

Essential Components of Group Life

Though there are many different kinds of groups, all groups share some common components and group processes.

There are six essentials that every group should strive to embrace. Whether you are leading a task group, a children's group, a home group for adults, or a support group, these components frame the context for your small group experience. Groups may emphasize some of these six components more than others, depending on the focus of the group. But all six should be present in the life of a small group.

1. Pursue spiritual transformation. When the truth of Scripture meets the lives of group members, the opportunity for transformation exists. Some groups focus only on doctrinal truth and Bible study, while others primarily share needs and concerns. Groups seeking to be transformed into the image of Christ must read, study, and speak the truth and apply it to life. Such groups ask, "How will we change or respond to the truth that has been studied and discussed?" Don't settle for gaining information—pursue transformation. Allow the Holy Spirit to work the truth into your heart to produce lasting change and growth.

2. Practice intentional shepherding. "Do we concentrate on caregiving or discipleship?" The answer is "Both!" Groups that help one another grow while also providing care for people in need will rarely have attendance problems. When we care for one another we declare that the church is a family. When we disciple one another for ministry and growth, we are equipping soldiers for the battle. Every leader must face the tension of how much effort to place on caring for people and how much time developing them. Intentional shepherding occurs when leaders encourage group members to consistently practice both.

3. Build authentic relationships. Groups often struggle to define their relational purpose. "Do we concentrate on building friendships or do we focus on accountability?" The answer is "Yes!" It is both. We all want friends—people to laugh and cry with, people to socialize with, people to simply "hang out" with. But friendship without accountability produces little spiritual growth. Good friends really care about us, challenge our thinking, and remind us to maintain our commitments.

4. Encourage healthy conflict. No one enjoys conflict. In fact, most of us will do anything to avoid it, hoping the problem will go away. The real question is, "How do we deal with relational problems without destroying the community we are trying to build?" Some people consistently respond with kindness when there is a relational breakdown. They hope that treating the offender nicely and never pointing out the offense or pattern of sin—will somehow erase the problem. Others prefer head-to-head confrontation, eagerly pointing out someone's error and demanding repentance and contrition. Kindness and confrontation, when working together, promotes reconciliation and creates an environment for facing difficult issues with truth and grace.

5. Perform loving service. Humility and spiritual growth are fostered when you serve others. Groups that serve together tend to form stronger bonds of community than those who merely meet for Bible study and prayer. Something amazing happens when groups serve together in loving relationships. Community is developed and the task is accomplished.

6. Accomplish a divine purpose. God has called us to love one another and to reach out to a lost world which requires a group to create intimacy while practicing openness. Remember that there are still many in your church and outside its walls that need a loving community. If we hoard what we have, or fail to love one another as brothers and sisters, we fail to achieve what God has commanded.

When small groups seek to weave all six of these components into the fabric of the community experience, God seems to pour out His love and blessing upon everyone.