

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST NIGHT

The first night is the most important night for the following reasons:

1. **You set expectations.**

People need to know what you expect of them. If you don't set clear expectations, then people will set their own expectations. Unmet expectations lead to frustration, unintended offense, and lack of structure. This will kill the health of your group.

What expectations should all groups set?

- On-time, every time: People need to show up every time you meet, and show up on time, except for emergencies (i.e. health and work-conflicts). This one is huge for building relationships and trust amongst the group.
- Safety and Grace: People need to know that the group is a safe place for them to be honest. People will only open up if it is a trustworthy and non-judgmental group for them to share their struggles.
- It takes time for people to open up, but eventually people are expected to get there.

2. **You set the tone.**

The tone of the group is how someone's experience of your group makes them *feel*. It is your job as the group leader to set up the meeting session in such a way that leaves people feeling safe and comfortable. The feeling of, "I am in good hands."

How do I set the tone in the group?

- It starts from the moment they sign up. Give them a phone call, introduce yourself and welcome them to the group. Take questions and pray with them.
- Frequent, warm, and optimistic email communication with your group up until the night before.
- House clean, soft worship music in background, food and refreshments laid out, phones away, and warm smiles when they come inside. You might even consider nametags?

WHAT SHOULD THE FIRST NIGHT LOOK LIKE?

Goals for the First Night

1. Get to know each other or rekindle relationships.
2. Clarify your group's expectations.
3. Read and discuss the Preface of the book
4. Pray for the building of relationships and spiritual growth of the group.

General Plan for First Night

1. Food, Refreshments and Atmosphere (~20 minutes)
 - Have food and drink arrangements ready upon arrival.
 - Have quiet worship music in the background (if you can).
 - Make sure everything is clean and neat. Phones away and off.
2. Getting to Know You (~45 minutes)
 - Let people know you will begin the discussion in 5 minutes
 - Open up your time with a brief prayer.
 - Upon sitting down, explain the uniqueness of the first meeting: getting to know each other or reacquainted and setting expectations.
 - Refer to "The First Night" handout attached. Returning leaders – feel free to adapt the sharing exercises based on the number of new members.
3. Setting expectations (~15 minutes)
 - Explain how the group will run each time (it's up to you, just be consistent)
 - Be clear that if they decide to commit that punctuality and consistency is a high value in the group except for emergencies, illness, or duties at work.
 - Optional: schedule social event beyond the normal meeting time.
4. Prayer Topical (~5-10 minutes)
 - Choose 2-3 topics to pray for.
 - Encourage all to participate with brief prayers, as many times as they want.
 - The leader or host will end praying for God to bless their group for the quarter.
5. Post-socializing (~20 minutes)
 - Never underestimate the significance of the time after the meeting. It is key to connect with people and find out more what people are all about.
 - Consider doing desert after the meeting.