

# **DISCUSSION DON'TS AND DO'S**

Giving teenagers the opportunity for small-group discussion and reflection can make the difference between an unsuccessful and a successful session.

## **Here's what not to do:**

**1. Don't talk.** A discussion leader's primary purpose is to keep the conversation moving in a positive direction. Many times leaders end up doing all the talking because they can't stand the tension of silence. Don't be afraid of silence; most likely it means that your students are thinking!

**2. Don't preach.** Small-group time is your chance to sit back and listen to students' ideas. Be conscious of how often you tend to speak up and declare what's right and wrong. You'll find that if your teenagers have the opportunity, they'll actually preach your lesson for you.

**3. Don't rush.** It's important to have an outline of questions, but don't follow it so closely that you aren't giving your students time to "unpack" their ideas. Steer clear of asking yes or no questions. If a teenager does respond with a yes or no, follow up by asking "why" or explain.

## **A few suggestions to help your small group be more effective:**

**1. Keep order.** Begin every discussion time by going over the ground rules. Let your students know that this is their time to talk and to share their opinions. Explain that only one person may talk at a time, and make sure that you point out to the group the expectation of confidentiality.

**2. Encourage.** Teenagers need encouragement to speak up, so start discussions with icebreaker questions to get the ball rolling. For example, have students share high or low points of their week. During the discussion, respond to teenagers' input by saying something such as "That's a good point," "I can understand why you might feel that way," "Thanks for sharing," and so on.

**3. Dig deeper.** Small group discussions give teenagers the opportunity to open up and discuss things in a safe environment. When students answer a question, follow up and ask deeper questions like "Why do you think that is?" "Can anyone else relate to that?" "Does anyone else agree or disagree?" or "How does it make you feel when that happens?"