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# Tips for Running a Discussion Group

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# How to Run a Discussion Group (With No Study Questions!)

One of the most difficult things for some youth leaders is to write discussion questions for a discussion group that follows a talk from the Bible. Here are some helpful guidelines that may allow you to bypass this activity all together.

## 1. Listen to the talk

Are there any obvious points that are good for discussion?

What is the main point that the speaker is making?

How can this be applied to the lives of the young person in your group?

What is the 'take home content' in the talk?

## 2. Write down anything you think would be helpful to discuss.

As you listen to the talk, write down anything that you think would be good to discuss in your group. This will be easier the more you get to know your group. You need to think of specific areas you can apply the content of the talk (e.g., school, home, parties etc.)

## 3. In your group follow this simple pattern:

- a. Make sure your group is seated on the same level (height) and so that each person can see everyone else in the group.
- b. Begin each discussion group by going around the circle and asking how they are doing: did they have a good sleep? Are there highlights from yesterday? Etc. Make this brief and friendly.
- c. Have a sharing question (or two) that is loosely based on the talk ('What is something you trust? Was there ever a time you thought you were going to die? What are you scared of?' etc.) Do this 'throwing the soft object style' (this is where you throw an object to someone who must answer the question. They then throw it to someone else and so on).
- d. Ask these questions: "Are there any questions from the talk? Was there anything that was unclear? Was there anything you disagreed with?" You may find that a discussion begins right away. If not, bring up your questions or points that you wrote down during the talk.

## **One thing to keep in mind....**

Your group will have more fruitful discussion the more they get to know each other. The rule is simple: comfort brings discussion. You will find that a discussion group will function much better the second or third time.

## **“What ifs”**

There are a number of tricky situations you may find yourself in with your discussion group. Here are some helpful tips to get you out of a jam:

## **What if my discussion group doesn't discuss (in other words, they stay silent)?**

There are a couple of helpful things you can do. Begin your time by going around the circle and quickly finding out how each person's week was. Follow this with a sharing question related to the study. You can also have each person read a bit of the Bible passage to break the ice. This ensures that each person has the opportunity to say something before they are faced with a series of questions. This (in theory) should make it easier to have a time of discussion. Keep in mind that some young people are quite content to listen. Silence doesn't always mean they are unhappy or uncomfortable.

## **What if my group is too rowdy?**

There is good rowdiness and there is bad rowdiness. If the group is excited to be together that is a great thing. If they are throwing chairs through the windows that is a bad thing. There are a number of things you can do:

1. Explain to the group that we may need to calm down just a bit when it is time for the Bible study/discussion group. Tell them that their help is “greatly appreciated.”
2. Are you running activities before the study that rev them up too much? If so, you will need to change these activities or run them after the discussion time.
3. Spend some time with key individuals and explain to them the problem and enlist their support. The best type of discipline is that which comes from within the group. In other words, you want kids in the group to help you to calm things down.

## **What if one person dominates and answers all the questions?**

There are three things you can do:

1. Pull them aside and tell them that it is fantastic that they are so eager to share and answer the questions. However, explain to them that one thing they can do to really help the group is to give others a chance. Most young people will understand.
2. Have them sit next to you (instead of across from you). This simple group dynamic will often help solve the problem.
3. Make sure you say “hello” to them and spend some time catching up before the discussion group. Some young people may simply be looking for affirmation. This simple act may help.

## **What if the group goes on tangents or has so much discussion that we never finish the study?**

As with rowdiness, this can be a good thing or a bad thing. If your group spends time talking about silly things—this is a problem. If one person dominates the group by taking it away from good topics to irrelevant topics, this is also a bad thing. However, if the study keeps raising good areas of discussion that is helpful spiritually to the youth, this is a good thing.

Here are some things you can do:

1. If you have a young person who insists on asking questions that are not on track or the group finds silly or unhelpful, make a time to chat with this person and talk about their questions.
2. If they persist by asking these questions during group time, simply say, "That is a question that you and I can deal with after the discussion group. Now back to the study".
3. If the group goes on tangents that are helpful, this may not necessarily be a problem. The golden rule is that "the study was made for man, not man for the study!" You will need to judge whether a tangent is helpful or not. Keep in mind that tangents are often the places where fruitful discussions take place.

### **OTHER RESOURCES FOR CAMPING:**

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See also, "Camp schedule" in "Free Resources" [effectivelyouthministry.com](http://effectivelyouthministry.com)

See also, "Instructions for camp parents" in "Free Resources" [effectivelyouthministry.com](http://effectivelyouthministry.com)

See also, "Guidelines for camp cooks" in "Free Resources" [effectivelyouthministry.com](http://effectivelyouthministry.com)

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