I add people to my group?

Before adding anyone to your group, be sure to discuss and decide as a group how you would like to add people.

The single most effective way to add people to your group is by personal invitation. Think about your neighbors, friends, and coworkers that may not be connected to a Life Group and would be a great fit for the group. Encourage the others in the group to do the same.

You can also contact the Life Group Core Team for referrals of people who are looking for a group.

### What do I do if/when someone else outside the group expresses interest via the First Responders or others to join my group?

Sherwood Oaks has an ongoing effort to connect existing members and new people to a Life Group and the First Responders are the conduit for the connection.

THE PROCESS: person fills out bulletin tear off or fills in Web form- First responder team contacts the person to determine need (normally within 48 hours)- First responders match the need to existing group they then contact leader for approval-leader is given information and contacts person to invite-person becomes a part of the group. There is follow up for First Responders file completion that will be explained at the same time the leader accepts the new person.

IMPORTANT: The groups need to be open to accepting new people when the group is not completely full. It is important that we have a sense of urgency when connecting the people not only by the First Responders but also by group leaders.

### What happens when we reach the maximum number of people in our group?

Some groups will choose to close once they have reached a predetermined, maximum number of people. Some groups will continue to add people. Sub-grouping is a strategy which helps in this process. With this strategy, a group may have eighteen people meet together for snacks

## Sherwood Oaks Christian Church Mission & Values

The mission of Sherwood Oaks is the Great Commission left for us in Matthew 28 — to go out into our world and help people become followers of Jesus. Then they can join us as we live by Jesus' Great Commandment which is to love God and love others. That is the heart of the *Yes2Love* commitment — growing stronger in our faith and reaching out to others.

To guide us as we grow closer to God and lead others to Him, we follow these core values:

**Worship** - More than just something we go to on Sunday, but offering every part of our lives to God daily

**Connect** - Making friends with others who share the same mission (vision) and values.

**Grow** - Learning to live like Jesus through a variety of smaller groups and classes.

**Serve** - Becoming the hands and feet of Jesus, serving the church, our community and the world

**Share** - Developing relationships with those who have yet to know God and sharing with them how he has changed our lives

## Life Groups Core Values

Based on Acts 2:42-47 we seek to:

### 1. Build Relationships:

Relationships are important to Life Groups as Jesus demonstrated it as a priority in his life. Jesus spent a tremendous amount of time getting to know his disciples and followers in the common places of life.

John 2:1-11; Matthew 9:10, 13:45, 19:13; Mark 1:29;  
John 11:1-2, 13:2

### How do you Build Relationships in a Life Group?

#### Learn Each Other's Story

It is amazing how hearing where someone has come from can help you to understand and love a person in your Life Group. Sharing each other's stories is a powerful means of connecting a group relationally.

#### Get together outside of your regular meeting time

Groups that invest in each other's lives outside of their regular meeting time are the groups that typically form a strong relational bond.

#### Get together with those of the same gender, outside of your regular meeting time

Meeting with just the guys or gals will often allow for greater freedom in personal sharing and accountability

## Child Care Recommendations

Each Life Group with children can decide how they want to handle childcare, if needed. Below are some options that the group may want to consider. If the group needs help implementing an option, please contact a Core Team member.

- Have family with young kids (<2) host
- Hire teens for babysitters and have all kids come to the same home
- Use existing church childcare (Sunday and Wednesday nights, when available and small fee applies)
- Invite existing church members/friends to help with childcare.
- Use existing child ministries for resources, ideas or personnel
- Family members provide childcare (teenage daughters, sons or other age)
- Allow other groups to do service projects to group by providing childcare
- Use high school ministry for babysitters
- Small groups for kids led by H.S., college or young adults
- Split cost between families for sitting at house
- Group swap
- Older kids watch/baby sit younger kids
  - o Older kids – self entertain
  - o Children's lesson resources
- Seniors: volunteer babysitter ministry
- Parent rotate out to watch for a week
- Teenager recommendation list from the church

## **The Top 10 Characteristics of Highly Effective Groups**

1. Deals with conflict well.
2. Shares responsibilities and roles in the group
3. Spends time outside of group together
4. Shares with one another how God is working in their lives
5. Serves together
6. Has clear goals and clear expectations (Life Group Ground Rules)
7. Periodically “checks in” to evaluate how the group is progressing
8. Has a defined structure for the group meetings
9. Has spiritual accountability; same-gender meetings in addition to regular meetings are a great way to make this a reality. The purpose is to encourage and challenge each other to grow spiritually.
10. Cares for each other in hard times.

## **The Top 10 Results of Highly Effective Groups**

1. Changed lives
2. A sense of belonging/family
3. Discovering and using spiritual gifts to serve God
4. Increased capacity to love others
5. Meaningful friendships
6. Increased desire to know and love God
7. People outside of the group are impacted for Christ
8. The group cares for each other
9. The group encourages and challenges each other to grow spiritually
10. New leaders developed, culminating in multiplication

## **2. Serve Others:**

Service should be about demonstrating God’s love for others whether believer or not. Mark 10:45, 12:31; Galatians 5:13

### **Who should we serve?**

Service can be done for 3 different general groups of people: those inside your life group, those inside the church, and outside the church.

### **What should the goal of service be?**

Service should be about demonstrating God’s love for others whether believer or not. If service is aimed towards unbelievers the ultimate aim should be to develop a relationship with them in order to share with them the water welling up to eternal life (John 4:14). While Jesus did meet physical needs, ultimately he came to meet our eternal need for a savior.

### **How do we serve?**

If you can focus on something or someone who has a personal connection to someone in your group, you have a better chance of getting to your group member’s hearts. If the group is stumped on what to do, suggest the group pray individually throughout the week, asking God to reveal to them what good works He has prepared in advance for them to do (Ephesians 2:10).

## Helpful Pointers

Keep the activity simple and contained. Some group members will immediately embrace the idea of serving and in their enthusiasm, may commit to more than they can manage.

1. *Keep a Steady Pace.* Whether it is curriculum or serving, people have a tendency to be eager in the beginning and lose steam over time. Beware of this trend and avoid discouragement.
2. *Beware of the Money Trap.* Avoid the temptation to just give money towards a problem or situation.
3. *Don't let serving take over the group.* It may become to set a time limit on how long this topic is discussed in a Life Group meeting to ensure the other two core values are not forgotten.
4. *Nominate a service rep.* Consider having the person who suggests the project be the project coordinator/organizer. After all they are the person with the personal connection.

### *Some suggestions:*

1. Help each other with home projects.
2. Help with community projects (Habitat, Hope builders, Hannah Center, etc)
3. Help with Sherwood Oaks projects (Carefest, etc)
4. Help a neighbor in Christian love.
5. Help support a missionary project or go on a church sponsored mission trip.

## Ground Rules

This is a great tool to collaboratively establish expectations related to creating and sustaining a healthy environment. It can be used to gain mutual “buy-in” as to what the group is about, and it can be used to talk about what roles different people will play in the group.

### How do I use the Ground Rules?

Use it as a living document and refer back to the Ground Rules on a periodic basis to evaluate how the group is doing and when a new member joins the group.

Note: A copy of some Ground Rules can be found on Sherwood Oaks' website in the Life Group page, [socc.org/lifegroups](http://socc.org/lifegroups).

## Group Commitment Agreement

The purpose of a group commitment agreement is to provide a predictable environment where participants pursue healthy relationships and spiritual growth.

The agreement includes key ground rules, goals and lists specific guidelines that define meeting logistics and content, as determined by the group.

Please go to [socc.org/lifegroups](http://socc.org/lifegroups) to view and download the draft agreement that you can adapt and complete based on your group input.



## Life Group Manager Instructions

Within the three Life Group Core Values and a few other expectations, the Life Group leaders and their groups have the freedom to operate their groups based on the needs and preferences of their members however some information exchange is vital to the success of the Life Group process.

- **What:** The Core Team is using our current church management system to make supplying this information as easy and simple as possible. Leaders will automatically get an email (and two reminders) after each regularly scheduled meeting. When you click on the link in the email, you will be taken directly to your group location (no password required) where you can record attendance in a matter of seconds.
- **Why:** While there you can update such things as you group members, meeting location and study topic. These items are important for the First Responders to have available as they try to find the best fit for people looking for a group.
- **How:** To get your Life Group set up in the system, you go to the Life Group portal at [socc.org](http://socc.org) to get the instructions. To access Sherwood Oaks' online community you will need a login and password. If you do not have one you can request one from Nancy at [nbarrow@socc.org](mailto:nbarrow@socc.org) or go online and request one be sent to you. To access the online community go to our website [socc.org](http://socc.org) and in the upper right hand corner of the page, where the social media links are, click the "S" that is in a conversation bubble.

Nancy Barrow and Steve Dyer will be available to answer questions and help you get started.

## 3. Grow Spiritually:

Spiritual growth is important to Life Groups as it is a direct result of obeying Jesus' first, greatest commandment to us; to love the Lord our God with all our heart soul and mind.

Mark 12:30; 2 Corinthians 3:18

### How do you grow spiritually in a Life Group?

#### Focus on Where Truth Meets Life

It is possible for groups to focus exclusively on truth and not take time to share with each other how it applies practically to their life. It is also possible to spend so much time sharing the issues of life that the group neglects to seek God's truth and how it applies to them personally. The goal is to see lives changed through the application of the truth of God's word.

#### Share Your Spiritual Journey

Some think of spiritual growth as something that happens in the Life Group meeting itself. While this is possible, the bulk of a person's spiritual growth is what happens in between the Life Group meetings. Life Group is a place to share what God has been doing in your life since you last met and to discuss how to apply new biblical truths to your circumstances. It is the sharing of your journey that often is a catalyst in someone else's faith walk.

#### Take the Next Step

One of the ways that God often grows us spiritually is by calling us out of our comfort zone. A Life Group is a great place to find the mutual encouragement and accountability to take the next step of faith in your walk with God.

## Life Group's Basic Expectations

- 10-14 members
- Scheduled to meet 2-4 times per month
- Annual commitment agreement
- Serve at least once per quarter
- Multiply
- Groups are led by a trained Life Groups leader
- Report meeting attendance, keep group profile current

## How do we organize Life Groups?

Our primary organizing principle for Life Groups is stage-of-life. One of the reasons for this is that it is easier for a group to make decisions on childcare when they are all in a similar life stage. Also, our experience has shown that when groups have stage-of-life and shared experiences in common, they are more likely to stay together.

Some sample life stage categories are:

- College/Grad Students
- Young Adults
- Parents of pre-teens (needing childcare)
- Parents of teens
- Empty nesters
- Women
- Men
- Multigenerational

Although members of groups organized by stage-of-life tend to have more in common, anyone is welcome to join. For example, if a couple is 37 years old with no children, they may choose to join a group that is predominantly made up of parents of elementary-aged children because they view that as their peer group. The fact that they do not have children is not meant to exclude them from the group.

## Prayer

### How does prayer fit into Life Groups?

- **Prior to:** It is recommended that you pray for the meeting before your group arrives. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct all that happens as you meet to grow in wisdom and knowledge of Him.
- **To start:** Meetings should begin with prayer, a simple invitation for the Lord to be with us and guide us. It should serve as a reminder of why we are meeting and of the Lord's presence with us. This can also serve as giving thanks for any food that will be served.
- **To end:** We should close in prayer as well, thanking the Lord for all He is and has done for us praising Him for His greatness and adding in any prayer requests the group may have. Begin the closing prayer by asking for prayer requests, jot these down to be sent out to all group members and encourage the group to pray for each other as well as the requests.
- Allow the members to voluntarily contribute since not all members will feel comfortable praying out loud but with time there will be more participation. Stating that prayer is simply speaking to God and it will sound differently from each of us may help. Also asking for a simple "what are you thankful for" or "what one thing would you like to ask the Lord for this week" will make it possible for all to participate.

Christ gives us the perfect example of prayer in Matthew 6:5-13. It is about the Father we are talking to rather than the words we utter.

Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses, or we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner.

*Scriptures Referenced:*

*Proverbs 19:11; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:29, 2 Timothy 2:24-26; James 5:9*

## Go and Be Reconciled

Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation- forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.

By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an assignment, not an accident. We will remember that success in God's eyes is not a matter of specific results, but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers will bring praise to our Lord and lead others to know His infinite love.

*Scriptures Referenced:*

*Matthew 5:23-24; 6:12; 7:12; Ephesians 4:1-3, 32; Philippians 2:3-4; Matthew 15:14-21; John 12:34-35; Romans 12:18; 1 Peter 2:19; 4:19*

Reprinted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Ken Sande (Baker Books, 3d ed., 2003). Peacemaker Ministries.  
[www.Peacemaker.net](http://www.Peacemaker.net)

## GroupLink

GroupLink is an event, occurring at least once a year where groups will be formed. This is a great place for people to meet and interact with new people to help make forming a new group easier. This is also the best place for new leaders to form new groups.

A GroupLink event normally lasts about 1.5 hours with food and childcare provided so that participants can relax and focus on getting connected.

Chair circles are spread out arranged by life stage. Leaders wanting to form a Life Group are available to get acquainted with people wanting to join a group.

This is a sample agenda of a GroupLink event:

1. Greet, eat & migrate to your life stage area of interest
2. Formation – find a prospective group that fits you
3. Launch – Plan your first meeting & other group aspects

## Finding a Life Group at any time

To join a Life Group between GroupLink sessions, go to [www.socc.org/lifegroups](http://www.socc.org/lifegroups) and fill out a "Life Groups Interest Form", email [lifegroups@socc.org](mailto:lifegroups@socc.org), or check the "Life Groups" box on the weekly bulletin tear-off. Our team will contact you, usually within 48 hours, to find out your group interests, availability and other preferences. This information will help find the best available group option to meet your needs. A member of the Life Group will then contact you to get acquainted and invite you to their meetings.

You can also drop in on a **GroupConnect** session, which is a smaller version of GroupLink. These happen once a month at Sherwood Oaks East. Check the website for exact dates.

## Prerequisites of Leadership

- Believer & member of Sherwood Oaks
- Active member, regular in fellowship
- Enrolled or completed Life Groups Leader training
- Willing to disciple/develop new leaders
- Trusts in Christ while pursuing Him in daily life
- Able to facilitate/manage group dynamics

Note: It is possible for all of the above to be true, but there are personal life circumstances that make it best not to serve as a leader for a season. However, joining a group is still recommended.

## Why does a group need a leader?

Having an identified leader is important because, at times, challenges will arise within the group. There is incredible value in having a person who has responsibility and permission to address the challenge presented.

The group's leader is a liaison to the Core Team & Church. The leader will be able to communicate the needs and prayers of the group and can help share with the church leadership.

## What kind of leader does the group need?

1. A leader who can lead collaboratively; a consensus-builder as opposed to an autocratic leader.
2. A leader who will lead by example and has these character traits: teachable, example of integrity & transparent
3. A leader who is growing and demonstrating the characteristics of a disciple of Christ:
  - a. Loves God with all of his or her heart
  - b. Loves others and seeks to contribute to their growth
  - c. Committed to studying and living the scriptures
  - d. Willing to share the good news of Jesus
  - e. Growing in faith through prayer

## Handling Conflict

As People reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict. We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people and grow to be like Christ. Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on his grace, we commit ourselves to respond to conflict according to the following principles:

*Scriptures Referenced:*  
*Matthew 5:9; Luke 6:27-36; Galatians 5:19-26*

## Glorify God

Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power and love, as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful and forgiving attitude.

*Scriptures Referenced:*  
*Romans 8:28-29; 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1; James 1:2-4 Psalms 37:1-6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:2-9; Colossians 3:1-4; James 3:17-18; 4:1-3; 1 Peter 2:12*

## Get the Log Out of Your Eye

Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts – confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict and seeking to repair any harm we have caused.

*Scriptures Referenced:*  
*Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 19:8; Colossians 3:5-14; 1 John 1:8-9*

## Gently Restore

## Feeling Stuck or Don't Know What to do?

As a Life Group leader, there will likely come a time when you feel stuck or at a loss as to what to do. Please contact us. The Life Group Core Team's primary role is to be a resource for you.

### Examples of Life Group Challenges

1. Challenging life circumstances for someone in the group
  - a. Someone in your group may share with you a difficult life situation that they are going through

*Tip: Remember that it is much more important to be a good listener than it is to have a solution for their problem.*

2. Challenging dynamics occurring in the meeting
  - a. Someone is introducing strange philosophies of ideas about God
  - b. Someone is dominating the conversation during the meeting
  - c. Someone asks a question for which you don't know how to answer

*Tip: Challenge the group to research the answer on their own and come to the next meeting with what they have found.*

3. Challenging relational dynamics
  - a. There is a relational friction between some people in the group
  - b. The group feels like it has lost momentum
  - c. The group seems bored with its current curriculum
  - d. Some people in the group don't seem to be committed

*Tip: Please don't feel like it has to be a major issue to justify calling us. We are eager to help walk you through any situation and pray with you and for you as you lead your group.*

- f. Seeks to serve others through wise stewardship of time, talents and treasure
4. A leader who delights in seeing God work in people's lives
5. Develop new leaders for multiplication and general growth

### Additional Thoughts:

The role of a Life Group leader is not intended to be that of a teacher. Often times the Life Group leader will facilitate the group discussion; however, this is a role which can be shared.

### Leader's Primary Responsibility

To encourage the group and individuals in the group to proactively live out the three core values of Sherwood Oaks Life Groups.

### Leader's Primary Function

- Create and sustain healthy environments
  - Manage the physical and relational environment
  - Provide structure for the meeting
  - Keep the group on track in implementation of the agreed upon Life Group Agreement
  - Share roles within the group (i.e. Facilitator, host, snacks, Service Rep, prayer, worship)
  - Handle conflict well (see pg. 23)
- Use online Life Group Manager (see pg. 27)
- Liaison to the Life Group Ministry
  - Periodically connect with the Life Group Core Team
  - Attend leader events
  - Update Life Group Core Team with your current curriculum, group information/roster changes using the online Life Group Manager

## Steps to Leading a Successful Life Group Meeting

### Creating Environments

The goal is to create environments that enable the group and its members to grow together relationally, spiritually and in their effectiveness to reach out to others.

There are two types of environments to manage:

#### Physical Environment

Most of the components of the physical environment are directly related to where the meeting is being hosted. Hosting is a group role which is often shared by various members in the group.

##### Create an environment that is welcoming and relaxed

- For example, the host might choose to:
- Have comfortable chairs arranged in a circle
- Make sure outside lights are turned on
- Give themselves ten minutes to “decompress” and pray before guests arrive
- Have snacks and drinks available
- No Profanity

##### Limit distractions

- Have TV turned off
- Have pets in a separate part of the house
- Silence cell phones
- Make sure the host home is reasonably clean
- Make sure the room temperature is comfortable
- Alcohol policy: We ask that alcohol not be served at home group functions

**Agree upon child care as a group.** (recommendations pg. 21)

### Relational Environment

Create an environment that is collaborative, safe, authentic and feels like family.

### Managing the Life Group Season

Think of your Life Group as having a season (similar to the way a sports team has a season) that runs concurrent with the school year. The Life Group kicks off the season in September and plays the championship game around the end of May. Summer is a time to celebrate a successful season as most Life Groups will typically have some kind of alternative schedule (I.E. meet once a month for socials.) Note: There are some groups that choose to continue to hold regular schedule during the summer, only breaking when members are unavailable.

As the new season approaches, individuals have the option to sign up for another season with their previous season’s Life Group or try a new Life Group experience.

The benefit of thinking of your Life Group as having a season is that it helps to sustain commitment and momentum over time and helps prevent people from feeling like they are “stuck” in a group.

End well. When the group is thinking about changes, allow several weeks for the group to process and pray about the upcoming decisions and the change that is coming. Then schedule a meeting date where all members can attend to discuss and reach consensus on their future. When a Life Group decides to multiply, or even disband and stop meeting, have a dinner or a special time to celebrate the time the group has spent together.

Talking with the Life Group Core Team prior to multiplying or ending the group is recommended and appreciated.

- **Show and tell:** Have each member create or bring something that reveals a little about who they are and share it during group time.
- **Share your story:** Some groups have had each group member share their story of how they came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. One Group member shares their story per meeting. This is a great way to connect relationally and get to know more about others in your group.
- **Celebrate:** Have a cookout, game night, or theme party to celebrate the end of a study together or to break up your time together during the middle of a study.
- **Sharing a meal:** If the group decides that a meal is a part of the meeting on a regular basis this may take the place of the Ice breaker/welcome and snacks. The blessing prior to eating should be shared by different people however let the person know in advance so they can be prepared.

## Managing the Life Group Meeting Curriculum

### How do we choose a group study and how do I know what options are available?

The Life Group Core Team will often make recommendations of a particular study for Life Groups and have extra copies available for purchase at the Bookstore. Unless it is part of a church-wide campaign, it isn't necessary for your group to use the recommended study. Choose a study with input and collaboration from the group. Right Now Media is an online streaming service that has numerous titles available. Contact the office for a login. For a list of our current DVD studies, email the lifegroups@socc.org.

Note: The purpose of the group study is to serve your group in growing closer to God and to each other, not for your group to serve the study. In other words, if the study becomes the focus and purpose of your group, feel free to make appropriate changes.

## Collaborative

- Share ownership of group roles
- Share communication
- Everyone is engaged; no one is dominating conversation
- Share commitment to the group; people call if they'll be absent or late

## Safe

- Maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality should be vigorously respected unless a person is engaged in illegal activity, or is a danger to themselves or others. *Seeking guidance from one of the pastors at Sherwood Oaks about a Life Group situation is not considered a violation of group confidentiality.*
- Avoid quick answers, snap judgments, simple fixes or side conversations.
- Maintain a sense of belonging; acceptance without judgment

## Authentic

- Model for and encourage members to go beneath the surface and be transparent in conversations.
- Model for and challenge each other to grow spiritually with gentleness and respect.
- Celebrate growth in the three core values periodically.

## Feels like Family

- Proactively care for one another
- Get together outside of the meeting
- Create excitement and energy in the group. Use icebreakers to get to know one another and laugh with one another. Celebrate the growth and successes in each other's lives.

NOTE: Creating a collaborative and safe environment will increase the chances of group members becoming more authentic and, ultimately, in creating a sense of family. A familial environment can be encouraged and directed, but not forced.

- Create an open environment that communicates: “This is our group (not my group) and it will be what we make it. So, if there is something we would like to see improve, lets improve it.”
- Have periodic group “check-in.” A couple of times a year create time in your group meeting to discuss how everyone feels the group is progressing.
- Use the Life Group Ground Rules to review what everyone hoped to achieve out of the Life Group.
- Ask: “What is our group’s greatest strength and in what areas would you like to see the group grow?” Then follow up with: “What practical steps can we take to move forward?”

## How to Structure the Life Group Meeting Structure

Structure provides freedom. Typically people are more at ease and willing to share when they know what to expect. However, keep in mind that the structure is a tool to serve the group, not the group to serve the structure. Strive to maintain a balance between keeping the meeting on schedule and being flexible.

### Meeting Sample Structure

The following is an example of how one group structures their meeting (other groups will vary the structure to fit their group’s personality.)

1. **7-7:20 Welcome/Snacks:** People will arrive at different times and this allows everyone to meet each other informally and catch up with one another prior.
2. **7:20-7:30 Icebreaker:** An icebreaker is a question designed to get people talking and sharing. The question can be fun and random. The icebreaker could also be a question created that is related to the topic you’ll be discussing in your Life Group. The person in charge of the icebreaker question

answers first and in so doing, sets an example for how much detail to give and time to take in answering the question.

3. **7:30-8/8:15 Discovery:** Most studies/curriculums make this an easy role to share. A DVD study will prompt you through the video and study guide step by step.
4. **8:15-8:40 Application:** During your discussions talk about how what you’ve learned is affecting and impacting your lives. Discuss how you are putting this knowledge into action in your lives. Use questions like the following: How has God been at work in your life? Where is God stretching you in your life? What is God teaching you as you read the Bible and pray throughout the week?
5. **8:40-9:00 Prayer:** Group members will share prayer requests and the group prays together. For some people in the group this will be the first time they have ever prayed out loud. Please remember to be patient with them and avoid putting them on the spot.

### Other Creative Ideas for Group Structure

Here are some additional ideas for you to use that add a bit of variety to your group meetings.

- **Communion:** This can be a very moving experience for the entire group and may also be the first time some have ever shared communion outside of a church service. You can use bread or crackers and juice for the elements as we do here at Sherwood Oaks. This can be done in several ways. For example, take turns reading the scripture in I Corinthians 11:23-26 and pass around the elements as Scripture is read. End with a prayer of thanks to God or a song.
- **Worship through prayer:** Have each group member personalize Scripture from the study and pray it out loud in the group.