

# Guide for Off-Campus Small Groups

Traditionally, youth ministry events are held at your facility. Small groups are different by nature, and the flexibility and customizability of a small group ministry allow for a variety of suitable meeting places: on-campus, off-campus, or even online. Many communities have found that having small groups meet off-campus in homes\*\* is highly successful. Here's why:

## **TURF MATTERS.**

Meeting in homes demonstrates to students and families that you are willing to meet them where they are. Literally. When small groups meet in homes, young people are often more likely to speak freely and comfortably since it is a space in which they are naturally free and comfortable.

## **FAMILIES ARE ENGAGED.**

When parents are invited to host the small group, they have the opportunity to get to know the other teens and their mentors. Parent engagement in faith development is crucial, but can be difficult when parents are just dropping their children off at an event with which they have no direct contact. It also gives parents a chance to practice hospitality, a virtue that is praised in sacred scripture (cf. Romans 12:13). Other members of the household, such as siblings, can directly see discipleship as relevant and attractive.

## **INCREASE OWNERSHIP.**

One of the most important elements of a discipleship group is ownership. In the end, we want young people to take ownership of their faith. We also want them to take ownership of the small group itself. When a small group meets in his or her home, the student will begin to think of it not as "the community's thing," but as "my thing."

## **Models of Off-Campus Meetings**

### **ROTATING HOMES:**

Small group members' families take turns hosting the small group meeting. Each week, a different family acts as the host, providing refreshments and a private space for the group to meet. Some small group members may never host, while others will host more often. Be sure your hosts are compliant with your local Safe Environment policies.

### **SAME HOST HOME:**

One household acts as that small group's host home for every meeting. This may be a student's home, the mentor's house, or another member of your community, such as an empty-nester.

### **PUBLIC PLACES:**

Some small groups may choose to meet off-campus in a neutral setting like a coffee shop or restaurant. This can be very effective so long as the group feels comfortable sharing in that environment.

\*\*Always check with your local diocese to request permission to meet off-site and for Safe Environment protocols.

## CHECKLIST FOR FINDING THE IDEAL MEETING SPACE:

- Is there space that is private enough for students to share openly without members of the household interrupting, such as a basement living room?
- Can you form a circle with the seating arrangement with all members sitting at the same level?
- Will they be able to see and hear any video content easily?
- Is the space in compliance with your local Safe Environment guidelines?

## Best Practices

### SCHEDULING:

- Designate one adult for each small group to be responsible for scheduling the times and locations of the meetings, such as the mentor or a lead parent.
- Schedule meetings at least one month in advance and communicate this clearly to all families and anyone else who ought to know.
- To find the best times and locations, try using free tools like Doodle.com.

### HOSPITALITY:

- Snacks are a simple way to make students feel comfortable. The host should provide refreshments.
- Mentors should arrive at the host's home before students come to make sure the space is ready and all technology is functioning properly.
- Mentors should make sure the room is returned to its original set-up before leaving. If you are meeting in a public place like a coffee shop, the students should purchase their own refreshments.
- Do not meet at a coffee shop or restaurant without patronizing the establishment!

### COMMUNICATION:

- Ask parents which mode of communication they prefer (i.e. group emails, group text, social media).
- Have one person be responsible for sending out reminders before meetings.
- Small group mentors should email parents after every meeting sharing the Parent Sheet and YDisciple video link, if applicable.
- Make sure you are in compliance with your diocesan communication policies.

### ACCOUNTABILITY:

With groups meeting offsite, the your coordinator should still know what is happening with each small group. Consider some form of accountability for each group meeting. Something as simple as a Google Form with the following questions can be filled out by leaders in less than two minutes:

- When did you meet?
- Where did you meet?
- Who was there?
- Who was missing?
- What content did you use?
- Anything else I should know?

"We never knew how powerful youth ministry was until it was happening in our living room. Hosting the small group was a huge blessing!"

**-BRUCE, PARENT**