

Leading Small Group Discussion

Question) What is the funniest or most random conversation you've had with a student?

The key to getting good discussion going is asking the right questions! This training will hopefully help you gain confidence in your ability to ask questions that initiate good discussion in small groups.

- 1) A **Leading** Question is asked in such a way that it assumes you know the answer. For example, "You all agree don't you?" This kind of question does not initiate discussion and should not be used.
- 2) A **Limiting** Question calls for a one-word answer. For example. "Do you agree?", expects a yes or no. These questions can work well in a Bible Study for getting facts from scripture. "in Romans 12:1 what did Paul say we should offer to God?" A limiting question should immediately be followed up with a Open Questions; otherwise they don't often create good discussion
- 3) An **Open** Question is specific, yet open ended. It expects those answering to think on their own and respond with a sentence, not just one word. An example would be, "What do you think it means to offer your body as a living sacrifice?" Open questions are the most useful kind of questions for initiating good discussion
- 4) A **Wide-Open** question is not specific, "Does anyone have any other thoughts on that?" They can be useful following an open question.

Mixing limiting or leading questions into a group discussion is okay, but just know that good discussion comes from open questions. Always be open to letting discussion go where kids lead it, as long as it's not always about their cat or something.

Leader-Initiated Questions:

- 1) **Direct Questions** are aimed a specific person
 - a. To draw a person into a conversation
 - b. To keep one person from dominating
 - c. To give someone a chance to talk who has something to say
 - d. To involve someone who has remained silent
- 2) **General Questions** are aimed at the whole group for anyone to answer
 - a. They are usually most useful for group discussion
 - b. They are normally the pre-planned questions given to you

Youth-Initiated Questions:

- 1) **Relay Questions** return someone's question to the group to answer
 - a. They promote discussion
 - b. They keep leaders from "preaching"
 - c. They get leaders off the hook
- 2) **Reverse Questions** return a question to the person who asked it
 - a. They give youth opportunity to express their own ideas

- b. They can help someone get serious who is making a joke of things

How do you respond to a youth when they give a wrong answer?

- Invite others to give another possible answer
- Restate the question
- Use an illustration to clarify
- Find a way to affirm the person
- **DO NOT:**
 - Say they are wrong and give the correct answer
 - React sarcastically
 - Laugh hysterically (even if it's hilarious)
 - Ask them what planet they got off of

What do you do when you ask a question, and everyone is silent?

- Silence can mean they are thinking, which is a good thing
- Give 10 seconds or so before you say anything
- Ask yourself if you used a good open ended question and rephrase if needed

How should I respond to a question that a youth asks me?

- If they are asking questions you are doing something right
- Try hard to listen and understand, the restate their question to make sure you understood it
- Determine if the student's question should be dealt with later, or the group should deal with it
- Avoid answering the question yourself. Involve the group in discovering the answer. Use Reverse or relay questions
- Don't be afraid to say "I'm not sure" if you don't have a good answer. Instead say "I'm not sure, but I'll look into it and get back to you"

Discussion Do's:

- Ask silent people easy questions to draw them out
- Reverse or relay questions back to the group
- Restate or illustrate when discussion waivers
- Summarize conclusions of the group
- Create an atmosphere of safe sharing
- Compliment good ideas/comments
- Keep discussion on track

Discussion Don'ts:

- Monopolize Discussion
- Allow one student to dominate the discussion
- Act as if you know all the answers
- Be uncomfortable with silence
- Let wrong conclusions go unquestioned
- Permit quarrelling
- Give up when students seem off track