

2021 Summer Reconnection Small Group Ministry

Session Format Guide for Facilitators

This is an overview and explanation of the elements in each session

Opening Words

These words invite us into sacred space with each other. As a facilitator, you can begin by reading these, or you can ask someone else to do so.

Sitting in Stillness

As a facilitator, at the first meeting, invite everyone to sit together in silence. In later meetings you may not need to make such an invitation, as people will know. This should be at least a minute, perhaps more. It gives each person a chance to really “arrive” in the space.

Reminder

We have included a reminder in each session of the magnitude of the impact of COVID on our lives. This in particular is meant to remind people that awkwardness is to be expected and to not assume others’ have had the same pandemic experience they have had. The topics and questions themselves are not directly about COVID, but people will bring their pandemic experience to the topics.

Re-visit Covenant

The first session’s activity is to form a covenant. In successive sessions you should review the covenant. If you have new people, which you are likely to, give them a chance to suggest edits or additions.

Check-in

This is a time to share the joys and sorrows in our lives and put down what we’ve been carrying so we can be fully present with each other. This is a time when we can, by listening and being fully present to each other, be compassionate with each other in the journeys of our lives. This is a kind of ministry and a kind of pastoral care.

This is not a time to respond to what people say, only to listen. You may find yourself wanting to offer support and this can be a wonderful thing to do—after the meeting ends. Also know that a person may most need to simply say something out loud. This could be the only place a person has to share some new exciting news or to talk about something deeply hard.

As you introduce check-in, if you have people who talk a lot, you may need to let everyone know ahead of time to take a minute or two. We are suggesting a shorter period of time than most small group ministries with the expectation many congregations will use this over Sunday mornings and have shorter sessions. If you have longer sessions feel free to expand check in.

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Let people check in at their own pace and in their own order or invite them to go around in a circle. If you find your group sitting in stillness waiting for one or two last people, ask gently if they'd like to check-in, reassuring them that it's fine to pass.

Embodied Meditation

This is a time of guided meditation meant to help ground and center people in their bodies. This is part of the trauma-informed intentionality of these sessions. Participating in it is entirely optional and the language reminds people of this. Some people may find themselves getting anxious if they pay attention to their bodies and find the direction to do so unsettling. This is because trauma and stress are stored in our bodies until we have the physiological and psychological space to process. We each have different cumulative trauma impact and different trauma and stress responses. If your group needs it, reassure them that the most important part of this is respecting their own body's wisdom.

Theme and Activity

Each session will have at least one reading and questions for sharing. Some sessions may have an activity. You may find that the activities help your group go deeper or you may find they don't work for your group.

Activity

The first session's activity is reviewing the suggested covenant and suggesting edits and/or additions. Please take notes on this so you have the edited version for successive sessions.

Readings

These will be quotes, poems, and short prose related to the discussion topic. Hopefully, they are new ways of looking at the topic and set off new thoughts in people.

Again, share the task of reading. You can have people volunteer or take turns around the circle. Your group can also start to figure out how they'd like to do this. Encourage a pause between readings so that each can sink in.

Questions for Sharing

These will be questions designed to start reflection and thinking.

Reassure people that they do not need to answer each one! Again, pause in the reading between questions so that they sink in.

Silence

Ask people to sit in silence for at least a minute, or even more, before sharing. This allows people to really dig deep and allows quieter people to find their words.

Responses to questions without cross talk

Speaking without cross-talk is far safer than when you know that someone may immediately respond to you—possibly challenging or disagreeing with you! This time allows people to say new ideas which may yet be tentative and to share tender

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stories and thoughts. By allowing each person a number of minutes, they can reflect and respond deeply rather than trying to give a short answer.

Ask people to each share their answers and thoughts first without responding to each other. Gently interrupt anyone who jumps in and tries to have a discussion and reassure them that there will be time for that shortly. Allow for a pause of silence between each speaker so that everyone has a chance to absorb what has been said.

If you find yourself waiting for one or two people, gently ask them if they'd like to speak, reassuring them that it's fine to pass. If you find that you have long-winded people, set a time limit. Your group may have their own opinions about how much time to spend in this section and in discussion.

Discussion

Often a small group ministry session has an optional open discussion after all have shared. Discussion after all have shared deeply can be a really rich time of sharing. If you are doing this on Sunday morning you probably do not have this time. If you are using these sessions at another time and have a small group ministry format that has this time you may want to include it.

Likes and Wishes

This is a chance for people to say briefly in a few words what they liked about the session and what they wish had been different. This provides a closure for the meeting and allows people to share anything that's bugging them rather than carrying that annoyance home. It's also affirming to hear what people enjoy about each other and their time together.

Sometimes these wishes prompt change in later meetings. Sometimes, these wishes have more to do with people's new experience with small group ministry and getting used to the format. It's okay if it's new and a little uncomfortable for people. If they'd really like to change the format, ask them if they are willing to do a few more sessions as written and then to have a discussion about the format after they've seen how it unfolds.

Closing Words

These will be words to end your time together. Pause. And then thank everyone and go home knowing you are helping nurture your spiritual community!