**Small group leaders help sheet**

Don’t panic! Being a group leader doesn’t mean you have to know all the answers or be super-spiritual. Here are a few tips to get you started:

* **Before the group meeting**
* Pray for your group meetings, and for the individuals in your group.
* Plan: think about what you want the group’s purpose to be. Is it to deepen the members’ biblical knowledge? To pray and support each other in our daily lives? To explore difficult topics or share experience? These aren’t exclusive and a group might do more than one thing, but don’t try to do too much in every session or you’ll have a very long meeting!
* You don’t have to do everything yourself- consider asking other group members to lead parts of the meeting, or to host the meeting.
* **At your first meeting**

The first time you meet, or when anyone new joins the group, you might want to have a quick discussion about how the group works. That might include practical things such as:

* where and what time you meet;
* who the group members are (including sharing contact details, if appropriate);
* who to tell if you aren’t going to be at a meeting or need to leave early;
* what you might want to bring with you (Bible, study materials for example);
* what will happen during the meeting (coffee, bible study, prayer?).

It should also include ‘ground rules’ for meetings, for example:

* anything personal said in the meeting should be treated as confidential (unless the individual concerned has agreed it can be shared);
* listen to what other people are saying and don’t talk over them;
* treat each other with respect, even if you disagree!
* no question is ‘too stupid’ to ask, and no answer too obvious to give.
* **Leading a bible study**
* Start by praying and asking God to help you learn and understand.
* Read the bible passage aloud- either ask one person to read, or read a few verses each.
* Ask open ended questions that provoke discussion beyond yes/ no answers, for example, “What do you think James means by taming the tongue?” rather than “Does James think we should be careful about what we say?”
* Ask questions that explore the text (e.g. “What does James tell us about how the early church got on with each other in chapter 4?”)
* Ask questions that help us apply the text to our own lives (e.g. “How can we avoid showing the kind of favouritism James describes in chapter 2?”)
* Think about **what**, **who**, **where**, **when**, **why** and **how** questions- ‘**What** happens in this passage?’ ‘**Why** does this matter?’ ‘**How** should it affect me/ the church?’
* Wrap up the session by praying about what you have studied, and maybe committing to do something based on what you’ve learnt. Next time, you could spend a couple of minutes feeding back about how you got on or what difference it has made to you.
* **Praying with your group**
* Some people are comfortable praying out loud and others are not. Don’t try to force people. If your group isn’t keen on praying out loud, try something creative: write prayers on post-it notes, pray silently as you drop pebbles into a bowl of water, read or write a psalm, or use intercessions from the Methodist Worship Book to guide your prayers.
* Make it clear when prayer starts and finishes: perhaps you can pray first and last, or ask someone else to close the prayer after a given time.
* Don’t be afraid of silence but don’t let it go on so long it becomes uncomfortable.
* Pray about the passage: does it give you something to praise God for? Something to ask for his help to do better in living it out? Something to ask for clarity or guidance on?
* Pray for each other: encourage your group to share prayer requests and pray for one another, now and during the week.
* **Potential problems**
* The group doesn’t seem engaged with the session: maybe the questions don’t interest them- try asking different types of question (see above). Different people learn in different ways, so try using videos or artwork to stimulate discussion, or asking people to respond creatively- perhaps by writing a psalm or hymn, lighting a candle or listening to music. Try asking people what they want to get out of the group, and focus on what suits them.
* One person doesn’t talk: find ways to make them feel comfortable in the group. Some people take a while before they are comfortable discussing their faith with people they don’t know very well. Maybe talk to them outside group meetings and ask if there is anything that is making them feel uncomfortable?
* One or two people dominate the discussion: try asking if anyone else has a different point of view or insight they would like to share. Try not to single people out unless you know each other very well! If necessary, talk to repeat offenders outside the group meeting and ask them to think about letting others speak.
* One person has a pastoral issue which the group can’t deal with or which is affecting their behaviour: talk to your minister or pastoral team to get help.
* **Where can I find help?**
* Your minister.
* Other group leaders: they may be able to share wisdom and resources.
* Pastoral visitors: if there are members of your group who need pastoral help.
* **Resources:**
* The Circuit will be producing material for groups to use. Contact the Circuit Office for copies. You are welcome to adapt the material or to come up with your own!
* Methodist Church website: Bible Month page: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/bible-month> and the Small Groups page has information for groups including several free downloadable resources: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/small-groups>
* CWR’s Small Group Central site (<http://www.smallgroupcentral.org.uk/>) has some interesting tips on making your first meeting welcoming: <http://www.smallgroupcentral.org.uk/your-first-meeting-practical-tips/>
* The Cell UK website <http://celluk.org.uk/cuk2/> has some useful information on small groups and lists resources, as does the Evangelical Alliance: <http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/resources-for-home-groups.cfm>