

THE 6 ROLES OF A SMALL GROUP LEADER*



What you are doing is a big deal—you will have to put on quite a few hats. Here are a few of the many you'll wear:

You are...

A spiritual leader.

Your students are listening to your faith and watching your life. They are counting on you walking with Jesus. Always know that your faith is lived out loud by your actions, not just your words. Even when we slip up, we show spiritual leadership in the way we humbly and correctly deal with mistakes and strive for God's best.

A youth pastor/shepherd. Your students are counting on you to notice when they're gone. They expect you to call them out when they miss the mark on God's standards and their commitments. They are waiting for that challenge. You are essentially a pastor in this small group ministry movement God's been using to develop Christ

*You'll also be a chauffeur, counselor, psychiatrist, friend, cook, mentor, role model, event planner, tour guide.

followers since the very first church in Acts. You get to lead students into this deep-level relational and spiritual journey. Some days that will be seen as a wild stroke of good fortune, other days it will be an inescapable weighty albatross of death. I pray a majority of your days affirm your calling as a shepherd and pastor.

Part of the youth ministry team. You can greatly help or cause crippling hurt to the student ministry of your church. Be a team player and remember that you are part of the whole.

An administrative wizard. Just kidding. Just wanted to see if you're still paying attention. It wouldn't hurt if you could remember where your Bible lesson folder is and how to send an e-mail, though.

The teacher. Your students are counting on you to open God's Word and help them to learn how to discover and live by God's plan. You don't have to have a doctorate in religion, be a stand-up comic, or have a Shakespearian stage presence. Your heart for God and your relationship with him will shine through your teaching. For it to shine through, you've got to have the light shining brightly within you. More on that later.

A relational giant. The small group is all about community. You are the facilitator of those

connections and relationships. Students come to group carrying a variety of baggage (dejection, rejection, insecurity) and high on life (life happened to go well that day, closeness with God, eager to grow in their faith). Reaching a group of students who bring such a wide variety of circumstances with them will require flexibility, sensitivity, and wisdom on your part. After all, how do we rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn simultaneously? Experience will bring the answer.

Hang in there!

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Students are listening with their ears and watching with their eyes. Small group leaders teach and model God's ways.

Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God (Ephesians 5:2).

4 WAYS SMALL GROUP LEADERS ARE SPIRITUAL LEADERS



Let's focus a little more closely on the first of the six primary functions of volunteer leaders who care for students in small groups. Here's a little more on what I believe is the first and most important role of all: the spiritual leader.

WALK WITH GOD:

Active in your faith and a growing believer

Effective small group leaders spend time with God, praying and modeling spiritual disciplines. They give plenty of grace for the ups and downs of walking with Christ, but overall, there's an expectation that leaders are growing on their own. Most importantly we desire hearts that are sensitive to God's leading and Spirit.

MODELING COMMUNITY:

Pursuing healthy friendships and relationships

Just like we challenge students to join a small group, it would make sense that we as adults value this too. We realize this is an additional commitment and possibly another night out of the week, but modeling community is critical as a growing adult. Besides being a model, we need the connection with other God-loving adults who can help us stay spiritually fresh. A leader who teaches without being renewed will burn out, shrivel spiritually, or get puffed up with pride—all deadly scenarios in the world of youth ministry.

ACCOUNTABLE:

Actively pursuing accountability in your life

The small group leader has to have healthy accountability in his or her life—the student small group is not the place for adult accountability and confession. Promote a safe environment in your adult group so you and the other members can freely share and encourage each other in accountable relationships.

FAITHFUL:

Attend a regular church service

Church attendance is also important in the life of a small group leader. We are part of our church and

want to be connected to the vision and direction of our senior pastor. At the same time, we realize that small groups require pouring out, and we need to be continually filled up as well—church plays a role there for sure.

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The primary role of a small group leader is to be a spiritual leader. It starts with you—so be faithful, walk with God, and be in community.

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important (Galatians 6:1-3).

Kurt Johnston is the Pastor of Student Ministries at Saddleback Church—he's officially my boss so I have to include him, right? But he's actually a seasoned youth worker who values the importance of volunteers like you. I asked him to share a few words:

Youth Ministry Heroes

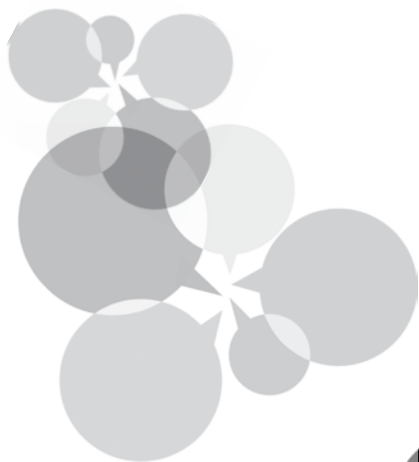
I'm pretty confident that leading a small group is the toughest role a youth ministry volunteer can choose to play (hosting a sixth-grade lock-in would be a close second, though). Think about it: When a volunteer agrees to be a small group leader, this person is agreeing to some sort of variation of the following:

- Becoming a pastor to a dozen high-maintenance teenagers.
- Preparing a lesson every week.
- Spending their own money with students at McDonald's, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell.
- Spending their own money on cholesterol medicine because of all the McDonald's, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell they eat.
- Taking phone calls from panicky parents at all hours of the night.

- Learning how to really listen, and not just provide easy answers.
- Sacrificing time with their own family.

The list could really go on and on, but you get the point: Volunteer small group leaders are the unsung heroes of your church!

-Kurt



THE 4 STEPS FOR DEALING WITH A STUDENT'S ABUSE OR NEGLECT



Note: For quick reference, consider making a photocopy this page and keep it in the front of your small group materials. You may even find yourself using it to help a fellow volunteer struggling with a student in crisis.

Most small group leaders won't feel equipped to deal effectively with a student in imminent danger of abuse or neglect. It's a scary scenario to address. However, hoping to avoid to your initial discomfort by avoiding the issue can cause tragic life-long pain in a student's life. The great news is that these events are rare and after you deal with one, you will feel prepared for them in the future.

While we trust you to handle most of the typical situations with discernment, there is the chance a student will reveal something beyond your ability. In extremely serious situations use these four steps to respond to a major crisis:

STEP 1: Alert the student

After counseling and consoling the student, let him know you have the responsibility to get help for the situation; part of that help will require privately making a couple of people aware of what happened. While we still very much agree to the covenant that includes confidentiality, a small group leader should never promise to “never tell anyone” about certain things a student may share. In some cases, you simply must. Let him know that you will walk with him through every step of getting him the help he needs. Be sure to communicate your care for him and a strong desire to make sure he is safe.

Be prepared for the student to sternly object to getting help; do your best to ease her fear. Do not let the student talk you out of taking the next step. Just encourage her, and let her know she will not go through this alone. If she refuses to start the process, let her know you will begin the process of getting help without her.

STEP 2: Partner with the student and family

Get in contact with your lead youth worker—these situations are never easy to handle, and the staff is there to help you through it. Your youth staff can help you decide if this situation requires filing

a report with authorities. They will also discuss further action with you. Even if you aren't sure this is "big enough" to warrant reporting it to the authorities, partner with the church so they can pray for you and help you lead your student back toward health.

STEP 3: Report to the authorities

After partnering with the team, fill out the necessary reports together to begin the process. You're not expected to be a professional in handling this; don't worry if there are questions that you cannot answer.

STEP 4: Follow further instructions

The church will instruct you on what steps, if any, need to be taken from here. Most likely,

What if it turns out the student told you false information?

You can only act on information they give to you. Students have made false accusations to retaliate against parents or authority figures. The consequences will be up to the student to bear. You must move forward as if they are being truthful until you know for certain they aren't.