

CONNECTION GROUPS

HOST INFO
STONECREEK
CHURCH

HELLO (POTENTIAL) HOST.

WHAT IS A HOST, ANYWAY?

Being a host means that you're willing to welcome a small group of around 8 people into your home—or another suitable location—six times. That's it. Nothing else.

You don't need to have all the answers, and we don't expect you to be a Bible expert or professional facilitator. We'll provide the easy to use DVD-driven study which will include the questions to discuss.

Just be friendly, have some snacks, take a shower beforehand and put your dog on a leash.

We're convinced that God will use the unique combination of your comfortable home, the DVD teaching and engaging group discussions and activities to challenge you, your friends/neighbors/or who else comes along to a new place in thinking about Him.

And as the group's host, you're a key link in all of this. Read on for some key info, answers to frequently asked questions and a form to let us know you're interested.

WHAT THOSE WHO'VE GONE BEFORE YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT LEADING?

WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED MOST ABOUT LEADING A GROUP?

“Watching and experiencing the “Ah-Ha” moments when the light bulb goes on and someone ‘gets IT!’ Those are the best.”

“The new friendships I made.”

“The most rewarding part of leading has been when I’m encouraged and educated more than they are. It almost feels wrong get more as a leader. But, I don’t care...”

“I’ve really enjoyed the fellowship. I’ve learned so much from others in my group. Because we are at different points in our walk with Christ and have different background/history, it is wonderful to share our thoughts and learnings.”

“Seeing how God works through the group experience and the change and growth that takes place.”

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE THINKING ABOUT HOSTING A GROUP THIS FALL?

“This is one of the most rewarding times - when you open yourself to God and His possibilities in the lives of fellow believers - incredible!”

“It’s not difficult or time consuming. Others can be involved in the leadership as well, like facilitating a week or planning snacks and social activities.”

“You will get a HUGE blessing in serving others.”

“It’s very rewarding because it makes the church a smaller place.”

“It is so much easier than you expect. All of us lead very busy lives, and it will take a little work, but it has been one of the biggest blessings in my life.”


“The effort you put in is only a fraction of what you’re going to get out of it.”

“Just Do It! No, really, do it!”

Ready To Go?

Simply print out this page, fill out the info sheet below and either:

- Drop it off at Guest Services this Sunday.
- Fax it to Jason Howard at 770-754-0460.
- E-mail to Jason Howard at groups@stonecreekchurch.org.
- Turn it into a paper airplane and send it to any one of our Next Step kiosk volunteers on Sunday.



HOST INFORMATION SHEET

PLEASE PRINT

LEADER NAME(S): _____

MEETING ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ **STATE:** _____ **ZIP:** _____

MEETING DAY: MON TUE WED THUR FRI SAT SUN

MEETING START DATE: ____ / ____ / ____

MEETING TIME: START _____ AM PM **FINISH** _____ AM PM

GROUP GENDER: MALE FEMALE CO-ED

GROUP MARITAL STATUS: SINGLE MARRIED
 MIXED (COUPLES & SINGLES)

CHILDREN WELCOME: YES NO

IF YES, PLEASE PROVIDE DETAILS:
(i.e., is there an official babysitter who is paid by the group, do you have children who others can play with, etc.? These details will be included in your group description.)

Please drop off this completed HOST INFORMATION SHEET at any Next Steps kiosk or Guest Services. You will receive a call about when to pick up your group materials.

Need More Info?
No problem. Keep reading.

1st THINGS FIRST

1. **Determine some logistics** so we can promote your group. What day of the week and time of day can you host? Could you offer childcare (especially if we provide the names of some great sitters and pay for them)?
2. **Invite some people** you already know to join you. Ask friends, neighbors and co-workers to join you for six get togethers at your house. All they need to do is bring their opinions and some salty snacks (tell 'em to leave their salty opinions at home.)
3. **Go through the “What ifs.”** In all of our years of small group experience, these are the top questions.
4. **Grab your leader pack and get going.** This pack will include your DVD, study guides for everyone in the group and some ground rules for you to read at the first meeting (see the last page in this guide.) You will also receive a Conversation Starters guide to help kick off the conversation the first week, or every week.

One additional thought before you go - prayer in the group.

If you feel the need to begin your six meetings with prayer, great. But don't feel obligated to do so. Remember that it's likely people in your group will be in very different places on their spiritual journeys, and will have varying levels of comfort and experience with prayer. If you do decide to pray, keep it simple, short and sweet. Maybe something like this:

God, thanks for this time together. Please open up our minds and hearts, and help us to understand more of what you want us to get out of our studying your Word. Help us to connect with each other and encourage each other both in and out of this time together. Amen.

OH, AND HAVE FUN, OF COURSE.

WHAT IF?

What if someone consistently dominates the conversation and there isn't room for others to talk?

This usually happens, and sometimes the chatty person is super nice, so you hate to say anything. But it will help. (Even as host, you might be tempted to carry a lot of the conversation. It's better to let everyone take equal part. Go for the "start-and-hand-off" approach.)

Consider following up with the chatty guy outside the group time. Ask him to be intentional about holding back so less-vocal members can participate more easily. If it happens again, step in diplomatically and say something like, "Dave, we've heard from you on this, but let's hear from others in the group who haven't had a chance to share..."

What if I have kids and don't know what to do with them while my group meets?

Your small group experience will include serious discussion, prayer and some surprises. And it will almost certainly be boring for young kids. Parents are encouraged to investigate babysitting options (some groups even share a group sitter). Every situation is different, so talk it over in your group and decide what's best for everyone.

What if someone consistently breaks the ground rules of the group?

Your first step should be to talk one-on-one with the person away from the rest of the group. Remind them of the ground rules and how they can help you keep the group a positive experience for everyone. Focus your discussion on the "event" that happened. If that doesn't work, sit down with the person and someone else from the group. If no meaningful changes occur after taking these steps, it would be appropriate to ask the person to step out of the group. This plan follows the guidance given in the Bible in Matthew 18:15-17.

What if someone in the group experiences a crisis?

This is what community is about. It's not all fun and salty snacks. It's being there for someone when they're hurting. Your first step is to see if there's a way that the group as a whole can be of help. For instance, if the person is in the hospital, you could call the other members to see if they can visit on different days, or split up help in a way that one person is not responsible for everything.

What if I'm going to be out of town for a week? Can I still host a group?

Sure. Just let your group know in advance when you'll be unavailable, and make arrangements with another group member to be host in your place that week.

What if there's conflict within the group? Or, what if a discussion turns into an argument?

Move the furniture against the walls and clear a large space in the center of your living room. Let the opposing parties fight it out, and whoever is left standing gets to be right. (Kidding.)

Seriously, there's a healthy principle that says, "What happens in the group needs to be resolved in the group." As host, your role is to remind everyone that the group needs to be a place that allows healthy disagreement, but not at the expense of respect for one another. This is a great opportunity to look at what the Bible has to say about disagreements. Have the group turn in their Bibles to Ephesians 4:15 to read about "speaking the truth in love," and to Ephesians 4:32 to read about "forgiving each other."

What if I want to host but don't know anyone to invite to join me? How will people get into my group?

THERE ARE 2 WAYS TO FIND PEOPLE:

1. Ask friends and people you already interact with on a regular basis to join your group. Ask co-workers, neighbors, bartenders, hairstylists - anyone you think could benefit from getting together six times this fall.
2. We will highlight your group on our Web site, in our weekly e-mail update and in our Groups Guide before a new semester begins. People just like you are looking to join a group and will use these tools to search for one. (If no one contacts you right away, don't worry.) As soon as you agree to host, we will get all of your pertinent information (where you'll be located, day & time you'll meet, will you offer childcare.)

HOW THE GROUP WORKS IN SIX MEETINGS

WEEK ONE

Let the “Conversation Starters” kick off your time. This first week helps get everyone comfortable and ready to go.

Next, go through the ground rules for the group and make sure everyone is on board. The hope is to have everyone commit to these verbally. Then, pass out the study guides, pop in the DVD and read the general description to everyone. Once you press play, just sit back and enjoy the teaching. When done, break out the leader questions and have the first discussion. When the time is up, you’re done! Have everyone clean up and confirm the next time you’ll meet.

NOTE: Depending on the size of your group week one, you could ask everyone to invite someone to join in week two. We can always get more guides.

WEEK TWO

This week is a lot like week one. Mingle for a while, then kick off the group time by passing the Conversation Starters again. When everyone has answered a different question, hit play on the DVD player. Have a great group.

WEEK THREE

This week, jump right into the study.

WEEK FOUR

Keep going. Maybe even plan some time to get together outside of the regular group time.

WEEK FIVE and/or SIX

As you finish up the study week five (or six, depending on the curriculum) make sure you discuss what everyone got out of the study and the chance to meet together.

As you finish, please know that there is no obligation to host another group. We would ask that you ask if the group wants to keep getting together. Maybe someone else could step up and host another study. Whatever happens, we know staying in community with people who know what’s going on in your life is really helpful as involve God more and more in your life.

AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE...

To meet or not to meet?

You might discover that some people in your group would like to continue meeting. Great! This is just one way that small groups are born. But it's entirely possible that not everyone wants to continue meeting. That's OK, too. Either way, be prepared to discuss this at your last meeting.

REMEMBER...

MAKE IT SAFE:

Your group should be a safe place for people, wherever they are on their spiritual journey. Be sure to respect any and all questions, and let everyone know they're welcome to explore the study topics, even if they don't agree with them.

Some people might uncover experiences in their past that elicit emotion, even strong emotions. Be respectful of them. People probably don't want to be "fixed" or given advice. Listen in an understanding way, and affirm them for their discovery and offer them a time out for others to continue, as appropriate.

HAVE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS:

Be sure that everyone knows your role as a host. You're there to help guide the discussion, but aren't the "teacher" or "Bible expert."

Check to make sure that everyone in your group has a personal study guide. The guide's purpose is to facilitate the individual piece of the group journey together.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Your group materials contain challenges, questions and instructions. The authors have tried their best to give you everything you need to facilitate the group meeting, but we're making no promises that it will totally carry your group. It will be up to you to encourage open discussion and know when it's time to keep going, and when it's time to move the discussion along. Take charge - you can do it!

SMALL GROUP GROUND RULES

These ground rules will help you (and your small group) get the most out of your time together. Read through these at your first get together.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

I'll show up every time we meet unless I'm out of town or I've let the host know the (good) reason I will be absent.

PREPARATION:

Before each meeting, I'll have completed as much of the in between lessons in my guide as possible.

AFFIRMATION:

I acknowledge that every person in this group is at a different point in considering, seeking or following Jesus, and I will value and affirm people for where they are.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

I'll maintain complete confidentiality. What I hear and say in the group stays in the group.

LISTENING:

I understand that others will need to be encouraged to share, to be open and to express ideas. I will let them do so, without being judgmental, trying to "fix" them or offering unsolicited advice.

SELF-AWARENESS:

I understand that some of us are talkers and some are quieter, so I'll be aware of not dominating the discussion or always leaving the weight of it to others.

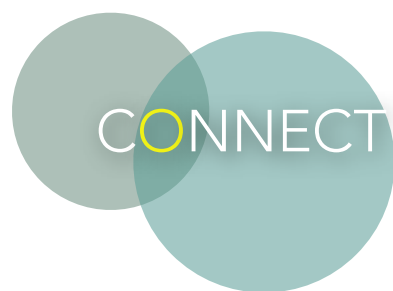
VULNERABILITY:

I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as I can with my perspectives and experience to create a safe environment that encourages others.

CONFLICT:

Community can be messy. I'll offer grace to others and won't leave over disagreements. I realize God might use conflict in my spiritual growth in some way I don't currently understand.

When done reading through these ground rules, ask if everyone can agree to them. If someone has an issue, take time to talk through it as a group.



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