

## Virtual Small Groups: Best Practices

### Know Your “Why”

- o Small groups flourish when participants know the purpose behind why they are meeting and leaders understand their role.
- o People are in need of community and connection now more than ever. This small group creates the space for fellowship during a time when people feel isolated.
- o Know your role as a facilitator: Your purpose is to guide and create the space for conversation. You are not expected to be a “teacher”.

### Before Your First Meeting

- o Send a welcome email to your small group. Create a culture of hospitality right from the start. This email should include:
  - An explanation of the groups purpose (the “Why”); practical details on how the group is going to meet (Zoom link, time, etc.); the expectation that everyone is welcome to participate, share, and ask any question. It’s helpful for members to know this is new for everyone and not just them.
- o Review your plan for your small group time.
- o Test your equipment in Zoom.
  - Enter the meeting early to make sure your audio/video are working and make sure Zoom is updated.
- o Ensure you have a stable internet connection.
  - Confirm you have a stable internet connection. You can do so here: <https://www.speedtest.net/>. 105-20 mbps download speed is recommended; use hardwired connection when possible.
- o Prepare your audio.
  - Always use headphones with a good mic. People feel more comfortable when they can see and hear you clearly.
- o Prepare your environment.
  - Choose a space that is quiet and as free of distractions as possible. Ensure your environment is well lit and bright. Avoid shadows on your face and in the background. Tip- always keep lighting in front of you. Sitting next to a window helps to make your background brighter.

### During Your First Small Group

- o Over-welcome: Say hello to each person as they join the meeting. As everyone joins the meeting, fill the time with conversation.
- o Over-communicate how it will work: Explain in the beginning how people are supposed to answer/share over Zoom and what to do if they have tech problems. Eliminate any doubt ahead of time and reiterate that they always have the permission to speak up.
- o Over-facilitate: Ensure everyone has the space to talk and share. Manage the conversation so that no single individual is able to dominate and that every individual has the chance to share.

- o Have the facilitator manage the chat box. If a member is having IT issues, encourage them to use the chat box to communicate to the facilitator.
- o Encourage everyone to use “Gallery View” during all meetings (not available on iPads).
- o Keep everyone unmuted and ask all members to share their video (if it’s not distracting). This helps conversation and takes pressure off of members to think so much before they speak.
- o Always state the elephant in the room: If you can’t hear someone, tell them. If you can’t see someone, tell them. It makes people feel less self-conscious if they know they will be told if something is wrong and don’t have to worry about it.
- o Introduce Zoom functions (chat box, raise hand button, backgrounds) and how your group will use them (should you choose). Share tips with the group for best lighting, internet connection, and audio.
- o Build interpersonal connection- this is key! Start with a question that everyone answers. This will help everyone get used to speaking up in a Zoom setting, using their equipment, timing, understanding how the functions work, etc. Utilize changing your background/sharing your screen and make it fun!
- o Icebreaker Ideas:
  - o “Cool zoom background” contests can be an easy weekly icebreaker and group activity.
  - o Begin by having each person share a gif that describes their week (either screenshare or in the chat box).
  - o Open with each member taking turns sharing their screen and sharing their current favorite funny YouTube video. When sharing a video in Zoom, make sure when you share your screen, you also press “share computer audio”.
  - o Begin with each member taking turns sharing their screen and showing the group a picture of where they want to go on their next vacation.
  - o Start or end with each member sharing their “one thing” for the week: Something positive or fun that they are interested in or that has inspired them. Ex: a song, book, new recipe, project, new movie coming out etc. Share links in external group message.
  - o For the next meeting, have each member pick one picture that best describes their relationship with God, family, or something light hearted like their best Halloween costume growing up.

### **After Your Small Group Meeting**

- o Encourage group communication outside of small group time. Start a group message to share prayer intentions.
- o Get creative in thinking of virtual fellowship opportunities outside of your regular meeting time. Ex: eating a meal together over zoom, creating collaborative weekly “Work From Home” playlists, Zoom happy hours etc.

