

Leading a Small Group

Suggestions for facilitating a *Faith Pictures* course

In advance

First decide where and when will you meet. Draw up a simple plan for publicising the course. Who do you want to tell? How will you tell them? What posters or handbills will you need? Remember: quality design and materials give a better impression. Feel free to use images from the Faith Pictures site. Personal invitations are usually most effective.

As the first session approaches, make sure you know how to download the Leader's Notes, Session Sheets and Takeaway Sheets. Make sure you can play the video during the session (either live via the internet, downloaded to your computer, or on disk). Will it be viewed on your computer screen, played through a TV or projected? Will all group members be able to see and hear it easily?

Group size

The size of your group will affect its dynamics. As a rough guide, in groups of 3-6 people everybody speaks, but the range of views and experiences may be limited. With 7-10 people almost everybody speaks. Between 10 and 20 people a few may dominate and some not speak at all. With over 30 people little participation is possible.

The room

- An ideal room is one that just fits the group. Too small is better than too big. Worst of all is a small group rattling around in a large room or hall! A home is a more relaxing setting than a church hall or other public space, and more conducive to easy conversation.
- Provide enough chairs and remove redundant chairs. Keep spaces between chairs to a minimum.
- Check for good 'eyelines' so people can see each other without twisting or turning.
- Positioning of chairs affects group dynamics. We suggest sitting in a circle, with the leader in the circle with everybody else. Worst of all is sitting in rows like a formal lecture.

Planning a session

- Read the Leader's Notes far enough in advance to find any items or equipment needed for that session (ideally, leave a few days).

- Decide which of the two prayer options at the end of each session you are going to use. In every session there is either Creative prayer, which is interactive, or Quiet prayer, which is a time of silent prayer ending with the Lord's Prayer in modern or traditional form. Whichever option you go for, end each session by reading aloud the Closing prayer.
- Each session includes an Icebreaker as part of the Opener. The simplest way to organise this is for everybody in the group to speak in turn, starting with yourself as leader.
- Each session includes sections labelled Explain (read out). Simply read these out loud to the group. Sections labelled On sheet refer to activities on the Session Sheet which you will give out to all group members during the session.
- In each session there's an optional extra called Still got time? This comes immediately before the concluding part of the main session. Some groups might take a decision always to use the Still got time? and let the session run on slightly longer.
- Some of the discussions are in pairs rather than as a whole group. Occasionally it is suggested that pairs are varied during a session, so a group member shares with a different person. The simplest way to do this is for group members to start with the person to one side of them, then later switch to the person on the other side. An alternative is to ask people to move to different seats.

Role of the leader

- Help group members to feel at ease with one another and the course. Be friendly and welcoming. Music as people arrive can help. Anticipate the range of drinks people might like, and decide if you are going to serve biscuits or snacks too.
- Involve all group members in the discussions. In whole-group discussions you may need to encourage quieter members to participate (while recognising some people prefer to listen more than speak). You may need to intervene tactfully if one person dominates discussion. 'Does anybody else have thoughts on that?' usually works.
- Be sensitive to individual needs (any current personal issues for group members).
- In discussions, welcome group members' experiences and the diversity of their stories. It is a vital component of Faith Pictures that people can be honest about their journey of faith – including any doubts and questions. Don't tell somebody their perspective is wrong or allow other group members to. If somebody does express views you or others find odd, it is better that they find the group a safe place to hear different perspectives and others' stories, rather than a place of criticism.
- Be time-keeper for the group. Ensure the group finishes on time. Move discussion on where necessary.
- Expect to share as an equal in the group, joining in all exercises and discussion. Enjoy taking part yourself!