

How to Conduct the First Meeting

It is recommended that you take some steps to building fellowship BEFORE your first meeting. The first may sound obvious, but is overlooked by many people seeking to launch a new group.

When you talk with the people planning on being a part of your group, be sure they know how to get to the host's home. A suggested meeting length is at least 90-min, but no more than 2-hours. Let them know you'll be providing snacks and refreshments and ask them if they need any help making arrangements for childcare so they can be a part of the group. This step is important because a couple of factors that help to increase people's commitment to the group are food and childcare. It is good for the small group leader to cover these things initially and then invite all the other participants to contribute later on.

Part of the small group leader's job in creating an environment where biblical community can grow is to create the right atmosphere in the place where you will be meeting. This might sound trivial, but physical space affects people on many different levels. You can help people feel more comfortable by arranging the seating in a circular way so they are facing each other, having snacks and drinks ready before people arrive, minimizing distractions, turning off the ringers on your phones, and even providing soft background music.

These same things can be done whether you're meeting in a home or the church building.[1] The important thing is to have them accomplished well before people arrive so that you can focus on greeting them at the door as they arrive and spending some quality social time as others show up and settle in. People's sense of belonging will increase exponentially if you complete these simple steps in setting the stage for your first and future small group meetings.

Let the first meeting be a time of people getting to know each other. Take time to learn about the people in your group and facilitate a conversation that can help them get to know each other. For example, you can ask each person or family questions like: "What brought you to our church and made you want to return?" "What motivated you to check out this group?" "What do you hope to experience in this group?" After everyone has had the opportunity to respond, share the hopes you have for the group and express thanks for everyone being there.

After the first few meetings, it is advisable to arrange for a couple of other people to bring drinks or snacks to your gatherings – this increases the commitment level for returning and eases your load.

Finally, take the lead in closing the group's time together in prayer, giving thanks for each person present and for God's blessings on your new group!

[1] Generally speaking, homes tend to feel more personal and relaxed so if a host home is available from the get-go, meet there. Sometimes leaders offer their home initially or they have the first meeting at the church and then determine a host home. It is recommended to meet in the same location for the first few meetings because it can be a deterrent for people to return if you start changing locations too early on. When you do change location, make sure everyone gets directions.