

Small-Group Student Leader Training: ECOURSE

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Goals of Small Group Training

We want to see ESM students trained, equipped, activated to demonstrate the love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. And we believe Small Groups are essential for this growth!

1. All students across onsite and online campuses participate in weekly small groups in class
2. We encourage small groups to consider meeting outside of class as they are able to accelerate learning and extend their classroom experience
3. A large part of small group success is a leader who is willing to create connection, vulnerability, and model leadership

Part I: Basics of Encounter Small Groups

1. Who is in my small group?

1. Small groups will be selected for you during Quarter 1 with the intention of helping to create a foundation for networking and regional transformation
2. Groups usually consist of 4-8 students who meet regularly at the start of every onsite class for 20 minutes or so. Online Small groups will most often meet at the end of their Zoom sessions.

2. What do we talk about in a small group?

1. Small group is a time to discuss three types of questions related to Encounter School:
 - a. The first topic is about the 'past' week's homework. And since Encounter homework is vital to all growth, it is important that each week, small groups share about homework and ask the question: What did Jesus do this past week through your homework? What did you learn? Where was the breakthrough? What's your recent testimony? This topic of homework also

provides a measure of accountability to one another to consistently do the work outside of school.

- b. The second topic is about the present. We want to connect with each other before class and give everyone a chance to share what is on their heart right now or what is Jesus doing in them during our time of praise. What did they experience in prayer or receive from God during worship?
 - c. The third basic topic is about the future. As a teaching ministry, we know that renewal of the mind is ongoing and is vital for transformation. So we ask: Where is God renewing your mind regarding your future with him, others, or the world? What is coming up in your week that might be challenging or will provide an opportunity for you to demonstrate the hope that's in you? Where do you need our prayer and support to help you achieve your God given dreams?
2. Looking weekly at the 'past, present, and future' gives structure to leaders while also providing freedom to handle real life moments that come up in class and in the personal lives of your group.

3. Do small groups meet outside of Encounter School?

1. Small group leaders have access to a small group curriculum filled with weekly questions and activations to extend your learning and accelerate your growth with the Lord and each other.
2. Regular emails will be sent to you with this extended curriculum content.
3. Consider inviting your group to meet outside of class weekly, monthly, or schedule a time once a quarter to meet in person or over zoom.
4. Since this is optional, encourage but don't put undue pressure on any member to have to participate.

4. What are my responsibilities as a leader?

1. **Facilitate Your Group:** Be proactive and excited to start the process with your group. As necessary, especially if your group wants to meet outside of class, be open to making phone calls or sending regular emails.
2. **Facilitate Discussions:** This is your CORE RESPONSIBILITY. Be prepared for each week with your homework done so you can be ready to focus on your group. Reviewing questions/topics/lessons ahead of time. If you meet outside of school and use the additional curriculum resources, look over the basic set of questions and activations related to your next small group time. Good small group leaders know how to ask questions and when to allow the Holy Spirit to redirect the group in a different direction without losing the purpose of the small group.
3. **Facilitate Activations:** Again, if you meet with your group outside of class, you can use the additional activations included in your small group curriculum. Activations are not hard to lead but they require faith! So ask for more! They are specific spiritual exercises to 'actualize' the very teachings that the questions cover. So when leading activation, remember the key is setting expectations and being the

first to take risks! As always, the leader is celebrating progress, passionate about every testimony, and models feedback and encouragement.

4. **Provide Accountability:** Be aware of your time, giving everyone an opportunity to share. Set the example by taking ownership of our core values, and continue to grow personally in these areas. You are not called to police your group, but by personally modeling good follow through and encouraging others to keep their commitments, you'll help keep others accountable to participate in small groups, complete homework, and keep up with content.
5. **Share Feedback to Leaders:** Continue to maintain communication with School Leadership by sharing testimonies, breakthroughs, and updates on the health of your group! And of course, please reach out to discuss any issues for which you need help/advice.

5. How can I fulfill my core responsibility?

1. Your core responsibility is making sure there is order and everyone has time to share and process their experience as it relates primarily to homework/teaching/activations. Of course, there may be situations that demand special attention be given to a fellow classmate because of a particularly powerful or painful experience in their life. With as much grace and wisdom as possible, please make sure that you do not let one student's personal experience or need, however, dominate your session.
2. In saying that, here are some quick ways to help you fulfill your responsibilities
 - a. Make sure to set up proper expectations:
 - i. "Hi everyone, before we begin, I just want to thank you all for being vulnerable and also respecting our time. We want to make sure each person gets to share. If everyone can make sure to be encouraging but not to feel the need to give advice or offer to minister to someone during small group. You are welcome to ask or receive that after everyone shares. Thanks!"
 - ii. Hi friends! Since there is a tone of activations today, I think our focus should be on _____. Sorry if you've got a ton of other things you want to share, but if we can keep it focused, that will help us all process the class best. Thanks for understanding!
 - b. Make sure to have some subtle ways to interject and manage situations where a group member is dominating the discussion:
 - i. "I'm so sorry that you are going through this. We're going to pray for you right now and then keep going. However, if anyone here would like to stay after or schedule a time to meet, maybe that's another way we can support you?"
 - ii. "Thank you so much for sharing. I know God's doing so much in you right now. If you don't mind, I want to make sure we have time to hear from everyone and then, if we have extra time, we can come back to you.

- c. And finally, be mindful of potential members who are totally content to let others talk for them and to remain in the background. Using encouragement, and not pressure tactics, the silent observers in small group can gently be invited to share and celebrate when they do.
 - i. “I know that we usually start with me going first in sharing, but maybe today, we can start with _____? What do you think? We’d all love to hear your experience of homework?”
 - ii. “Wow, that is awesome. It’s so great to hear how God is working in your life! We all are so excited whenever you share! Thank you so much!”
 - iii. Maybe next week, would you begin the group sharing? I know a few of us can totally fill up the conversation easily but I really believe it would bless the whole group to hear what you experienced first.
3. Other than managing small group discussions, we will periodically ask leaders to get feedback, pass along reminders, or to take attendance in your small group.

6. What happens if I am absent?

1. If you miss a class, we simply ask that you establish a back-up classmate to help move the small group through their discussion time.

7. What should I do for the first (few) Small Group sessions?

1. Welcome everyone and give everyone a chance to share their name, where they are from, and maybe their home parish.
2. Inviting members to share how they heard/got connected with Encounter.
3. Let them know your role as the leader (not dictator!) doesn’t mean you know more than them, but with their help, you are making sure that we’re holding each other accountable to the greatness God placed inside of us by his Spirit. Also accountable to homework and attendance!
4. Express to the group that even though we didn’t pick this group, we’re invited to choose to love, honor, and bless this group. God wants each of us to be in this group and so we are partnering with God and each other to make this a time to honor the Lord and celebrate and bless God’s good work in each of us.
5. Regularly remind your group that even though we are not always deep diving into the secrets of the heart, we are honoring the conversations in our small group. Unless someone is a danger to themselves or others, we are committing to not sharing details of other peoples sharing with anyone outside of this group.
6. Finally, let group members know that you are open to feedback. That you will do the best you can to make sure everyone gets a chance to share. This may mean you’ll need help and encouragement along the way.

Part II: Enhancing Your Small Group

The following section is on enhancement. Once your group is flowing well, you can challenge yourself and model for your group Connection, Leadership, and Accountability. Discerning how to apply this to your group is important and not all groups will necessarily arrive at a place to go deeper at the same time, if at all. As you listen to this section, we invite you to begin dialoguing with the Lord how he wants you to enhance your small group so that it brings him the most glory and blesses all those involved!

1. Connection

1. **Creating a Safe Place:**

- a. Be someone who will protect the integrity of relationships by keeping things confidential. Communicate that as a group, we listen and value what others share by not interrupting each other or trying to give unasked for advice. We want our small groups to be safe places for people to share within the limits of what our goals are and their relation to the school.
- b. Ask Jesus how can you better create a safe environment for this to flourish?

2. **Modeling Vulnerability:**

- a. The definition of the word “vulnerable” - it comes from the Latin word “vulnerare” which means “to wound.” Therefore being vulnerable means that I share things that can expose my heart to others when I share. Vulnerability is more than just sharing sin, struggles, or the things people could use to wound us, but also about sharing hopes, dreams, and areas we are gifted in. It includes sharing about activations, homework, and allowing others to hold us accountable to our school commitments. Sharing and asking for feedback is a way in which leaders can create opportunities for growth and how you deal with any negative emotions from this process with the Lord is a sign that you are growing!

3. **Emphasizing Intentionality:**

- a. Connection requires you to deliberately engage with those around you. This is important for those individuals in your group who are the least likely to share with the rest of the group to know that each person has the power to choose to participate. As you ask the Lord how you can be a more intentional leader, consider asking for prayer requests, fasting for your group, and reminding them that creating a deeper connection is a choice and not just something that happens naturally.

2. Leadership

1. *"You can love people without leading them, but you cannot lead people without loving them."* - John Maxwell
2. **Working On Communication Skills:**
 - a. Too often we assume that life experiences have taught us all the communication skills that we need. However, though a lot of skills are transferable in life, your small group facilitation will often require you to go back to the basics with the Lord. Ask Jesus, in the environment you help lead, are you a good listener? Do you seek to understand while listening? As you consider this with the Lord, you can begin not only to model this to your group, but also encourage your group to be comfortable with silence after a question is asked and help remind the group about how important it is to be fully present to one another during small group time.
3. **Emphasizing Ownership:**
 - a. In a small group, you may have a fellow student who either overshares or shares in such a way that it communicates a victim mindset. This tends to make groups feel like they have to cater to one person at the expense of everyone else. As Christians, we are each called to break off lies and take personal responsibility for our own life's growth, purpose, calling and greatness. You can emphasize this by regularly inviting everyone into the process of affirming teachings on renewal of the mind, the power of words, renouncing lies, declaring truth, and affirming the goodness of God! Ultimately, as a leader, you want to model to the group that when it comes to areas of weakness and burden, no one should work harder on your problem than you. It's not your responsibility, or that of the group, or a ministry school, to fix anyone; we are all here to help and support along the way. There is freedom in this responsibility: your role is not to control, but instead to call out the greatness in others.
4. **Facilitate Meaningful Discussions:**
 - a. Growth in a small group can hinge on your ability to partner with the Spirit and ask powerful open ended questions that require more than simple one-word responses. Consider picking one small group and to disrupt the normal pattern of discussion by asking your group permission to spend time on just one or two of the following types of questions below or from the supplemental Small Group curriculum.
 - i. What is God speaking to you?
 - ii. In this season what do you feel the Lord is teaching you?
 - iii. What are your current struggles and/or strengths?
 - iv. What has been your greatest breakthrough, and what are you contending for?
 - v. What could you do consistently that you're not currently doing? How would it change your life?
 - vi. What do you want to see happen by the end of this year?
 - vii. If there were no restraints, what do you see yourself doing in three years?

3. Accountability

1. Accountability is the process of holding someone accountable to their abilities.
2. **Natural accountability:**
 - a. We can cultivate an atmosphere where accountability naturally occurs instead of forcing accountability on each other. The more you intentionally lead by example, the more you can naturally hold members accountable to their greatness and how God sees them. Consider the following ways to create a culture of accountability:
 - i. Before a class discussion, spend a minute and remind each person of their identity in Christ. You can ask one person each week to be in charge of this so they see you, the leader, as someone clearly stating that you need this as much as anyone else does!
 - ii. When you share a testimony, ask others to help you focus on what God is doing and not what God isn't doing in your life.
 - iii. Invite and remind others of the prophetic words spoken over their lives. Have them remind you.
3. **Be willing to confront issues directly:**
 - a. If a situation calls for it, it's important to confront a problem in your group head on. The Latin word for confrontation is "collation" which means "to bring together." This is important. You may feel less than interested in confrontation, and so it is important to understand it's value. The goal of confrontation is not conflict, but it is to protect connection.
 - b. Steps
 - i. Stay rooted in love: Before confronting an issue with someone else, can you connect with God and maintain your connection with him as you think through the situation or think about this person?
 - ii. Create a plan to deal with the situation sooner than later: Pushing a problem down the field doesn't make the problem go away or doesn't take real responsibility off your shoulders.
 - iii. Approach with grace: Remembering when confronting, to seek first to understand and address people with grace. In order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings, do not assume you know their motives or intentions.
 - iv. Keep the goal in mind: Remember that your goal as a leader is to champion and love people. We cannot control the outcome of how people will respond to confrontation.
 - c. If the problem can not be resolved directly, or you are looking for support, please let your class leader know the situation and how they can help.

Pt 3. Challenges to Group Dynamics

This final section of small group training focuses on the different times of people you may have in your small group. Using exaggerations, we offer insights in how to love and lead people based on their small group behavior and not pass judgement on their intentions.

The Silent Observer – The one who consistently does not participate. Having a reserved personality is a strength, but becomes a weakness when it is to the detriment of connection and the person's gifts and talents are not being used for the edification, and comfort of their team members.

Common lies that can hinder the Silent Observers:

- I can't trust people.
- I have nothing important or valuable to say.
- I'm afraid of being misunderstood.
- I won't be able to articulate well.
- I'm going to be too much.

Tips:

- Prophesy and call out their greatness.
- Purposefully ask open-ended questions, e.g., "How did you hear about ESM and what made you decide to come here?" Avoid questions that can be answered with one word such as, "How are you doing?" or "Are you liking school?"
- Ask their opinion on the topic you are discussing.
- Give advance notice to share in the group.
- Show that you value them by affirming after they share, and follow up with them to hear about their experience.

Keys

- For the leader: Build trust and pull out the gold.
- For the Silent Observer: Grow in self-worth, identity, boldness, and risk-taking.

The Dominator – Unaware individuals who can be opinionated and forceful and do not realize how they are affecting the people around them.

Tips:

- Create boundaries for your group discussions in the beginning by letting everyone know they are valuable and that every person has the opportunity to share.
- Give cues if they have gone too long. Make sure you stop the person by saying something like, “I love what you’re saying, but can you wrap up in the next 30 seconds, so we can hear from others?”
- If they cannot manage their talking or interrupting, meet with them privately and explain how you are experiencing them. Invite them to help you with involving the other members of the group in sharing, and explain that while their contributions are valuable, you want everyone to have an opportunity to contribute.

Keys

- For the leader: Be loving, but direct and communicate clear boundaries.
- For the Dominator: Grow in self-awareness, humility, and value for others.

The Victim – This person needs to be the center of attention and is unwilling to take ownership of problems.

A victim’s problem will overshadow your group time, and prevent other group members’ needs from being recognized. Small group is a place for people to share and get support, but each person must take responsibility for their own problems.

Tips:

- Ask them, “What is the problem and what are you going to do about this?”
- Ask them, “What do you need?” On the other hand, do not spend every small group focussing on their needs.
- Give options for potential solutions, and then ask “What do you think is the best solution for you?What are you going to do about this?”
- Thank them for sharing and praying with them.
- Remind them of what the Lord has already spoken.
- Ask Holy Spirit if you are meant to deal with this in the group, or meet with them in private.

Keys

- For the leader: Empower the person to take ownership of their own challenges. Remember it is not your job as a small group leader to solve all their problems, or “fix” them.
- For the Victim: Know that you are powerful and can solve problems with God’s help.

The Obstinate – They have an opposite opinion about everything, and usually share it. Different opinions are great, but this could be coming from an unhealthy attitude that is undermining and divisive. When they share, you might feel a “heavy cloud.” This is a spirit. It is not allowed in your environment and must be confronted. If there is no immediate change of heart, the person may have to be removed.

Tips:

- Talk to them privately about how you are experiencing them. They may not be self-aware enough to even realize how they are acting, and sometimes a personal conversation is all it will require in order to correct their behavior.

Keys

- For the leader: Look for the fruit of repentance, and restored honor.
- For the Obstinate: Repent, clean up your mess, and look for ways you can serve and honor your leader.