

. SIX ACCOUNTABILITY TIPS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Accountability, especially for teenagers who want to grow in their commitments to Christ, is vital to cultivating authentic community. The best and most natural place to do this is within small groups, especially if you embrace the small group/house group ideas. During house group time, non-accountability ingredients such as hanging out, eating together, teaching, discussion, and even prayer can be championed. This frees up small groups to zero in on the deeper ingredients of community—interaction, application of teaching, prayer, and accountability.

Here are six tips for cultivating an accountability environment within small groups:

- **Tip 1: Keep small groups gender-based.** As a rule, same-sex groups work best for accountability.
- **Tip 2: Cultivate trust.** Remind students at the start of every meeting: “What’s said here, stays here.” This helps cultivate an environment of trust and support. If you discover a student breaking confidence, confront him immediately and be sure he knows his continued involvement depends upon confidentiality. And by all means, don’t break confidence yourself.
- **Tip 3: Know when to make exceptions to confidence.** There are a few exceptions to the confidentiality rule. For instance, if someone’s life is in danger, if the church has certain guidelines for when confidence should be broken, or if there’s a legal obligation to tell someone else, then confidence must be broken. How do you do this? I’ve always told students, “I promise to keep everything confidential that I’m allowed to keep confidential. However, if you tell me something that I’m

responsible to tell someone else about, I will do so. Remember, however, I always have your very best interests at heart. I will only tell someone else when I know it is best for you; and I will only tell the person or persons that are supposed to know. You can trust me to do what's right."

- **Tip 4: Be vulnerable first.** Share personal victories and defeats. Without vulnerability, accountability doesn't happen. This means you must take the lead by being vulnerable first.
- **Tip 5: Be honest first.** Just as with vulnerability, accountability doesn't happen without honesty.
- **Tip 6: Ask good questions.** Accountability is enhanced when real-life questions are asked and answered. Consider asking these types of questions:
 - What are you doing in your time connecting with God?
 - How are you investing in the lives of others (those within the youth group and your non-churched friends)?
 - Do you have any strategies for how to best cultivate the important areas of your life (family relationships, school, job, friendships)?
 - What steps are you taking to make sure you're above reproach in relationships, especially in dating relationships?
 - Are there any sins you're flirting with, such as lust, gossip, lying, immorality, etc.?
 - How can we best pray for and support you?