

# CONNECT GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

**Nov 2022**



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## A Note from PD

Hello, Connect Group Leaders!

First, THANK YOU for saying “yes” to leading a Connect Group!

The mission of Connect Group ministry is the same as that of Christ Place Church: “To lead people in a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ,” and there are two main goals we are chasing to accomplish our mission: 1. True Biblical Fellowship and 2. Outward Focus. We want Connect Groups to be a place where ANYONE can come and feel like they belong and are growing closer to God. When we grow closer to God and see more of His heart, we begin to understand that we can’t keep it to ourselves; we are compelled to give away the love God has given us. When Connect Groups operate this way the impact is exponential. This is part of disciple-making: *to be disciples who make disciples who make more disciples!*

A large part of our influence is how we present ourselves. We put our best foot forward every time we meet, because a lack of organization, bad atmosphere, and an unwelcoming environment can be a huge distraction and make it hard for people to feel safe in our groups. We want Connect Groups to be successful and for you to know you’ve represented Jesus and Christ Place well every time you meet with your group!

Same team,

*PD*

Danette Matty, Director of Connections

- *What made you want to lead a group?*
- *What do you bring in a group setting that will make a difference in people’s lives?*
- *What do you desire most in a group?*

*“Give away what you desire most.”*





## 8 Key Habits of Small Group Leaders

Adopted from “8 Habits of Effective Small-Group Leaders” by Dave Early

The eight habits can take a small-group leader, and those under him or her, to a new level. Whether an apprentice leader, a novice small-group leader, a seasoned leader, a coach of group leaders, a director of a district of groups, or a pastor of a large small-group ministry, these eight habits will work and lead to fruitfulness and multiplication. You'll also experience greater fulfillment in your ministry.

The eight habits of effective small-group leaders are:

1. Dream of leading a healthy, growing, multiplying group.
2. Pray for group members daily.
3. Invite new people to visit the group weekly.
4. Contact group members regularly.
5. Prepare for the group meeting.
6. Mentor an apprentice leader.
7. Plan group fellowship activities.
8. Be committed to personal growth.

Source: Christianity Today online, <https://bit.ly/3failrc>

- *How does each of these habits impact a small group?*
- *How do they impact you as a leader?*

### **H.O.S.T.**

**H**ave a heart for people.

**O**pen your home.

**S**hare a snack.

**T**urn on the TV (DVD, Right Now Media, Roku).

Source: *Steve Gladen on Small Groups Podcast*, Episode 191





## Logistics is Our Love Language

Okay, that may be a little dramatic, but here is some helpful info that make small groups run efficiently and communicate caring and clarity to your participants.

### 1. Please call every individual the first time they sign up for your group.

- a. Your call makes them feel important, and they are.
- b. Your friendly voice helps them feel welcomed and not like a data point in our “system.”
- c. Your brief introduction (something like, “Hi D, I saw that you signed up for our group and I just wanted to welcome you!) communicates intentionality, not just process.
- d. Asking, “What made you sign up for our group?” could tell you where they’re coming from, if they signed up by mistake (it happens!), or that your group might not be for them (in which case, you can recommend another).
- e. **When Connect Leaders don’t call a new sign-up or they have a question that doesn’t get answered, they may feel uncared for.** We never want people to feel unseen or unheard. Occasionally someone says, “*I signed up for a group but no one called me and I didn’t know the address where they meet.*” Sad, but it happens. One quick phone call or voicemail brings caring and clarity.

### 2. Please take attendance after every group.

- a. Around CP, we have a saying: “*Numbers matter because every number represents a story, every story represents a person, and every person matters to God.*” So, when you take attendance, it gives us a bead on people’s involvement and helps us compare what works with what doesn’t. Reply to the Attendance email or use the Church Center app on your mobile device.
- b. Group attendance is a practical detail that helps give us an indication of personal involvement and possibly, spiritual growth.

### 3. Weekly email/text/phone call makes all the difference.

- a. Regular communication from you communicates caring and clarity to your group members.

### 4. All Things Admin

- a. If you have tech questions, contact our Tech Connect Coach – see #5. For administrative questions, contact your Connect Coach or anyone from our Connections team (PD or Käte).
- b. Administration includes familiarizing yourself with Planning Center Online (PCO), downloading the green & blue **Church Center App**, which is the mobile version of PCO, as well as the red & white **Christ Place App**, which tells you what’s happening currently at CP. The more familiar you are with the apps in particular, the easier it will be to help your group members with them. The Church Center app is an easy way to message with your group without overloading your email or phone with group texts (unless you want those).
5. **Connect Coaches** – Prayer and knowledge support in Connect Groups Ministry.
  - a. **Online Only & Tech Connect Coach:** Dave Shoff [dave@shoffs.com](mailto:dave@shoffs.com) (E.g., PCO, Church Center App, etc.)
  - b. **Young Marrieds/Families Connect Coaches:** Dan & Anna Farnworth [dfarnworth216@gmail.com](mailto:dfarnworth216@gmail.com), [aemendyk@gmail.com](mailto:aemendyk@gmail.com)
  - c. **Women’s Connect Coach:** Larissa Drappel [ohheyylari@gmail.com](mailto:ohheyylari@gmail.com)
  - d. **Men’s Connect Coach:** Alan Morrison [alan.g2r@gmail.com](mailto:alan.g2r@gmail.com)
  - e. **Young Adults Connect Coach:** PD
  - f. **Multigenerational (Everyone Welcome) Coach:** PD

### 5. Online Resource & Team Connection

- a. Connect Leader Hub: [christplace.church/connectleader](http://christplace.church/connectleader)
- b. CL Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/478413856005726>
- c. CP app & Church Center app
- d. Study Guide Library: [christplace.churchcenter.com/people/forms/301154](http://christplace.churchcenter.com/people/forms/301154)
- e. At least once a year (Fall), Pastor Rick asks all CL’s to lead a church-wide study based on God’s direction for Christ Place; usually six weeks.
- f. Once or twice annually, we host a CL “Investment” where we touch on more specific areas of leading groups and mentoring people.







## 6. All Things Shepherding

- a. If something comes up in your group you are not sure how to handle, please feel free to contact your Connect Coach, if someone is currently in that role or Pastor Danette at [dmatty@christplace.church](mailto:dmatty@christplace.church) or 402-421-1111. We don't want you to feel alone in leadership. We all bump up against personal and group dynamics that throw us for a loop at times. Our team may not have all the answers, but we have some! And, we're here to support you!
- b. Keep an eye on people in your group who would be great at shepherding others and please, refer them to us!
- c. Kids and pets are family members (one is more important than the other 😊).
  - *How do you enjoy both (kids and pets) and have a meaningful group time?*
- d. Depending on your seating arrangement, ask people to sit farther from door so late-comers and guests don't have to walk through the group to get to a seat. This communicates: We have an open seat and we're expecting you!





## How to Facilitate a Meaningful Discussion

1. Set the tone of your group. No one can create a friendly atmosphere like you, the leader. When it comes to energy, honesty, and a welcoming environment, that's you. There are other things that contribute to the culture of your group like: having pleasant music on when people arrive, a greeter who welcomes people at the door, starting and ending group on time, having snacks (who doesn't love treats?), though food is not a requirement.

**Fun-killers:** Awkward alienating or condescending remarks or behaviors oversharing "TMI", politics, critiques or assumptions about people, groups, or the church, etc. Stick to wise and life-giving discussions!



- *How can you respond when this happens?*

2. Pray & Prep. We ask you to spend a little time each week to pray for your Connect Group. What a difference it makes when leaders pray! Also, don't wait until 30 minutes before CG to look at the Study Guide. Review the Study Guide a day or two prior to your group meeting; consider making it part of your devotional time with God, to allow the Holy Spirit to teach you "beyond the book." We trust Him and you to put questions in your own words, if that helps you and your participants.

3. Ask "follow-up questions". When someone responds with a "yes" or "no", follow it up with, "Why do you say that?" or, "Tell us more about why you feel that way."

4. Don't be afraid of silence. Especially in the beginning of your group, it can be awkward, but it's part of the process. Sometimes people need to mentally process.

5. Help the non-verbal person with a direct question. For example, "Shelby, what do you think about that?"

6. Help the verbal person by taking action. For example, “Joe, that’s great and I love how you’ve contributed. Let’s get some others involved in this conversation.” If this is a reoccurring issue, have a private conversation along these lines: “Joe, I love having you in group and your input is vital, but I need you to help me get others to talk. So rather than always responding, let’s give others the opportunity. I’d like for you to help me ask others their thoughts.”

7. Grow in sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. If at any point in the discussion, the Holy Spirit prompts you to pray for someone or insert a question not in the workbook, be bold. Consider this: “Hey everyone, this isn’t in our workbook, and I could be off but I feel like God is leading me to ask \_\_\_\_\_.” Furthermore, we want to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s prompting and love someone by praying for them even though it wasn’t planned. This kind of sensitivity to God could mark a powerful turning point when it comes to the relational tenor of your group!

8. Affirm people’s responses. When someone shares something, thank them and repeat part of what you heard them say.

9. It’s okay if you don’t know an answer. People respect leaders who say, “I don’t know,” or “I’m not sure.” If someone in group asks a question and no one has a good answer, let them know you’ll get one. Follow-up next week with what you’ve discovered.

10. Ask others to HELP. Put together a sign-up for weekly treats. Ask if someone is interested in sending out the prayer requests taken each week. Prayerfully enlist someone you trust to be your assistant leader in the group.



## Tips for Your First Group Meeting

- Before everyone arrives, make sure the video is working and the volume is where you want it.
- Start and end on time.
- Whatever content you are leading from, become familiar with the study guide sections entitled something like, “A Note to Small Group Hosts,” “Understanding Your Study Guide,” or “Using Your Workbook.”
- Have fun & get to know each other.
- Consider the below ideas for your first group meeting.

**PRE-ARRIVAL:** Play music and turn on lights before people arrive. Provide pens for people to take notes.

**ARRIVAL:** Allow people to arrive, talk, and snack. As the leader, take time one on one and ask history questions (i.e. How long have you lived in Lincoln?). (EST 10 Minutes)

**GETTING STARTED:** Gather everyone together and open with a short and sincere prayer. Go over the below elements of what a healthy connect group looks and feels like, and ask everyone to agree to do their part to foster healthy relationships. (EST 3-5 minutes)

1. We want you to bring your Bibles.
2. It's always O.K. to ask a question - no such thing as a dumb question.
3. Be completely honest - even if it's not real spiritual.
4. Confidentiality is non-negotiable - what's said here, stays here.
5. Be a good listener and realize that body language communicates as well.
6. Know yourself - are you verbal or non-verbal?
7. Avoid politics and gossip - stay on course.
8. As the CG facilitator, I request your permission to bring us back from “rabbit trails.”

**INTRODUCTION:** Have everyone open their Study Guide to SESSION 1. A fun ice- breaker question or game is optional during this section. It's your call...just be mindful of time. (EST 5-15 Minutes)

**WATCH VIDEO** (if applicable): Encourage people to take notes during the video. When the video is over, proceed to the discussion questions. (EST 35-45 Minutes)

**DISCUSSION:** Our goal during the discussion is for people to talk. Duh, we know! It's tempting to teach here, because, after all, you have wisdom and you're the leader. Here's a good rule of thumb: If you feel strongly about making a specific comment after a question, only do so after 2-3 others have shared their thoughts. Give people 20-30 seconds to gather their thoughts and voice them. You'd be amazed that, though 30 seconds feels like 30 minutes, someone will offer their opinion and it will be worth the wait!

**WRAP UP:** Learn how to "land the plane" in a discussion. Don't hesitate to wrap up even if you didn't cover everything. Meaningful dialogue over a few discussion points is just as enriching as asking and answering every single discussion point. When you're close to your end time, share a closing thought (in just a few statements), and close with prayer. It's better to end on time and leave people hungry for more (with the option to hang out after the 'official' wrap-up) than to go past the stop time and make people feel obligated to stay. People can tell when you respect their time.

**GROUP PRAYER:** Ask if there are any prayer requests. Ask someone to write them down. Ask if anyone would like to pray for any of the spoken needs. You, as leader, end with a final, brief prayer.

**DISMISS:** Encourage everyone to meet with God each day, practicing listening and talking to Him, and reading His Word.

This is simply a guide to help you have a great Connect Group experience. Please feel free to take these guidelines and tweak them to customize them to your group setting. If you have any questions at all, please reach out to our Connections team. Thank you for being a disciple who makes disciples!



## Expectations for Meeting at Christ Place

If you are meeting in a room at a Christ Place campus, be sure to procure a key or entry code and honor the below “Room Clean Up” guidelines.



### Room Clean Up

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*After your meeting, you are responsible for cleaning up all rooms that were used (classrooms, nursery, kitchen, foyer, bathrooms etc.)*

- Wipe down tables, chairs, counters as needed.
- Put all items back in their place: chairs, toys, coffee pot, paper products etc...
- All trash cans that were used need to be taken out to the dumpster and then replace the liner with the bags in the bottom of the trash can.
- Vacuum around/under furniture as needed.
- Nursery bathrooms checked, and wipe down seats/floor with sanitizer.
- Put all rooms back the way you found them... or better ☺
- All cleaning supplies are located in the storage closet in the main foyer (trash bags, cleaner rags, vacuums, sweepers, etc...)
- All food used/left for future meetings needs to be in proper, sealed storage containers. If not properly stored, it will be thrown away.
- Thank you for helping us keep our facilities a clean and enjoyable place!



