

LIFE Group Protocol Issues

The purpose of this list is to provide you with a resource when encountering difficult situations within your life group. Often times situations arise that bring about discomfort for you as a leader and here we hope to provide you with a list of brief protocols to follow that might give you a bit of direction in difficult leadership scenarios. Keep in mind that every situation is unique and will require its own personal approach, but here are some guidelines when troublesome situations arise. Some issues include:

- **Issues of Divorce**

The issues related to divorce are very diverse and can be everything from poor conflict styles to domestic violence. Often, the LIFE Group leader will be the first to learn about the decision and unfortunately, the decision is often made before the LIFE Group leader can intervene. Once a couple has made the decision to divorce, there is little that can be done to save the marriage. However, there may be several steps that can be done to support the individuals.

- Class Response

- The LIFE Group leader will want to confirm that the report is true. I recommend that he/she talk to both partners in the marriage.
- The LIFE Group leader will need to assess if counseling is an option. Both parties will need to agree to participate in the couple therapy. Couple therapy can be effective, even after adultery, if both parties are willing to work.
- If both parties are not willing to work, the LIFE Group leader will need to assess if either partner is a candidate for individual psychotherapy.
- The LIFE Group leader will ask permission from the couple about what to share with the class.

- The LIFE Group leader will assure both parties that he/she is praying for the couple.
- Next Steps
 - DivorceCare is a good option for individuals who have gone through the divorce process. Individuals do best to attend the class after the divorce is final.
 - The LIFE Group leader will help the individuals find a new LIFE Group if this is something that the individuals want.
 - The LIFE Group leader will lead the class in processing the loss of a family from their group. There may be some grief work that the group needs to do.

- **Benevolence**

Benevolent needs can be very demanding and depleting to a LIFE Group. Fortunately, the church has established a Benevolence Committee that is able to assess and assist with benevolent needs. Unfortunately, the Benevolence Committee guidelines that are currently in place limit the amount of response that any one individual or family can receive during a given year. Often, this means that the LIFE Group will be asked to continue the benevolent response after the Benevolence Committee has exhausted its ability to help. The class will have to make a decision about whether it will help or not.

- Class Response
 - The LIFE Group leader will assess the needs.
 - In some cases, this can best be done by creating a support team for each benevolent receiver. The support team will meet with the benevolent receiver to determine what the specific needs are (some may be financial; others may be physical support, e.g., assistance with transportation, help with yard maintenance, help with financial planning). The support team

will then make decisions about which of these they can help and which they cannot.

○ Next Steps

- The Support Team will make regular reports to the class about what needs are being met and what needs still need to be met.
- The Support Team will enlist individuals from the class who have abilities to meet certain needs.
- The Support Team will work with the other ministries of the church to identify other resources of help for the benevolent receiver

● Bereavement/Grief

Grief can be assessed in two ways: Acute grief will be the normal process of grief after a significant loss. The normal grieving process will take two years. However, the initial symptoms of acute grief will usually diminish after 6 months. Chronic or Traumatic grief will continue to have acute symptoms after the initial 6 months. This will require therapy.

○ Class Response

- The LIFE Group leader will confirm the report of a significant loss and make contact with the grieving individual to offer condolence and prayer.
- The LIFE Group leader will report the loss to the class and a class response will be determined. Some class responses may be: taking food to the home; attending the memorial service; providing childcare to the family; sending cards.

○ Next Steps

- The LIFE Group leader will recommend grief support ministries to the grieving individual, e.g., GriefShare or the B.E.H.O.L.D. grief series
- The LIFE Group leader will help the grieving individual find a new LIFE Group if that is needed.

- The LIFE Group leader will make contact with the grieving individual at 3 months, 6 months, and 1 year intervals.
- The LIFE Group leader will encourage the grieving individual to seek counseling if the acute symptoms continue past the 6 month period.

- Isolation (group members disconnecting)

Isolation is never a good sign and may be a sign of depression or bi-polar disorder. If the Isolation is not arrested, the isolating individual may see a marked decline in emotional and cognitive functioning.

- Class Response
 - The LIFE Group leader will attempt to make contact with the isolating individual to determine if the absence is indeed a form of isolation.
 - The LIFE Group leader will encourage other members of the class also to make contact with the isolating individual.
- Next Steps
 - The LIFE Group leader will encourage the isolating individual to seek out counseling options.

- Infidelity/adultery

(cf. response for divorce)

- Class Response
- Next Steps

- Addiction (eating disorders mentioned here)

Addiction is a very difficult disease to treat. Individuals who are suffering from addiction will have to come to a place of resignation (commonly referred to as “hitting rock bottom”) before the recovery can begin. Recovery will depend on the drug of choice, the length of use, and the co-dependency and enabling issues in the family system.

Recovery is typically going to require these resources:

1. A proper mental health diagnosis

2. Medication support
3. On-going psychotherapy
4. Weekly attendance at a 12-Step recovery meeting
 - Class Response
 - The LIFE Group leader will confirm with the suffering individual if indeed they are dealing with an addiction.
 - The LIFE Group leader will ask what kind of help the suffering individual is receiving.
 - The LIFE Group leader will encourage the suffering individual to get help or to continue to receive help.
 - The LIFE Group leader will ask how much of the suffering individual's story may be told to the LIFE Group.
 - Next Steps
 - The LIFE Group leader will check in with the suffering individual on regular occasions to encourage continued treatment.
 - The LIFE Group leader will continue to offer support even if the suffering individual relapses. Relapse can be a part of recovery if used as a part of the treatment plan.

- Codependency/Enabling

Where there is addiction, there is most often some type or level of codependency and enabling. In order for the proper treatment of the addiction, the codependency/enabling must also be treated. Unfortunately, people who are codependent often don't recognize that they are codependent and will resist any form of help.

- Class Response
 - The LIFE Group leader will encourage the suffering individual to attend an AL-ANON group.
- Next Steps

- The LIFE Group leader will check in with the suffering individual on regular occasions to encourage continued treatment.

• Pornography

Pornography is a growing problem and is one of the leading threats to the family. Pornography is both a chemical addiction and an attachment disorder. Both of these must be treated in order for the individual to free himself/herself from the slavery to pornography. Treatment will more than likely require weekly support group meetings and weekly individual therapy. The treatment can be financially expensive, but the financial cost of continuing the addiction will be even worse.

○ Class Response

- The LIFE Group leader will contact the suffering individual to confirm the addiction.
- The LIFE Group leader will encourage the suffering individual to seek professional treatment.
- The LIFE Group leader will ask the suffering individual how they want this information to be handled.
- The LIFE Group leader will offer prayer and support to both the suffering individual and the spouse or other family members.

○ Next Steps

- The LIFE Group leader will check in with the suffering individual on regular occasions to encourage continued treatment.

• Personality disorders

Individuals suffering from personality disorders will often be drawn to the church because they want close relationships. These individuals will often be the first to volunteer for service projects or to serve in leadership roles. They will often appear very engaging and personable. They may be the most likeable person in the group. However, their disorder will eventually manifest. They will likely create chaos in the

group. They will often divide the class loyalties. They will demand attention from the leaders or class members at all times of the day or night.

Personality disorders do not respond well to traditional therapies. One reason that these disorders do not response well to therapy is that the suffering individual does not recognize the problems as his or hers. One of the symptoms of the disorder is that they blame others for their problems.

- Class Response

- The LIFE Group leader will be SLOW in giving leadership to any new member of the class. (cf. I think the apostle Paul had experienced someone with a personality disorder when he wrote, “don’t ordain anyone too hastily” 1 Timothy 5:22. It is good advice.)
- The LIFE Group leader will create clear boundaries when he/she begins to receive calls or texts at unusual times.

- Next Steps

- If it becomes clear that a group member is creating division or chaos in the class, the LIFE Group leader will report the issue to the Discipleship ministry office and ask for guidance.

- **Homosexuality**

Homosexuality is not a disease or a disorder, but a sexual orientation. There is good evidence that sexual orientation is more complicated than simply heterosexual and homosexual. In fact, there is good evidence that there is a sexual orientation scale from heterosexual to bi-sexual to homosexual. Everyone is somewhere along this scale.

There is no evidence that any kind of therapy can change a person’s sexual orientation.

However, we stand by the Scripture that states that homosexual behavior is sinful. In

any LIFE Group, there may be people who are openly

gay/lesbian/transgendered/bisexual or who simply struggle with their sexual orientation.

Some may be acting out their sexual desires. Some may be resisting acting out their

sexual desires. The question will be how the LIFE Group leader decides to address this issue. If there is no report of sexual misconduct, the LIFE Group leader may decide not to respond at all.

- Class Response

- The LIFE Group leader will determine if the report of sexual misconduct is true by confronting the offender with the charges.
- The LIFE Group leader will report to the offender that the misconduct is against the Scriptural guidelines for appropriate sexual behavior.

- Next Steps

- The LIFE Group leader will inform the Discipleship ministry team.

- Rebellion Within Families (Prodigalism)

A rebellious child can be very distressing for a family. Some rebellion is developmentally appropriate. During the teen years, the developmental task is “differentiating” from the family of origin. Though this too can be distressing, it is not always cause for alarm. How the child chooses to act out may be a cause for alarm and would need to be assessed individually.

- Class Response

- The LIFE Group leader will want to confirm with the family the report of rebellious behavior.
- The LIFE Group leader will refer the family to counseling resources (these can be found in the Congregational Care office)
- The LIFE Group leader will ask the family how they want this to be reported to the LIFE Group.
- The LIFE Group leader will reassure the family of his/her prayers and continued support.

- Next Steps

- The LIFE Group leader will report to the LIFE Group if this is requested by the family.
- The LIFE Group leader will monitor the family's attendance to ensure that they are not isolating.
- The LIFE Group leader will check with the family on occasion to see how the family is doing and if other helping resources are needed.

- **Suicide**

Suicide is a devastating event in the life of both the family and the LIFE Group. The group most at risk for committing suicide are white males over 65 years. The group that is most at risk for attempting suicide is teens. Every statement regarding suggestions of self-harm or suicide are taken seriously. It is not unusual for someone to imagine taking their own life. Most people at some point in their lives have said or thought, "I don't know why I am here. I would be better off dead." That is not the same as someone who is actively thinking about and planning their own death. The 3 Ms are Motivation, Method, and Means. When they are all aligned, the person is a candidate for suicide.

- Class Response

- The LIFE Group leader will take all reports of suicide ideation seriously and contact the individual to ask if they are intending self-harm.
- If the individual insists they are not, the LIFE Group leader will "document" the contact and indicate that the question was asked and the answer was given. (Documentation of the response is very important).
- If the individual says Yes or if the LIFE Group leader suspects that they answer is Yes, then he/she will call the Brentwood Police (615) 371-0160 and make a report.
- The LIFE Group leader will then report the incident to the Discipleship Ministry office and to the Congregational Care office

- If the answer is No, the LIFE Group leader will recommend that the suffering individual seek counseling through the Congregational Care office.
- Next Steps
 - The LIFE Group leader will make contact within two weeks with the suffering individual to see if the suicidal ideation is continuing, diminishing, or escalating.

*other issues covered in meeting 6/2/14

- Clearly define roles and structural leadership within Life groups
 - Bring Life Groups together and evaluate current structural state – provide them with hypotheticals to see how they respond to certain situations
- Round Table discussions
 - Pull together a sampling of Life Groups covering various demographics for purposes of training and evaluation