

Caring for Those You Lead

Leader Huddle Discussion Guide

Ice Breaker:

- Describe a time when you were part of a group that rallied around a person in need. What did that look like?

Teaching: Caring for Those You Lead

As small group leaders, we are called upon to care for those we lead. This involves both the head and the heart. We need to be equipped with resources and knowledgeable about what to do in a given situation. And we need to be motivated by a heart of love and compassion toward those within our care.

Our hope at NCC is that most basic pastoral care needs can be addressed within the context of small groups and the friendships formed there. When someone is hospitalized or laid off, has a baby or a difficult boss, loses a family member or has a moral failure, we want the small group to rally around them, to be a supportive community. This can be as simple as serving as a listening ear when they're dealing with relational issues or texting them to check in when they've been having a tough week at work. Some of this is so obvious that we don't even think of it as care, but as normal human interaction. But it's extremely important.

The following practices should be helpful to you as you seek to provide support and care to small group members who are facing difficult situations.

1. **Offer time and attention.** Think of this as the "gift of availability." Knowing that you are available may be all that someone needs. Attention is often the best gift we can give someone. Isn't this what kids are always craving? Giving attention says, "You're important to me. I care about you." Often this will involve intentionally setting aside time and eliminating distractions.
2. **Communicate acceptance and positive regard.** In other words, *smile*. Indicate that you are *for* them. Express confidence in them. If they are confessing a sin struggle, don't act horrified – thank them for sharing and validate their willingness to be open and transparent.
3. **Be a good listener.** This is how you earn trust with them. Don't just pay attention, actually *listen* to them and make it clear you are doing so. You can do so by utilizing the five steps to active listening, which you can remember with the acronym SOLER:
 - **Squarely** face the person
 - **Open** your posture
 - **Lean** towards the other
 - **Eye** contact maintained
 - **Relax** while attending

4. **Maintain confidentiality.** This should go without saying, but don't pass along what they share with you or with the group without a very important reason for doing so. And don't gossip about what was shared in the group with other group members. In general, the only time you should break confidentiality is when someone is threatening to injure themselves or others.
5. **Uphold appropriate boundaries.** Don't let someone hijack the group and dominate it with their issue or need every week. Of course, it depends on the group, but you may need to set parameters for sharing updates – perhaps reserving them for prayer time at the end. This is very situation-specific, but something to keep in mind.
6. **Remain committed to their growth.** Recognize that growth is a process. It takes time for people to grow. Often, the depth of your impact is determined by the duration of your investment. Walk with them.
7. **Assist in their learning process.** Don't solve all their problems for them, but assist them in the process of discovery, learning and development. People have a lot more buy-in if they discover a solution or make a decision themselves. You should do your best to support and equip them, but in some cases there's action they must take themselves and you'll circumvent their growth if you do it for them.
8. **Know your own limits.** Don't burn yourself out on one person's needs and neglect the rest of your group. Recognize your own span of care, your own level of ability, and refer them to help when necessary.
9. **Seek out resources.** As needed, seek out the resources and support you need to deal with the situation. As a small group leader, your coaches and small group director are resources for you. The church staff is available to help. You can reach out to NCC's pastoral care team by contacting Paul.Irwin@theaterchurch.com or Ryan.Zempel@theaterchurch.com. Ask for recommendations and referrals whenever necessary.

As we seek to provide care to the members of our small groups, it can be helpful to remember 2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

Discussion Questions:

- What are some pastoral care needs that can be met within the context of a small group? What are some needs that go beyond a small group's ability to handle?
- Which of the practices resonated with you the most? Why?
- Which practice do you think is the most challenging?
- Which of the practices have you seen followed by someone else in regards to you? How was it beneficial to you?
- What steps can you take to help the members of your group use these practices when a member expresses a need to the group as a whole?