

Healthy Life Group Dynamics

by John Hanna

Life Groups Thrive On Safety

Safe Places are necessary for people to explore life with God and see just how that life intersects with theirs. As group leaders and hosts, we help create that safe place in many ways - some obvious, and some subtle. Clearly stating expectations for group dynamics up front will help create the tone and culture of your group. You can print this out and give to group members at one of your first meetings.

The Group Statement

We are a group of imperfect people pursuing a perfect God. We exist to help each other find and follow Christ. These are some things we want to be true of our group:

- *We create a safe and honest environment, staying transparent and authentic.*
- *We keep it inside the circle. Confidentiality is necessary for a healthy group.*
- *We look together to the Bible for help and guidance, and keep out our own politics, sales, or agendas.*
- *We do not try to fix each other, preach sermons, or give unsolicited advice. We instead encourage, listen to, and celebrate each other.*
- *We handle conflict between us quickly and honestly by going to the person, owning our part, and practicing forgiveness.*
- *We respect each other's time by starting and ending when we say we will.*
- *We trust that it is God's role to change people, not ours.*
- *We believe that in Jesus Christ, there is hope for everyone.*

HONESTY AND AUTHENTICITY

We create a safe and honest environment, staying transparent and authentic.

- Our discussion questions focus on life application so much because that is where the true work of the Spirit happens in us. Truth unapplied is just good information. **Our lives do not yet match up to the lives that God wants for us, so being honest about where we are is the first step to change.** Admitting things is a substantial step for most people, which is why everyone's timeline for sharing is different. But often, the leader sets the tone and pace of the group from day one.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We keep it inside the circle. Confidentiality is necessary for a healthy group.

- Confidentiality is necessary for a group to be healthy and transformative, and GOSSIP is the #1 killer of vulnerability, honesty, and significant relationships. Choose to respect your group members by considering what is said in group to be secret information, unless told otherwise. And it is also your responsibility to shut down conversations that sound like gossip. Fight for the health of your group!

KEEP OUT THE OTHER STUFF

We look together to the Bible for help & guidance, and keep out our own politics, sales, or agendas.

- Life Groups are not a forum for politics, sales, or other agendas. They are a chance to talk about life with God and what we are learning about Him. It is easy to drift, to go on tangents, or to venture far off-topic very quickly - but stay focused on the conversation! These other paths can lead to hurt feelings or missed opportunities; stay focused on the task at hand.

HEALTHY CONFLICT

We handle conflict between us quickly and honestly by going to the person, owning our part, and practicing forgiveness.

- **Conflict is inevitable.** Anywhere there is a significant relationship, there is conflict. It's natural - different people have different expectations and different ways of seeing the world. The question is always how we choose to deal with our conflict.
- **Healthy Conflict > Artificial Harmony.** It's true every time. Artificial harmony is created when we say, *"I don't want to hurt his feelings..."* or *"It's probably not a big deal, I'm sure I'll be fine..."* But we all know that unaddressed conflict always has unintended consequences.
- In Matthew 18:15-19, Jesus gives us clear direction on how to handle our conflict, and it's summed up quickly in the statement above. We believe that it's essential for us to handle conflict well, especially as leaders. And remember, it's always okay to ask for help!

LISTENING > FIXING

We do not try to fix each other, preach sermons, or give unsolicited advice. We instead encourage, listen to, and celebrate each other.

- This is possibly the most common of them all... the Cross-Talker. Cross-talking is usually done with the best intentions, but can come across as hurtful, insensitive, and even rude. It usually starts with... *"Well if it was me, I'd..."* or *"You really should..."* or even *"What God really says is..."*
- It's often not bad advice - but good advice with the wrong approach becomes bad. **Groups are not a forum for fixing problems - they are meant to facilitate self-awareness and the process of transformation.**
- You can help frame this up for your group by reminding everyone that when we share...
 - It's about our experience, not what someone else should do.
 - The "how" is never as important as the "why". Different doesn't always mean wrong.
 - In group discussions, listening > fixing. It's not that we *never* fix problems or confront each other - it's that we choose not to use our group discussion as a forum to do so. Confrontation is always best heard in relationship, and in private.