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Life Groups

LEADER GUIDE

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OUR MISSION VISION & STRATEGY

Our Mission

Our mission is to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ . . .

We believe spiritual growth flows out of three basic commitments:

- A commitment to God and the Bible. (*Intimacy with God*)
- A commitment to significant Christian relationships. (*Community with insiders*)
- A Commitment to serving others. (*Influence with outsiders*)

To help develop these significant relationships, we have created "**Life Groups.**"

Life Groups provide a predictable small group environment where participants experience **Authentic Community:**

- A. Accountability
- B. Belonging
- C. Care

*It is our **vision** to have every member of our church involved in either a Life Group or another similar small group experience.*

Life Groups

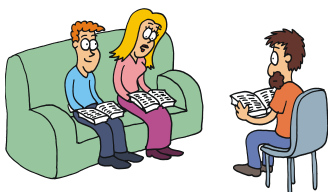
A Life Group is made up of 10-16 people who meet weekly to **study**, to **share**, to **support** each other and to **serve** others in their Christian lives. A typical meeting lasts for an hour and a half, and includes light refreshments. We break the year into 4 school terms. We encourage each Life Group to plan one social event per term where everyone can connect in a new way.

Elements of a Life Groups



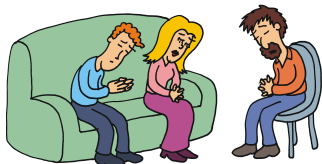
1. Sharing

We take time to share what is happening in our lives. Overtime this becomes more informal and personal as our groups feels safer and more comfortable.



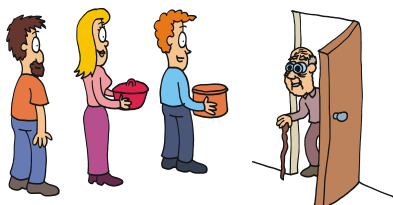
2. Study

We study a portion of God's word that relates to the previous weekend's sermon. Our goal is to learn how to apply and live out our Christianity in our day-to-day experiences and relationships.



3. Support

We learn how to take care of one another as Christ commanded. This care will take many forms such as *prayer, listening, meeting needs, encouraging and even challenging one another as needed.* . . .



4. Serving

We serve in our church and local community often in partnership with the Care ministry or through participation in a Service Project.

Sermon Based Life Groups



How does this work?

The studies are based on the previous weekend's sermon. Most of our Life Groups are built upon what we call a "Lecture-Lab" model. If you imagine the weekend sermon as a lecture on Christian living, then the group meeting is a lab where you get to roll up your sleeves and discuss how the sermon works out in real life.

Each week there will be a series of Bible passages and questions to study and complete before your meeting. The homework is included with the sermon outline during the Sunday service or downloads from website. It will usually take 20 to 30 minutes to complete the homework.

You can also visit our sermon page to listen to audio versions of our sermons (<http://bpcc.crca.org.au/>), or order a CD copy of the previous sermons from the church office (office@bpcc.com.au)

How do I sign up?

Church wide sign-ups begin at the start of each new term. You can also sign up before or after any weekend worship service at our connection desk or by calling the church office or by emailing us at lifegroupcentral@bpcc.com.au. Our pastors and staff will be happy to help you find just the right group for you.

LIFE GROUP LEADER DESCRIPTION

Life groups are an integral part of what we do as a church. We believe that sustained life change occurs as we are growing in a relationship with Christ, and that this happens best when we are prioritising intentional relationships with others who are seeking this same goal. Life groups provide people with the opportunity to connect with others, grow in their relationship with Christ, and experience community. Our life group leaders create environments for people to develop and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul taught the Corinthians that some plant the seeds, others water them, but God makes them grow (1 Corinthians 3:6). Group leaders have the privilege of creating environments in which seeds of faith are planted and watered in the lives of those they lead, while trusting God with the growth.

Our leaders play a pivotal role in helping us achieve our mission *to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ!*

Role of Life group leaders

Life group leaders are responsible for providing their groups with vision, direction, and support. Leaders are successful when they are personally growing in their intimacy with God, community with insiders, and influence with outsiders (3 Vital Relationships), and are leading their groups in such a way as to encourage the group members' growth in these three relationships as well. Life group leaders are supported by Group Coaches and BPC staff.

Qualifications

- Have a personal, growing relationship with Jesus Christ (for at least two years)
- Recognise the Bible as the authority for their lives
- Have life group experience (preferably)
- Be a member of the church
- Have the time, emotional capacity, and moral discernment to lead a group

Expectations

- Lead the group by facilitating the group meeting, monitoring its health and duration, and promoting participation among group members
- Commit to engage in training and leadership development opportunities provided by the church
- Identify and develop a qualified apprentice and embrace apprentice leader development as a measure of success

Additional Expectations

To communicate special needs up-line to your coach and/or pastors

It's possible that some issues will surface in your group or a member's life that are beyond your experience, expertise or comfort zone to deal with. In that case, leaders are responsible to communicate up-line to either their coach or one of the pastors on staff for guidance or additional help.

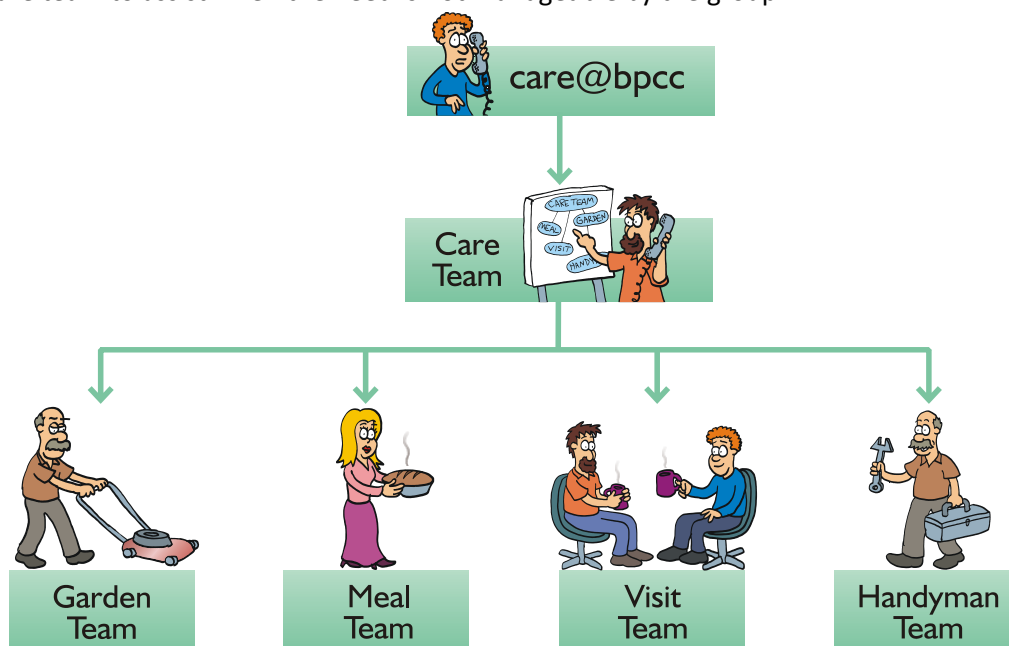
When a crisis or illness hits

Your group needs to spring into action. You as a leader need to be sure that you and others from the group will take the lead in providing any needed meals or practical help, as well as be available for prayer and support as needed.

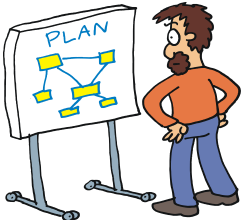


All cases that will take considerable time and resources will be done in partnership with the Care Team who will support you in meeting the needs of that group member.

OUR CARE MINISTRY

Meeting the care needs of those who attend Bray Park Community Church is a huge priority for our Care Ministry. Whether it's an encouraging visit, a mow of the lawn, or a meal, our Care team works hard to share the love of Christ in small but meaningful ways. The Life group has a role to play in supporting those in their group and also has the care team to assist when the need is not manageable by the group.



GROUP LEADER VISION HUDDLES & SKILLS

 <p>VISION</p>	<p>We will KEEP CASTING THE <i>Life Group</i> VISION & PURPOSE</p> <p>We believe spiritual growth flows out of three basic commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment to God and the Bible. (<i>Intimacy with God</i>) • A commitment to significant Christian relationships. (<i>Community with insiders</i>) • A Commitment to serving others. (<i>Influence with outsiders</i>) <p>Life Groups provide a predictable small group environment where participants experience Authentic Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Accountability B. Belonging C. Care <p><i>It is our vision to have every member of our church involved in either a Life Group or another similar small group experience.</i></p>
 <p>HUDDLES</p>	<p>We will SUPPORT GROUP LEADERS</p> <p>We have coaches available for each leader. They will stay in contact and visit your life group meeting on occasions. They are a life line if you need it.</p> <p>They will also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurture (encouragement, prayer & celebration), • Develop (skills [rookies etc...], idea exchange, insights & problem solving) • Build (challenge, accountability & communication).
 <p>SKILLS</p>	<p>We will TRAIN GROUP LEADERS in the essentials</p> <p>We have some irreducible minimums - the essentials that are critical to leading well. If each of us will implement these priorities, we believe we will be effective in leading our groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Think Life Change ✓ Cultivate Relationships ✓ Promote Participation ✓ Replace Yourself ✓ Provide Care ✓ Multiply Influence <p>We will offer training in bite-sized and easily accessible formats.</p> <p>We will also offer “need-based training”. For instance, when you as a leader come up against a sticky theological issue or need to deal with a family in crisis, we’re right there; ready to guide you through it.</p>

THE 6 LIFE GROUP LEADER ESSENTIALS

Life group leaders are charged with an incredible responsibility. Because you are involved in the day-to-day lives of your group members, you have tremendous influence on the spiritual lives of the people in your groups. With this in mind, we encourage you to prioritise your own relationship with God. We will be focusing on six key aspects of group leadership - six essentials that are critical to the success of your groups.

Think Life Change – Why we do Life Groups

Bill Hybels has said that vision leaks. And that is definitely true when it comes to the vision and purpose for groups. It is easy for groups to drift away from their main purpose. So this value reminds us why we have groups: to create predictable environments where participants experience spiritual growth and authentic community; an environment where God is active in the lives of its members; a life group where people *change*. Keeping the life-change goal front and centre challenges us to keep our groups purposeful.

Cultivate Relationships – How we build Community

This essential focuses on how we build a sense of community in our groups. Relationships are like bank accounts: They don't just happen. They require regular intentional deposits. Starting early to build the relational capital of the group is one of the most important steps we can take. Planning a social get together once a term is a terrific way to build those relationships. We must make ongoing deposits to continually cultivate relationship among the group members. Planned deposits bring greater relational satisfaction to a group's balance sheet.

Promote Participation – How you lead a group

This essential focuses on how we lead the group meeting. It reminds us that since shared participation creates broader ownership of the group, all group members should be encouraged to participate often in the facilitation and leadership of the group meeting. This essential also reminds us to promote participation by being navigators of discussion, not teachers of curriculum. The difference is critical. Every time we ask open-ended questions, we are inviting participation. More than sharing the right answers, we want people to share their lives.

Replace Yourself – How to Intentionally Apprentice

This essential encourages us to intentionally apprentice someone in our group for future leadership. The apprentice is someone who has the potential to replace a leader, not simply assist him. Since adults often learn on a need-to-know basis, apprenticing is the most effective way to identify and train group leaders. When we put someone into the game, he or she learns quickly. Ideally, we should identify an apprentice within the first six months of the group.

Provide Care –How you Handle Tough Situations

This essential reminds us that the primary way BPCC provides care to its attendees is through Life groups. We are equipped on how to deal with challenging situations in our groups. We are provided access to additional care ministry resources available from the church, we partner with the Care ministry at BPCC.

Multiply Influence – How you Maximise Influence

This final essential reminds us that multiplying our groups opens the door for others to participate in group life. It also allows us the opportunity to multiply our influence. While we recognize this to be the most difficult aspect of group leadership, it can also be the most rewarding.

LIFE GROUPS COVENANT (See Attachment 1 & 3)

Life groups thrive on participation! The purpose of this covenant is to help you to discuss and clarify your group's goals, expectations, and commitments.

LIFE GROUP FEEDBACK FORM (See Attachment 2)

We are constantly working to improve the Life group ministry & we need your help! This is the time in the Term that we ask for feedback about your group. This information is very helpful to your Life Group Leader and Host, as well as the entire Life Group staff. Please answer candidly so we can evaluate both our strengths and weaknesses.

HOST RESPONSIBILITIES

In some groups the life group leader/s and host is the same person/couple. But in other groups the host is not the leader and this information is important to share with the host team. *As a Life Group Host* you do much more than just provide a home to meet in! You are a vitally important part of the leadership team. The combination of a committed leader and a committed host (each focusing on their roles within the group) is hard to beat. Here's a list of some of your responsibilities:

TO PROVIDE A CLEAN, COMFORTABLE HOME ENVIRONMENT

Some Key Questions:

- Is my house clean and picked up by meeting time?
- Do I have enough comfortable chairs?
- Do I have enough lighting?
- Is my house free of dog or cat odours?
- Are my children interrupting the group? **(See Attachment 3)**

TO PROVIDE A WARM AND FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

As part of the leadership team, your job is to help your members feel loved, accepted, and welcome.

This involves things like:

- Introducing folks to one another during your first meeting or social if you start the group off with one.
- Making sure to talk with and involve the shy or less popular members before and after meetings.

TO PROVIDE SUPPORT & FEEDBACK FOR THE LEADER

One of the host's most important jobs is to discuss and evaluate the group with the leader on a regular basis. This often can be done informally after everyone leaves.

Items to discuss include:

- What's going well in the group? What's not?
- Who's hurting in the group? Who's growing? How can you help?
- Are you dividing your time wisely in the meetings? Are you balance between sharing, study and prayer?
- How can you encourage quiet members to share more openly?
- Another way to help your leader is to jump start the discussion when it lags.

Hosts are responsible to organize the weekly refreshments and/or desserts.

PRAYING TOGETHER IN LIFE GROUPS

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GROUPS COMMIT TO PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER?

- ✓ Your relationship with Him and each other will deepen. You will experience spiritual growth in Christ.
- ✓ There is less chance of burnout as you put problems in His hands and trust members to His care.
- ✓ You allow the Holy Spirit to work in your group so your time together is filling and refreshing.
- ✓ He will answer your prayers in amazing ways, and your faith will increase.

GROUND RULES FOR PRAYER IN LIFE GROUPS

Over the years we've found that group prayer goes better when we follow three simple guidelines. Group prayer goes best when...

1. We pray for one topic at a time

Anyone in the group is free to introduce a prayer request either before prayer begins or during the prayer time. Once a topic is introduced, the group focuses on that request alone. Once it's covered, the group moves on to the next topic.

2. Each person prays more than once

Because the group is focusing on one topic at a time, each person is encouraged to pray several times during the prayer time for those topics they feel most led to pray about.

3. We keep our prayers short and simple

Group prayer goes better when members keep their prayers short and to the point. When someone prays for a long time, it's hard for the other members to stay focused and long prayers tend to intimidate those who are just learning to pray out loud in a group.

CREATIVE IDEAS FOR GROUP PRAYER

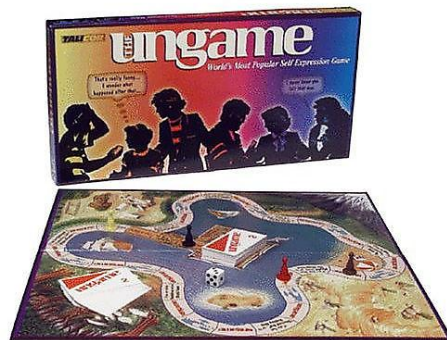
1. Pray through a psalm out loud together
2. Pray the prayer requests of the person to your right, either aloud or silently
3. Vary prayer time between the beginning, middle and closing of the meeting
4. Pick a portion of Scripture to pray for one another during the week (Col 1:9, Eph. 3:14-19)
5. Try brief "popcorn" prayers – short one sentence prayers.
6. If someone is in crisis, stop and pray for them right then
7. Pray for the church, a country, a family in need, specific seeker-oriented events, or any area for which your group has a passion
8. Ask members to write out prayer requests and exchange them with another member to pray aloud.
9. Is there someone in your group with the gift of faith or encouragement? Ask that person to be the prayer coordinator who writes down requests each meeting and keeps track of answers. If a group member has an emergency, they can call the prayer coordinator, who will notify all the other members to pray for them.
10. Praise is a part of intercession. Is a group member in the midst of struggle? Praise God instead of praying requests.
11. Have each member write down requests for the week on a piece of paper. Fold the piece of paper and put it in a hat. Pass the hat, each member agreeing to pray for the person they pick and to call to encourage them during the week

SUGGESTIONS FOR ICE BREAKERS

'Getting to know you' type activities or 'ice breakers' are an important aspect when groups come together for the first time. An icebreaker must be appropriate for the life group. If it's too childish, people will not feel comfortable. If it's too threatening, people will draw back. Icebreakers become shorter and less important as the group becomes tightly knit over the course of the life cycle. You might spend 1/2 the time on an ice breaker the first two meetings, but you only need to spend 10 or 15 minutes after a few months.

1. What foreign country would you like to visit? Why?
2. If you could do one miracle (other than make the whole world Christian) what would you do? Why?
3. I wish that before I got married someone had told me
4. I will probably never, but it would still be fun if I could.
5. What is your greatest fear? Why?
6. If you could raise one person from the dead, who would you raise and why?
7. What is the nicest thing anybody ever said about you?
8. If your house were on fire, what three items (not people) would you try to save?
9. What have you learned this week?
10. What is your greatest fear and why?
11. It's very difficult for me to discipline myself with regards to
12. Tell the group briefly the story of your wedding day. (leader: if you warn them in advance, each couple can bring their pictures to share with the group.)
13. If you won a million dollars what would you do with it?
14. What is your favourite bible verse
15. Which do you value most – sight or speech? Why?
16. Where do you go, or what do you do, when life gets too heavy for you? Why?
17. What has been one of the greatest adventures you have ever been on?
18. What was the best gift you ever received as a child?
19. What day of your life would you most like to relive? Why?
20. When I go into a restaurant, what I really like most is

THE UNGAME



Players progress along the playing board as they answer questions such as "What are the four most important things in your life," and "what do you think life will be like in 100 years?" Special spaces on the board encourage players to exchange their thoughts and feelings or describe how they've been affected by past emotions.

While intended to encourage honesty, The Ungame can be surprisingly fun and challenging when loosening its restrictions on answers based on reality. Mature players can seek to come up with the most creative, outlandish answers possible, especially through playing a role.



LIFE GROUPS: OUR BASIC PURPOSE

Life Groups exist to promote spiritual growth and maturity through the development of significant Christian relationships centred on the study of God’s word. (See Hebrews 10:24-25 & Romans 8:29)

SHARING

Each week we'll take time to share what is happening in our lives. At first this sharing will include some planned "sharing questions. But after the first few weeks, it will become more informal and personal as our group feels safer and more comfortable.

STUDY

Each week we'll study a portion of God’s word that relates to the previous weekend’s sermon. Our goal is to learn how to apply and live out our Christianity in our day-to-day experiences and relationships.

SUPPORT

Each week we'll learn how to take care of one another as Christ commanded (see John 15:9-13). This care will take many forms such as *prayer, listening, meeting needs, encouraging and even challenging one another as needed.*

SERVING

Spiritual Growth is fostered not only by what we gain through the support and input of others, but also through service to others. The role each of us fills is important to the health of the church and for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the community in which we live (Ephesians 4:11-16). Throughout the quarter it is our hope that you can find and or be affirmed in the ways God has designed you to serve and make a difference in God’s Kingdom.

GROUP GUIDELINES

1. The group will meet from _____ through _____.
2. The group will meet on _____ night.
3. The group sessions will begin at _____ and end at _____.
4. The group time will typically consist of _____ minutes of sharing, _____ of study/discussion, and _____ of prayer.
5. The group will be a closed group until all members agree to additional members.
6. Group members will attend and participate on a regular basis. Members agree to pray for other group members on a weekly basis.
7. If applicable discuss and determine the options you are going to adopt to successfully accommodate children within our life group setting. (See Attachment 3)

We agree together in Christ to honour this covenant.

- | | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| 1. _____. | 6. _____. | 11. _____. |
| 2. _____. | 7. _____. | 12. _____. |
| 3. _____. | 8. _____. | 13. _____. |
| 4. _____. | 9. _____. | 14. _____. |
| 5. _____. | 10. _____. | 15. _____. |



Life Group Feedback

Leader's Name: _____ **Your Name:** _____

Your Group

1) On a scale of 1-5 (5 is outstanding, 1 is poor) please rate the following for your group:
 ____ prayer time ____ group discussion/study ____ care factor ____ group overall

2) Has your group helped you grow in any of the following areas? (check any that apply)

- Weekly encouragement to stay focused on Jesus
- Read and apply scripture beyond weekend services
- Personal study of God's word
- Process life decisions
- Support in life's challenges
- Other _____

3) Are you comfortable with the number of people who participate in your group discussions?

(i.e. do more people need to share, do some members dominate, do you feel you had an opportunity to share?)

- ____ Yes, I felt comfortable with our discussions
 ____ No, I felt our discussion time needed improvement

Comments: _____

Your Leaders & Hosts

1) When it comes to listening skills, my Leader is:

____ Excellent ____ Above average ____ Average ____ Below Average

2) In your opinion, should your Leader talk more or less during meetings? ____ more ____ less ____ no change

Comments: _____

3) Using the same 1-5 scale, please rate the following to help your Hosts improve your meetings:

____ seating arrangements ____ lighting ____ temperature ____ refreshments ____ socials

4) Other comments about your Leaders & Hosts:

Your Service Project

1) What Service Project did you participate in? _____

2) Rate your experience (low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)

The Life Group Questions (Homework)

1) Using the same 1-5 scale, please rate:

____ overall quality of the homework

2) Do you think the homework is : ____ too long ____ too short ____ ideal length

Explain _____

3) Do you have any suggestions for improving the quality of the homework (how to better encourage spiritual growth & connection with others)?

Your Plans

For the next Life Group term, I'm planning on:

- 1) Continuing in the same group
- 2) Taking a break from Life groups
- 3) Trying a new group

We are constantly working to improve the Life group ministry & we need your help! This is the time in the Term that we ask for feedback about your group. This information is very helpful to your Life Group Leader and Host, as well as the entire Life Group staff. Please answer candidly so we can evaluate both our strengths and weaknesses.



The Childcare Conundrum

Here is an overview of the many ways to include children within your community.

Matthew 19:14

Several options do exist for successfully accommodating children within a small-group setting.

Overview of common options

Here are some common options when children participate with adults in the group:

1. Children remain present with adults for the entire meeting.
2. Children remain present with adults for part of the meeting, and then break into a separate group in a separate room. Children can develop their own life group, participate in an activity (such as a Veggie Tales video), or enjoy a supervised time of free play.
3. Children join the adults every other meeting, or once a month. Children and adults meet separately during the other weeks.
4. Children and adults meet separately for the entire meeting.

Here are some common options when a babysitter is involved:

1. Adults work together to arrange a babysitter for all of the children in the group. Payment is split between the entire group, or between only those bringing children.
2. A babysitter cares for most of the children during the group meeting, but nursing infants are allowed to remain with adults.
3. Outside of the life group, each parent arranges for the care of their own children through a relative or sitter.
4. Young adults or teenagers from the church's youth ministry volunteer to care for the children of your life group as an act of service.
5. Young adults or teenagers from the church's youth ministry care for the children of your life group and are paid for their work.

Here are some common options when childcare is arranged within the life group:

1. Each small-group member cares for the children on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly rotation.
2. Only those participants who have children in the group provide childcare on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly rotation.
3. Participants of other life groups at your church (ones that meet during a different time of the week) rotate to provide childcare for your life group, which returns the service.

How to build a life-changing children's life group

Several of the above options involve children coming together for their own small-group experience.

This can be a great way to solve the childcare problem and advance each child's spiritual development at the same time. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- A children's life group should not exceed eight children. You will need two adults to lead this many children.
- To prevent the life group from feeling like a school classroom, have the children sit on cushions and face each other in a circle. Consider bringing props or decorations to make the room fun and exciting.
- Develop a list ground rules (core values and practices) and have each child commit to follow them at all times.
- Prepare and share food together with children.
- Allow friends to stay together, but encourage the children to interact with everyone at each meeting.
- Make a special time for each child to share about his or her week with the rest of the group.
- For part of the group time, encourage children to pray for one another and with one another.
- Play lively Christian music in the background, or sing worship songs together as a group.

A central part of any children's life group is the lesson.

Children will learn best when a leader is able to strike a balance between the extremes of boring lecture and empty activity. Here are a few tips to help achieve that balance:

- Have the children perform a puppet show or skit for the adult members of the life group. If you're really brave, ask the adults to do the same for the children.
- Help the children create a watercolor painting, clay sculpture, or drawing that is based on a biblical story.
- Oversee the development of a scrapbook by all of the children in the group.
- As a group, help the children compose a worship song or act out a Bible story. It's often entertaining to record these creations on video and play them back for the children to watch and discuss.
- For a lesson on prayer, have a child share a special need or desire. Invite the other children to lay hands on him or her and pray.
- Each week, or every other week, introduce an adult small-group participant to the children. Have the adult share briefly about who they are, what they do, and how they came to know Jesus.

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