



## REMEMBER

- The best small group questions, exercises and activities provide an invitation for participants to respond from their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences where no “right answer” is required. It is important to remember that their stories have shaped who they are. If you want to know them, find ways of inviting them to share their stories.
- Having others hear and acknowledge us as we share swells confidence and increases possibilities; being mocked or disregarded does the opposite. Watching for disrespect and protecting each participant is vital if the small group is to bring life rather than death.
- Our God is a listener. He “bends down to listen” to us (Ps. 116:2) and we represent Him well to the world when we listen too. Choosing to listen is agreeing with God about the value of the young person sitting before you. Every time you do, you communicate the youth’s worth in a tangible way.



## RECOGNIZE

- Small groups can be a place where things are discovered rather than taught. Choosing curious and interesting conversation questions about thoughts, feelings and experiences creates space for teens to explore what they think, who they are, who others are and who others see God to be.
- Our desire to engage teens with content we want them to hear can threaten the potential for genuine community building in small groups. A group that impacts teens is often more about hearing and being heard within an authentic community than about gaining information.
- Small groups can also be a place to help young people build communication skills, think reflectively, learn empathy and practice restraining themselves to listen to others. These skills are central to the development of resilience which helps teens weather the storms of life.
- Creating a group agreement provides a set of clear, co-created guidelines that invite everyone to share responsibility for the safety of each other and the experience. A group can regularly re-visit agreements to see if they are still working and make changes if issues arise.



## RESPOND

- **Know the flow.** Following a predictable pattern offers nervous and uncertain participants something to “rest into”. Consider moving through these 4 categories each week, inviting each teen to contribute their perspectives one at a time:
  1. **Invitation** - Check in and get to know each other better - (eg. best and worst of your week; two things you’re grateful for this week; online icebreaker questions ...)
  2. **Exploration** - Introduce the topic/theme and find a way to creatively invite the teens to consider it. (eg. Topic = joy; Exploration = search online images for joy and each pick one that captures joy most for you. Show it and tell why.)
  3. **Contemplation** - Share stories about where and when the topic/theme has intersected or impacted our lives by offering a question/sharing prompt to respond to.
  4. **Affirmation** - Exchange words of encouragement based on what you have heard; invite the participants to share what they’ve heard each other say.

- **Mind the Details.** No less than 4 and no more than 8 will offer the best conversational space. Be sure the group is sitting comfortably in a circle with no one person at a higher or lower level than the rest. Have a plan for how to give each teen a chance to share or pass (i.e.using a talking stick, tossing a conversation ball, going around the circle ...). Adjust the length of the group and amount of content based on the capacity of the participants.
- **Be a participant leader.** Always respond with appropriate and genuine honesty to each question/sharing prompt you give the group. Your faith will impact the way you see things and will authentically come through as you share your own stories.



## RESOURCES

[www.conversationcafe.org/the-complete-hosting-manual](http://www.conversationcafe.org/the-complete-hosting-manual) - An interesting format for stirring group conversations.

[spirituallyhungry.com/small-group-questions-for-youth-ministry](http://spirituallyhungry.com/small-group-questions-for-youth-ministry) - 128 small group conversation questions.