

HighPointYouth Small Groups '09-'10

A Guide for HPY Small Group Leaders

1 Thess. 2:7b-8

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, **we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.** [TNIV]

Even though we had some standing as Christ's apostles, we never threw our weight around or tried to come across as important, with you or anyone else. We weren't aloof with you. We took you just as you were. We were never patronizing, never condescending, but we cared for you the way a mother cares for her children. We loved you dearly. **Not content to just pass on the Message, we wanted to give you our hearts. And we did.** [the Message]

First of all, thanks for acting on the call to be a small group leader! The investment you put into students will be invaluable...and will grow over the years more than you can imagine. Students have such a strong need these days to have a caring, believing adult in their lives...mostly just to listen and be there for them.

You will never be their parent (*that role is already taken*)...
you will never be their best friend (*though you will be a good one*)...
they will never be your spiritual guide (*talk about unhealthy*)...
but you will be their Small Group Leader!

You are the adult in their lives who listens without overreaction...who models God's unconditional love for us all...and who actually likes these students and gently points them to Jesus. It's an awesome and important responsibility.

Ten things a great small group leader provides for kids...

1. Another caring adult is cheering them on.
2. Encouragement to grow spiritually on their own.
3. Support during difficult times in their life.
4. Presence at their sporting events.
5. Someone who is excited to see them at church.
6. Someone they are excited to see when they arrive at church.
7. Someone who leaves them voice messages "just because I was thinking of you."
8. A caring adult who doesn't freak-out over bad grades--they're capable of being neutral.
9. Someone who is a "safe" person to talk to.
10. A person who is tender, yet truthful when students need a little correcting.

At HighPointYouth, we *must* have small groups to be able to offer these 10 things to every student. With all this in mind, this document contains a few other things to keep in mind over this school year as you lead your students.

Small Group Leader Expectations *(both HS and MS leaders):*

Once a WEEK:

- Pray for all leaders and small groups as you prepare adequately for leading your small group.
- Contact your students via phone call, text, twitter, etc. each week before small groups.
- Show up 15 minutes early and stay 15 minutes late *(or be the last to leave)*. This is crucial relationship-building time.
- Spend an additional 30 minutes each week to send notes, meet for coffee, send twitters, go to games, send a follow-up email, etc.

Once a MONTH: Talk with Mike or Jeanne-Mari to share your victories, struggles, and questions.

Small Group Leader Tips *(both HS and MS leaders):*

- **The two big small group rules you probably want to communicate often are (1) be respectful...when one person is speaking, everyone else is listening...and (2) what is shared in the group stays in the group.**
- Include the entire small group in the discussion whenever possible.
- At the beginning of each group time, let everyone in the group speak...they need a victory. Have them share a non-threatening piece of information about themselves in the group.
- Be aware of new people, and include them in the conversation.
- Remember that small groups often raise the tension level *(because people can't hide)*.
- Move from light to heavy discussion.
- Ask "I feel" rather than "I know" questions.
- **The best questions are not yes/no and do not have right or wrong answers.**
- The longer the group is together, the better they will feel about the group.
- In a small group, it's easier to share, pray, encourage and be personal than in a larger group.
- **Do not allow one person to monopolize the conversation. Talk to Mike if you need help with this.**
- Avoid put-downs or sarcasm. This kills trust.
- Don't overreact to any type of scary confession. Affirm the student...stop and have the group pray for them *(share hugs, whatever)*...then make sure to follow up with the student following the meeting.
- **Affirm every response.**
- Allow people the right to pass and not share.
- Create a casual and relaxed atmosphere.
- **Seldom expound on an answer yourself. If it needs expounding, ask the group to expound on it.**
- Call people by name.
- Over time, let each person take a turn at running the group.
- Eye contact and body language are important for the leader.
- When you ask someone to read, make sure he or she is able to read out loud or else don't ask them.
- Get your group in a comfortable atmosphere where everyone can see each other's eyes.

Small Group Leader Rules *(both HS and MS leaders):*

- **Guy leaders are not allowed to give a girl a ride to or from group.** Multiple girls to and from the same location is fine.
- **Female leaders are not allowed to give a guy a ride to or from group.** Multiple guys to and from the same location is fine.
- **Dating/flirting is never allowed between leaders and students.** If you are a college student who “likes” one of the high school students and would like to pursue a relationship...that’s fine as long as you first step down from being a youth leader.

I’m not a “rules” guy...but these rules are critical. They exist both for your protection and that of our students. If you have any questions or issues, contact Mike immediately.

High School Small Groups *(Non-first Wednesdays 7:00-8:30pm)*

High School small groups meet at the HighPoint building. Each “first Wednesday of the month” will be REVERB...our big-group worship and teaching gathering. The rest of the Wednesday’s of that month will be small group nights. Here’s the schedule of a typical night:

- 6:45 Leaders arrive; pray together for the evening.
- 7:00 Students arrive...hang out time.
- 7:15 Big-group study-intro.
- 7:30ish Break into small groups. Each week, the small group will include:
 - **Welcome.** “What’s been going on this week?”
 - **Bible study.**
 - **Prayer time.** “What are some specific things we can pray for you this week?”
 - **Thanks.** “Thanks for coming this week...it was great hanging out with y’all.”
- 8:30 Small groups end.
- 8:45 Everybody goes home.

High School small groups have the option of leaving the building for small group time. If a group wants to meet at *It’s A Grind* or *Taco Bell* or outside at a local park, that’s great. Make sure to let Mike know the location.

Middle School Small Groups (Sundays 6:00-7:30pm)

Middle School small groups meet at the HighPoint building. Here's the schedule of a typical night:

- 5:45 Leaders arrive; pray together for the evening.
- 6:00 Students arrive...hang out time.
- 6:15 Big-group study-intro.
- 6:30ish Break into small groups. Each week, the small group will include:
 - **Welcome.** "What's been going on this week?"
 - **Bible study.**
 - **Prayer time.** "What are some specific things we can pray for you this week?"
 - **Thanks.** "Thanks for coming this week...it was great hanging out with y'all."
- 7:30 Small groups end. Hang out time.
- 7:45 Everybody goes home.

If students want to help with the resetting of chairs, etc., that's great. And we always want to make it a goal to leave the building in better shape than we found it.

Wrap-Up

There are about a thousand little things you will learn about your students and about small groups over the year...way too many and way too unique to place here. Always feel free to contact Mike or talk to another small group leader who's been doing this for awhile. It takes a special gift to be able to be a good small group leader...and God uses special gifts in really big ways when we use them for His purposes.

THANK-YOU for being a HPY small group leader!

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Bonus Training Article:

The following article has some good advice for how to (or how not to) handle tangents in a small group. It's addressed to Junior High small groups (since it's a bigger issue there), but it is just as applicable to high school groups. Let me know if you have any questions about it. -Mike

Tangent Trouble! *by kurt Johnston*

If you've ever tried to lead a junior high small group bible study for more than about 3.5 minutes, you've experienced the universal struggle that all leaders face: Tangents.

Ah, tangents; those wonderful little diversions. If you're like most junior high small group leaders you probably feel like tangents are rarely wonderful and almost never little! I've got some bad news and some good news for you. The bad news: You will never eliminate tangents. The good news: You can minimize them and actually make them beneficial to the group.

Let me share a few thoughts about getting you and your small group out of tangent trouble.

1) Not all tangents are terrible. If you were actually able to trace the origins of the tangents your junior highers lead you down, you might be surprised to discover that most of them actually start off as an honest observation or question about the bible study or topic that is being discussed. What this means is that tangents don't always originate because students are bored with the small group, but rather, because they are engaged and the discussion is sparking something in those strange, little minds.

2) All spiritual discussion is good discussion. Here's what I mean. When a tangent takes over a group, it usually goes one of two ways: First, it may go down a crazy, windy path towards television shows, the cute kid at school or the price of tea in China. In these cases, you probably want to try to bring the tangent to an end as quickly as possible for the sake of your bible study time. But a second route tangents take is simply a small diversion from the original question or topic. These tangents typically stay spiritual in nature but add an unsuspected twist or turn. In my opinion, tangents that are still spiritual in nature are worth pursuing. If 7th grade boys want to talk about why bad things happen to good people instead of your study on the Beatitudes...LET 'EM! If you find them going down some tangent trail about helping the needy in the middle of your study of Exodus...GREAT! When these types of tangents arise, I suggest going with them instead of shutting them down.

3) You can slam the breaks on a tangent. When you do feel like it's time to bring a tangent to an end or to head it off before it starts, here is a super basic method: Brian: "Hey mister small group leader, do dogs go to heaven?" Mister Small Group Leader: "That's a great question, Brian. Why don't you track me down after our bible study time and we'll talk about it then."

I predict we will have people living in condos on Mars before we figure out how to end junior high tangents. Instead of trying to end them, I vote for leaders who determine to use tangents for good in their groups. I also vote for condos on Mars...that would be so stinkin' sweet!