

SMALL GROUPS



Preventing Conflict

Conflict is a natural result of people spending time together. In Small Groups, conflict should be embraced rather than avoided. Conflict may occur between group members, and group members will definitely experience conflict with people outside the group. When properly handled, conflict can spur groups to a deeper level of intimacy and community.

1. **Keep short accounts** with one another. If you have an issue with someone, go quickly and talk to them rather than allowing the issue to grow. Be sure to encourage other members of your Small Group to adopt this. If you hear someone complaining or speaking negatively about someone else, encourage them to talk directly to that person.
2. **Use “I” statements** when talking about what you are feeling and experiencing. Say things like “I get angry when...” or “I feel...” rather than “*You* make me...” or “*You* are...” Being intentional about the way these thoughts are phrased can change the posture of the people involved and drive the conversation in a way to seek to understand and solve a problem, rather than toward accusations and defensive behavior and stances.
3. **Listen closely for underlying messages.** Remember, tone and body language communicate as much as, if not more than, words. As a leader, take a relaxed posture and use positive signals to drive the conversation. If needed, address behaviors of others during the conversation and encourage them to be productive and positive with the signals they are sending.
4. **Try to communicate in person.** Avoid the use of email as much as possible in conflict situations. Often, communicating via email, text, or social media can cause further confusion and misunderstanding. It is nearly impossible to discern tone over writing, even with people you know well. In emotional situations, people tend to read much into whatever tone they perceive from the message, regardless of the intent of the sender.