

Effective Skills for Retreat Ministry

Small Group Facilitation Skills



Participant's Packet

What's a Small Group Facilitator to Do??

(Adapted from *Help! I'm a Small-Group Leader! 50 Ways to Lead Teenagers Into Lively & Purposeful Discussions* by Laurie Polich. Published by Youth Specialties, Inc., © 1998.)

Taking On The Talker

- Position the Talker next to you (reduces eye contact when you ask a question.)
- Establish ground rules about letting group members speak and reiterating them when necessary.
- Circulate an object (stuffed animal, Nerf ® ball, etc.—a person must possess the object before speaking.)
- Assign them the task of listening to summarize.
- Speak privately with the Talker, reminding him/her about allowing others to share.
- Other:

Drawing Out The Thinker

- Position the Thinker directly across from you (increases eye contact when you ask a question.)
- Direct questions to specific persons: “What do you think, Jason?”
- Get to know the Thinker outside the small group; get to know his/her story, likes/dislikes, interests, etc., so that you can create questions that will bring him/her into the discussion.
- Cautiously ask them a question you know they can answer.
- Don't interpret silence as something that needs to be fixed. Some kids learn best by watching and listening.
- Other:

Challenging The Church Kid

- Avoid using questions with a “right” answer. Use questions that leave room for a variety of answers.
- Don't be satisfied with pat answers. Always ask why.
- Play a good-natured game of devil's advocate (but don't over do this one!) Counter a squeaky-clean answer with a provocative argument from the other side of the issue.
- Ask the Church Kid to help you devise the small group discussion questions and invite and train him/her to help lead the small group once in a while.
- Other:

Dodging The Distracter

- The Distracter needs MOVEMENT. Ask him/her to pass out papers, pencils, bibles, etc.
- Design discussions that include active-learning techniques.
- If the group has been completely derailed, without critique or remark toward the Distracter, face the fact and say, "We're off the topic" and repeat the question.
- Speak privately with the Distracter about what would help him/her stay more focused. Often he/she will tell you what his/her parents or teachers at school do to help.
- Other:

Defusing The Debater

- Establish ground rules for the group: "It's ok to disagree with opinions, but it is inappropriate to attack or put down other small group members if their opinions differ from yours," and "Only one person speaks at a time." "God gave us two ears and only one mouth so that we would listen twice as much as we talk."
- Remember that the goal is to direct discussion, not stifle it.
- Speak privately with the Debater, reminding him or her that some comments may be hurtful. Be sure to differentiate between the person and his/her actions.
- Other:

Captivating The Crisis Producer

- Before your small group meets, speak privately with the Crisis Producer in order to talk through his/her problems instead of bringing them to the small group.
- At the beginning of the discussion, assure group members that everyone will have a chance to share problems, prayer requests, etc., at the end of the session.
- If necessary, be flexible enough to postpone your plan when a young person raises a legitimate crisis during the discussion. Be prepared to make an appropriate referral, or alert the proper authorities if you know or suspect the young person is in danger.
- Other:

Small Group Facilitator Functions

Small group facilitation can be challenging because leaders need to pay attention to two different needs: to accomplish the group's task(s) while at the same time attending to the feelings, energy, inclusion, etc. of group members. Effective leaders will get tasks done in a way that leaves people feeling satisfied, included and hopefully energized by the experience. Following are some specific functions that effective small group leaders regularly do in groups:

Task Functions

SEEK INFORMATION: Requesting facts; seeking relevant information about topic

GIVE INFORMATION: Offering facts; providing relevant information

CLARIFY: Interpreting or reflecting ideas and suggestions; clearing up issues

SUMMARIZE: Pulling together related ideas; offering a decision or conclusion for the group to consider

Maintenance Functions

ENCOURAGING: Being friendly, warm and responsive to others and their contributions

HARMONIZING: Reconciling disagreements; helping others to explore their differences

GATEKEEPING: Keeping communication channels open; facilitating the participation of others

ENERGIZING: Monitoring group energy, and using breaks, energizers, activities, humor, etc. as necessary to energize the group.

Tips for Small Group Leaders

1. Accept the ideas, reactions, and feelings of each person. Let group members know that you are trying to understand them.
2. Be genuine. Be yourself. Communicate who you are, not just what your role is; but don't let your needs get in the way of the group.
3. Let silence work for you. Some may be waiting for silence before participating. Some just need time to think before responding. Let others talk before expressing your own opinion.
4. Be observant and sensitive to the group's needs. Sticking to the scheduled activity is not always best for the group. Notice group member interaction.
5. Keep track of the discussion and where it's headed. Allow some sidetracking and joking for tension relief. Keep track of time and remind group of time limits. Surface anything of importance that is being overlooked at the end of discussion.
6. Guide discussion with probing questions. Remember "why" and "what" questions stimulate head responses. "How you feel or felt" questions stimulate feeling responses.
7. Involve as many as possible in the discussion. Avoid "in-jokes." Encourage members to speak to the entire group, not just the leader.
8. Encourage leadership functions by members of the group. Do not attempt to retain power and control or manipulate the group.
9. Do not ask group members to do anything you are not willing to do yourself.
10. Be a constant in the group, insuring that at least one person can be counted on to listen to content and feeling. Concentrate on being both task and maintenance person.

Levels of Risk in Groups

Some individuals respond in every small group as if it were therapy. A leader's response can head off self-disclosure that could be inappropriate or over-threatening to individuals or the group.

LEAST THREATENING

LEVEL 1: Discussing ideas, information, theories, generalizations

LEVEL 2: Sharing feelings, experiences, or problems from the past

LEVEL 3: Sharing current problems and feelings from outside the group

MOST THREATENING

LEVEL 4: Encountering here-and-now relationships and feelings in the group

LEVEL 5: Sharing very personal problems not ordinarily discussed outside the family

Most people can benefit significantly from sharing on levels 1, 2, and 3. Since most youth retreats have short-term groups that will disband at the conclusion of the retreat, small group leaders should not go beyond level 3, because there isn't enough time to work through deep feelings; moreover, levels 4-5 demand experienced group facilitation and/or counseling skills.

If a leader senses that someone is revealing very personal problems not ordinarily discussed outside the family, the leader should avoid responding in ways that focus on what has been said. While demonstrating concern for the person, the leader should gently but firmly steer the group back to levels 1-3.

If a group member reveals a very serious problem or issue in the group (e.g., suicidal thinking/planning, child abuse, etc.), it is the group leader's responsibility to discuss the situation with the Retreat Team Leader so as to determine an appropriate course of action (e.g., referral), and to assist in whatever follow-up is warranted.

Important: The measure of a really good youth retreat is not the number of tears shed or painful stories shared. That's a mistake that new group leaders often make, that can lead to people sharing more deeply and vulnerably than they want to, or is even healthy for them. As small group facilitators on retreats our goal is to lead our groups into a healthy level of interpersonal sharing, no more. The goal is not to "spill our guts" or make everybody cry; the goal is to provide a safe, comfortable place where people can be honest and say what's on their minds.

You may be the only Gospel some people ever read.

W Where are you from?

(Where were you born? What parish do you belong to?)

H Hobbies or Interests

(What are you interested in? Sports? Music? Drama? Dance? Skateboarding? Computers? Crafts?)

E Events or Experiences

(What recent events have you been to or experiences have you had? Movies? Concerts? Sporting Events? Ever had a “brush with greatness?” Meet any celebrities?)

A Acquaintances

(Who do you know? Who are you friends with? What do you like to do with your friends?)

T Travel

(Where’ve you been? How many states/countries have you visited? Where did you go on vacation? Where would you like to go?)

S School

(What school do you go to? Favorite/worst class? Favorite/worst teacher? Belong to any clubs?)

**If you can remember “WHEATS,”
you can have a conversation with any
person in almost any situation!**

Ways to Choose A Group Leader at Random

When your group divides up into small groups for discussion, all too often the same people in each group end up answering all the questions and leading all the conversations. One way to help groups choose a wider range of leaders or spokespersons is to select from the following list a different criterion for leadership every time you need a “volunteer” or break into groups. This will not only spread around leadership opportunities, it will also teach you things about the people you’re with that you wouldn’t know otherwise. (Contributed by Tommy Baker, Florence, KY)

The leader for your group will be the person:

1. who has visited the most states in America.
2. from the largest family.
3. whose birthday is closest to yours (the facilitator, youth minister, teacher, pastor, etc.).
4. who is seated closest to you (the facilitator, youth minister, teacher, pastor, etc.).
5. who has never been to Disney World/Land.
6. who lives farthest from the _____ (church, school, etc.)
7. who is the tallest in your group.
8. with the smallest shoe size.
9. with the most blue on (that you can see).
10. who has employed the most modes of travel (boat, car, train, airplane, jet ski, snowboard, etc.).
11. who loves spinach the least.
12. wearing shoes that don’t lace up.
13. with the darkest hair.
14. who weighed the least at birth.
15. who stayed closest to home on his/her last family vacation.
16. who has been in the most weeks of vacation bible school.
17. who has used an outhouse the most number of times.
18. with the least number of letters in his/her full name.
19. with the most first cousins.
20. who has had the most boyfriends or girlfriends.
21. who uses Crest toothpaste, or has used it the longest.
22. who has to get up the earliest for school or work.
23. with the most pets.
24. with the biggest hand.
25. with the most syllables in his/her name.
26. with the most jewelry on.
27. with the youngest sibling.
28. who uses Dial soap.
29. who lives farthest from the hospital.
30. who watched Saturday morning cartoons most recently.
31. who has worn braces the longest.
32. whose family has the oldest model car.
33. who has eaten most recently.
34. who has attended the most professional basketball games.
35. who has had the most broken bones.
36. who has been to the dentist most recently.
37. with the most vowels in his/her full name.
38. with the youngest mother.
39. with the most buttons on.
40. who got the least amount of sleep last night.
41. who learned to ride a bicycle at the earliest age.
42. who has the most older siblings.
43. who learned to swim at the youngest age.

44. who has eaten at the most fast-food restaurants in the last week.
45. who has been shopping most recently.
46. with the most fillings in his/her teeth.
47. who has been in the most car accidents.
48. with the most M's in his/her full name.
49. whose birthday is closest to Ground Hog's Day (Feb. 2).
50. with the shortest hair.
51. who was the longest at birth.
52. who went on vacation most recently.
53. with the most uncles.
54. with the largest shoe size.
55. with the lightest hair.
56. who has never flown, or who has flown the least.
57. who is the shortest in the group.
58. who lives closest to the hospital.
59. who has visited the fewest states in America.
60. whose birthday is closest to Jesus' (Dec. 25).
61. who weighed the most at birth.
62. who has had the braces off his/her teeth the longest.
63. who ate the most for breakfast this morning.
64. who can play the most musical instruments.
65. who learned to ride a bike at the latest age.
66. who is the oldest person in the group.
67. who gets up latest to go to school or work.
68. who has the smallest hand in the group.
69. with the fewest syllables in his/her full name.
70. whose birthday is closest to today's date.
71. with the most grandparents living.
72. with the oldest sibling.
73. who most recently purchased a CD.
74. who has lived in the most houses or apartments.
75. who has had the most part-time jobs.
76. who is the pickiest eater.
77. who watched the most TV in the past week.
78. who has the most buddies on their "Buddy List."
79. who has the most change (coins) on them (total amount of \$, not number of coins.)
80. who got his/her driver's license most recently.
81. who can speak the most languages.
82. who played with a small child most recently.
83. who changed the ringtone on his/her cell phone most recently.
84. who is not wearing socks right now.
85. who has had his/her driver's license the longest.
86. who has kept a journal or diary the longest.
87. who has the most ear/face piercings.
88. who most recently went camping.
89. who has the fewest fillings in his/her teeth.
90. who was absent from school or work the fewest times this year.
91. who has never been skiing (or has skied the fewest times).
92. who most recently colored with crayons.
93. who most recently went shopping, but did not buy anything.
94. who can sustain a hula hoop for 30 seconds or longer.
95. who most recently ate at McDonald's.

Discussion Starters

1. What is one of the most enjoyable times you have spent with your family this year?
2. What is something you are looking forward to doing with your family within the next six months?
3. What are three qualities you greatly admire in your dad?
4. What are three qualities you greatly admire in your mom?
5. What is one tradition in your family?
6. What is something you really want out of life?
7. What is one of the best books you have ever read?
8. What would a perfect day for you look like? What would you do?
9. If God were seated next to you, what three questions would you ask?
10. What are three things that make you angry or frustrated?
11. When is one time when you have been aware of God's presence?
12. What is one thing that makes you happy?
13. What is one thing that you fear?
14. What is one of your happiest memories?
15. What is a question you have about Christianity (or Catholicism)?
16. If Jesus were here on earth today, what would most distress him?
17. If you could ask Christ to change one problem in the world today, what would it be?
18. Where's one of your favorite places to go with your friends?
19. What are two things you would do if you were President? Pope?
20. What are two secrets for a long-lasting friendship?
21. What was one of the most fun times you had with your friends this year?
22. What is one food you can't stand?
23. How do you feel about living forever?
24. What are three qualities you want your friends to have?
25. What do you think life on earth will be like in 100 years?
26. How would you describe heaven?
27. What is one thing you could say about death?
28. What is your definition of sin?
29. What is one present (gift) you'd like to receive?
30. If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go? Why?
31. Why do you think people go to church?
32. What was a time this past month when you felt close to your mom or dad?
33. What three activities do you like to do with your family?
34. What are three things that make your family laugh together?
35. What is one favorite childhood memory of the time spent with your family?
36. What is one time when you felt especially close to a family member?
37. Your favorite animal is....
38. Satisfaction is....
39. I am concerned about....
40. I get discouraged when....
41. I feel afraid when I think about....
42. I feel bored with life when....
43. My friends and I really have fun when....
44. Who is the most relevant person to our times?
45. What is the best movie you have seen?
46. What is your favorite activity to do in your free time?
47. What is the most beautiful quality about people?

48. What is the most sacred thing you know?
49. On what basis do you select your friends?
50. What is the greatest crime that one person can commit against another?
51. If you had to use another word for God, what would you use?
52. For what would you lay down your life?
53. What do people like most about you?
54. When do you sense being most alive?
55. When do you feel most lonely?
56. In school you see some people all year long and never speak to them. Why?
57. When did you first sense God's presence in your life?
58. What one day in your life would you like to live over?
59. Select a word that you feel describes people your age.
60. What is the most powerful force loose in the world today?
61. When has your faith been most challenged?
62. If there was one thing that you could change about your life, what would that be?