

Making Small Groups Work: Creating Community

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Why is creating community important?

Relationships are the key to any good small group. *The best way to ensure that the relationships in your small group are healthy and positive is to be intentional in creating community.* The people in your group are far more likely to share deeply with each other and engage in discussions if they know each other first. This is why we encourage every small group to have fun together, to eat together and to share life with each other. When people know each other they are far more likely to be proactive in encouraging each other to be more like Jesus.

Shared experiences and particularly shared fun are essential in helping people to feel part of something. Most of us probably can't remember the content of the small group week on week but we can often remember the funny things that happened, the stupid games we played and the silly things people said. It's these little memories that help us identify the other people in our group as part of the same whole and that makes us feel safe when we're around them. And it's when we feel safe that we're more likely to share what's really going on.

Hospitality

As much as no one likes to admit they judge by appearances, most people make judgments on their first impression. In a small group setting the first impression is often the hospitality on offer.

Hospitality is more than just providing great snacks, although these are important. It's the feel of the room, how welcoming you are, how welcoming the people in your group are, how well getting to know people is facilitated.

Things you might want to think about when considering people's first impression of your group:

1. Are there snacks and drinks on offer?

Food is important. It's an easy way to be generous. It's

a great natural ice breaker. Chocolate hob nobs make a much better impression than a plate of slightly soggy rich tea biscuits.

Obviously be considerate of the means each of your small group might have to contribute to refreshments. But if bringing refreshments isn't on one person every week it's much easier to encourage people to be generous on their week.

Make sure you have some hot and cold drinks on offer, not everyone likes tea or coffee.

If people in your group are good at baking, encourage them to use their talents to bless the group!

2. What is the room we're meeting in like?

Are there enough chairs?

Is it too cold or too hot?

Is it tidy?

Do we need to consider meeting someone else's house because they have a bigger living room?

Could you use candles or lamps to make the room feel friendlier?

Is there room for worship?

3. Do I make an effort to be as welcoming as possible to newcomers?

Make sure you take the lead in chatting to new people. Introduce them to other people in the group. Your group will hopefully follow your example and take an interest in the new person. Even though it's not about you people are also more likely to stay in the group if they like you.

4. Do my group make an effort with new people?

Keep an eye on whether you are doing all the leg work with new people. Chat to people in your group about how they feel about new people. Encourage everyone in your group to make an effort with new people. Try not to let them get insular and cliquy. Explain everything.

5. Don't assume everyone who comes to your group for the first time is a Christian.

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If someone new has turned up to your group make sure you explain clearly what you're doing at each stage and let them know they don't have to opt in straight away. Hospitality doesn't end once everyone's got some food and a drink, it's about making people feel comfortable and safe the whole time they are part of your group.

Having Fun Together

It might sound like an obvious thing to say but having fun together creates community. So have fun in your small group. Fun creates memories, and it helps people get to know each other in a low pressure way. This means that when you ask people to share in a more intimate way they are more likely to feel comfortable with the other people in their group.

Fun looks different in each small group. It might be that your group loves watching movies or playing games, they could love sport or real ale or whisky, they might love good coffee or art. Try and tap into the interests of your group and create a group you love being part of. And don't be afraid to be original, it might be that someone has an idea for having fun you never would have thought of.

It's also fun to serve together. Many small groups would say that some of their most fun evenings have involved painting someone's house or doing someone's garden. For example the sense of community was really evident within the groups that painted Cedar House or the Arches. It's exciting not just to do something together that people enjoy but that also blesses others.

Some fun ideas:

- A night of board games - Balderdash, Cranium, Articulate, Deal or No Deal, Taboo, Last Word, Logo, Saboteur, Bohnanza all work well with small groups
- Wine tasting
- Ice skating
- Climbing (Youth Centre?)

- Real Ale night
- Cinema
- Sports evening/day
- Picnics
- Themed meals - mexican, italian, medieval!
- Eating challenges
- Blessing the community projects
- Ready, Steady, Cook
- Small Group Bake Off
- Fireworks Night/Bonfire
- Pancake party
- Christmas and Easter Parties
- Walking/Cycling (there are lots of beautiful walks/rides in the Peaks)
- Thanksgiving (if you've got Americans in your group)
- World Record Breaking
- Quasar
- Bowling
- Going out to a concert, play, open mic night, live jazz evening, pantomime, comedy evening together
- Games – Who's in the Bag? The Animal Game. Emperor Pauper. Morning Ma'am. Empires.

Weekends Away

Many groups have found that going on a weekend away together really helps people bond as a community. It's a bit like doing a whole term's worth of community building in one go. It's a great opportunity to get to know each other better, have lots of fun, eats lots of food and, if you like, go deeper on some subjects that you may not have time for on an ordinary small group evening. It's also a great thing to delegate to someone in your group to organise to give them a bit of ownership.

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Useful websites for finding venues are:

- **www.groupaccomodation.com** – a variety of accommodation is listed here from youth hostels to luxury cottages that accommodate groups larger than 10.
- **www.yha.org.uk** – youth hostels
- **www.nationaltrust.org.uk/holidays** - information about hiring cottages, bunkhouses, yurts and camping pods in various national trust parks and properties.
- **www.findabunkhouse.co.uk** – bunkhouses and camping barns.
- **www.thebigdomain.com** – more expensive accommodation, cottages and houses.

Icebreakers

Some people cringe at the word icebreaker. However they can be useful tools for helping people get to know each other better. If the word icebreaker really offends you just call it a question.

There is a resource available on MyTrent with lots of icebreaker question ideas for small groups.

Sometimes it useful to think of them in more than one category:

Level 1 Icebreakers: simple questions in which the group share a little bit of information about themselves.

E.g. Who's the most famous person you've ever met?

Level 2 Icebreakers: go a little deeper and require the group to share their opinions on something.

E.g. What would be your dream job?

Level 3 Icebreakers: are more full-on and require the group to share deeper feelings. They may form the basis of the whole small-group session.

E.g. When in your life (if ever) did God become more than a word for you?