



Leading a Small Group

Suggestions for hosting *why on earth...?* sessions

In advance

First decide where and when will you meet. Draw up a simple plan for publicising the sessions. Who do you want to tell? How will you tell them? What posters or flyers will you need? Remember: quality design and materials give a better impression. Feel free to use images from the *why on earth...?* site. Personal invitations are usually most effective.

As the first session approaches, make sure you know how to download the *Leader's Notes* for yourself and a *Session Sheet* for each group member. Make sure you can play the short, animated video during the session (either live via the internet, downloaded to your computer, or on disk). Will it be viewed on your computer screen, played through a TV or projected? Will all group members be able to see and hear it easily?

Group size

The size of your group will affect its dynamics. As a rough guide, in groups of 3-6 people everybody speaks, but the range of views and experiences may be limited. With 7-10 people almost everybody speaks. Between 10 and 20 people a few may dominate and some not speak at all. With over 30 people little participation is possible.

The room

- An ideal room is one that just fits the group. Too small is better than too big. Worst of all is a small group rattling around in a large room or hall! A home is a more relaxing setting than a church hall or other public space, and more conducive to easy conversation.
- Provide enough chairs and remove redundant chairs. Keep spaces between chairs to a minimum.
- Check for good 'eyelines' so people can see each other without twisting or turning.
- Positioning of chairs affects group dynamics. We suggest sitting in a circle, with the leader in the circle with everybody else. Worst of all is sitting in rows like a formal lecture.

Planning a session

- Read the *Leader's Notes* far enough in advance to find any items or equipment needed for that session (ideally, leave a few days). Note that each session has three sections: *Starters*, *Main Course* and *Dessert*. There is also a *Takeaway* at the end. All the information you need to lead a session is in the session's *Leader's Notes*.
- Each session includes an *Icebreaker* as part of the *Starters*. The simplest way to organise this is for everybody in the group to speak in turn, starting with yourself as leader.
- An essential part of each session is *Background Noise*. This is a chance early on for group members to share any views and opinions they have already come across on the subject, from all kinds of sources. To help them do this, there is a *Background Noise* picture with thought-bubbles representing each of the following:
 - > (School) School and upbringing
 - > (People) Friends and family
 - > (TV) TV and film
 - > (Smartphone) Social media
 - > (Question-Mark) Anything else

It is important that people feel free to talk about the range of views they have heard, without any sense that there is a 'correct' answer.

- Each session includes sections labelled *Explain (read out)*. Simply read these out loud to the group. Sections labelled *On sheet* refer to activities on the Session Sheet which you will give out to all group members during the session.
- Some of the discussions are in pairs rather than as a whole group. Occasionally it is suggested that pairs are varied during a session, so a group member shares with a different person. The simplest way to do this is for group members to start with the person to one side of them, then later switch to the person on the other side. An alternative is to ask people to move to different seats.
- Decide which of the two prayer options at the end of each session you are going to use. In every session there is either *Creative Prayer*, which is interactive, or *Space to Think*, which is a time to reflect on words from the Bible, ending with the *Lord's Prayer* in modern or traditional form. Whichever option you go for, end each session by reading aloud the *Closing Prayer*.
- Each Session ends with a *Takeaway*. This is a simple activity or point to ponder for group members in the week ahead.

Role of the leader

- Help group members to feel at ease with one another and the session. Be friendly and welcoming. Music as people arrive can help. Anticipate the range of drinks people might like, and decide if you are going to serve biscuits or snacks too.
- Involve all group members in the discussions. In whole-group discussions you may need to encourage quieter members to participate (while recognising some people prefer to listen more than speak). You may need to intervene tactfully if one person dominates discussion. 'Does anybody else have thoughts on that?' usually works.
- Be sensitive to individual needs (any current personal issues for group members).
- In discussions, welcome group members' experiences and the diversity of their stories. It is a vital component of *why on earth...?* that people can be honest about their own experiences and questions. Don't tell somebody their perspective is wrong or allow other group members to. If somebody does express views you or others find odd, it is better that they find the group a safe place to hear different perspectives and others' stories, rather than a place of criticism.
- Be timekeeper for the group. Ensure the group finishes on time. Move discussion on where necessary.
- Expect to share as an equal in the group, joining in all exercises and discussion. Enjoy taking part yourself!