4 TIPS FOR LEADING TEENAGERS IN SMALL GROUPS

The first time you're in charge of a small group of teenagers, you might feel pretty intimidated. It's a big responsibility, and there's so much to remember—names, talking points, and rules for your icebreaker. Beyond that, there's the stuff you can't always prepare for, like honest conversations, unexpected breakthroughs, and the deep, thoughtful questions teenagers can ask. There's just so much small group leaders need to know.

When we stop to think about it, small group leaders have some of the most important roles within youth ministry.

- They learn about their lives.
- They get to build deep connections with teenagers.
- They hear their questions and help them make sense of their experiences.

With such an important role, how can small group leaders become the best, most helpful, and loving people in your youth ministry?

Well, if you're a youth pastor, we've got a few ideas for how you can train your current small group leaders. And if you're a volunteer, we've got some ideas to help you become a better small group leader right now.

Here are four tips that can help, no matter your role!

Tip #1: KNOW YOUR ROLE

Your overall role as a small group leader can be broken down into three parts:

- You're a **guide.** While not an easy role to define, you're part mentor, pastor, friend, and teacher. But you're not fully any of those things. Thankfully, you don't need to have all of the answers. Instead, you get to help lead a conversation to help your teenagers find truth together.
- You're a **facilitator.** This is more than just knowing your material and the Scripture you'll be talking through. You also have to know how to facilitate a conversation by drawing people in, asking different types of questions, learning when to push for more, and knowing when to back off. But don't just fill time to keep the conversation going. You can use silence to facilitate conversation, too!
- You're a **person.** Being a small group leader means building relationships. You can't lead the teenagers you serve without building connections with each person in your group. That means learning about the things they enjoy, asking them questions about their lives, and showing up to their important events as often as you can.

Because of their age, you might discover your group of teenagers is full of questions, deep thoughts, and unique experiences. So, whenever you meet with them, remember to stay flexible and adapt to what happens in each meeting. You may be surprised at how much teenagers grow when you create a space where they feel cared for and listened to.

Tip #2: KNOW YOUR GOAL

Your goal is to help teenagers take the *next step* in their faith journey.

You're not there to have all the answers or solve their problems. That's a great goal but not always realistic, so you can relax a little. Instead, help teenagers take the next step toward living out their faith. You're helping your group learn how to take ownership of their faith as they grow into adults.

Plus, the teenagers in your group are going to grow differently. Spiritual growth is a journey, and no two journeys are exactly the same. As teenagers build up spiritual habits on their own time, they'll grow in their faith differently, and that's completely okay. It's just important to remember as you help each of your teenagers explore what the next step in their faith can look like.

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Tip #3: FOCUS ON HABITS

Remember your role, or ... roles? You're a guide, facilitator, and person. Most likely, you're not the primary influence in a teenager's faith. Their parents, caregivers, mentors, and family members might often fill that role than you. But **you *are* a part of the discipleship process for every person in your group.**

You've probably heard the word "discipleship" quite a bit, but let's be honest—it's a word many people have defined differently. We like to think of discipleship in terms of four spiritual habits. **These are the decisions, behaviors, and rhythms that help everyone—teenagers included—grow spiritually over time.** They are ...

- **Spend time with God**
- **Spend time with others**
- **Use your gifts**
- **Share your story**

When we focus on helping teenagers build habits in these four areas, we give them chances to grow in new ways. And it doesn't take a ton of forethought to do it, either.

You can help them **spend time with God** by assigning a Scripture reading or some prayer prompts. You can help them **spend time with others** by organizing a hangout or meal outside of your normal meeting time. You can help teenagers **use their gifts** by helping them take a spiritual gifts assessment or share what they think each member's gifts are. You can help them **share their story** by challenging them to post on social media or practice giving their testimony to the group.

Helping teenagers build up their habits doesn't have to be intimidating. If you want to learn more about the four spiritual habits and a discipleship strategy that can help, just check out this article.

Tip #4: KEEP LEARNING

Those first three tips cover some of the basics of being a small group leader, but that's not where this ends. There's no certification course for leading a small group that teaches you everything you need to know. There's a lot of learning on the job you'll need to do, like ...

- Learn from your mistakes.
- Get better at asking for help.
- Work on balancing deep conversation with fun bonding experiences.
- Figure out how to engage the introverts while managing your extroverts.
- Find resources to help someone experiencing a crisis you've never dealt with before.
- Work on balancing deep conversation with fun bonding experiences.
- Research the complicated questions, issues, and ideas your group members bring up.

Never stop learning. It's well-known that leaders are more effective when they keep learning and growing. You might be the one *leading* the small group, but you can still grow while you do.

So many people in your church and your ministry would love to help you. Talk to your youth pastor. Ask people in other ministries for tips and advice. Leading a group is a big deal, and you don't have to feel like you're doing it alone.

It's why we're here to help. We make Grow Students Curriculum to help small group leaders like you be great at what they do. Inside of Grow Students, you'll find ...

- Small group guides and questions
- Volunteer meeting outlines
- Monthly tip videos to help you be an even better small group leader
- A volunteer handbook to help you know your role

And if your church doesn't use Grow Curriculum, we have tons of other resources and strategies in our blog for you to steal. Take what's there, tweak it to match your ministry, and make it your own. We hope it helps you be even better at running a small group and connecting with teenagers!



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