How To Do It

Come together. How?

It’s more of an art than a science. You can’t just plug in a formula and expect the same product every time because this has to do with people, and people are predictably unpredictable.

While practice can build experience, a few tips can speed up the learning process for someone fostering closeness and community through these group-building activities.

**Create a Plan.** A plan gives the sense that everything came together naturally. You will probably have to adjust a few things, but a plan invites participation and movement towards the goal of coming together. Some activities require specific materials or props. A plan pushes you to have those ready, which increases your repertoire. If you have a 30-minute segment of group building activities, plan for 45 minutes and drop some as you lead. In the back of this book you can find examples and a template to copy and create your own.

**Follow a Flow.** Begin with simple, non-threatening activities. If your group is new or has new people, start with names. Then move to Ice breakers to galvanize a group to action. You may choose to do more than one. Then lead towards purposeful interaction. It makes sense to do low-risk interactions before attempting medium- or high-risk interactions. An “Inding” (yes, each component of the flow starts with an “I”) completes a group gathering. You’ll see the names and description of the activities within each segment of the flow under “Types of Activities.” In general, you’ll want to move from the left to the right on the following continuum.

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Intros Ice-Breakers Interactions Interactions Interactions Indings

 Low Risk Medium Risk High Risk

**Steps Along the Way.**

* Start with enthusiasm. Others rarely go beyond what you exude.
* Know your stuff. When you can lead activities by heart, you can give more attention to what’s happening with the group.
* Be a good listener. Two ears, one mouth; what was God thinking?
* Explain and demonstrate. Make it easy; move from simple to complex. Show-and-Tell.
* It’s about the group; not about you.
* You can lead, but you can’t make others follow.
* When a person goes deeper, it invites others in the group to follow.
* Will others go deeper, or avoid it with humor or change of topic?
* Estimate the amount of time needed for each activity.
* Stop an activity at the peak of its enjoyment.

**Adapt as Needed.**

* Call what you see, such as “You almost have it” or “This really isn’t working so let’s drop it and move on”
* As the leader, you can influence, but you can’t control the group
* The leader is the rudder, not the entire ship.
* If the group doesn’t go deeper when the opportunity comes, return to lighter, physical games; then try going deeper later.
* To encourage more talking or interaction, divide into subgroups.

**Some Generalizations.** It’s usually best to have a co-leader or assistant. When you do, the co-leader helps with materials or props and also fills in gaps. A co-leader should sit opposite the leader rather than next to the leader. This enables you to divide-and-conquer as well as having ideal face and eye contact with each other. Usually the best formation is sitting in a circle. Bring the circle in tighter when talking or with more intimate activities. Consider the surrounding space. In general, males like activity and shy away from deep conversations, while females are often ready to talk and to talk deeply. Coed groups have a different dynamic than a group of all females or all males.

**SHOP**. This acronym takes a group beyond the superficial to the heart of the matter. I don’t like to start with the Bible in small groups because people tend give clichés rather than what’s really on their heart. So I prefer to begin with silly games or else Bible study becomes a silly game instead of God drawing us to himself. Through the activities we want people in the small group to have conversations that are:

**S** = Spiritual—God and connecting with Him is the goal.

**H** = Honest—Tell the truth; no “pat” answers.

**O** = Open—Share with others from your heart; take a risk.

**P** = Personal—Speak for yourself, not in generalities.