

# Initial Stage of Small Group Development

People coming into a new group tend to bring a blend of common questions, concerns, and fears. By anticipating these questions and feelings and understanding the initial characteristics of any group, you can take steps for a successful launch.<sup>1</sup>

## INITIAL QUESTIONS

- Will I be accepted or rejected here?
- How will this group be different from my daily interactions?
- What exactly will these sessions be like?
- What risks will I take here?
- How am I like other people here? Different?
- Will I feel pressured and pushed to perform in some way?
- How important will I be?
- Who will be the real leaders here?
- What can be achieved here?

## CONCERNS AND FEARS

- I'm afraid I'll look stupid.
- Will I tell too much about myself?
- Will others like me?
- What if I find out what I'm really like?
- What if everyone rejects me?
- What if the group attacks me?
- I'm afraid I'll be withdrawn and passive.
- What will happen if I really open up my feelings?
- Will I embarrass myself?
- What if I'm asked to do something I don't want to do?
- What if others can tell I'm afraid and nervous?
- What if I find out things about myself that I can't cope with?

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from a presentation by Dave Broucek at the 2002 National Conference of Neighborhood Bible Studies, which became Q Place in 2008. Content gleaned from George Mason University, Center for Service & Leadership. Used by permission.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INITIAL STAGE

- Silence and awkwardness
- High anxiety
- Impatience to “get the ball rolling”
- Confusion about what everybody is supposed to be doing
- Storytelling, a tendency to talk about others and focus on people and situations outside of the group
- Central issue: trust vs. mistrust
- Testing of each other and the leaders
- Requests for greater leader involvement
- “Cocktail” conversations, safe levels of conversation
- Vying for informal leadership

## HOW FACILITATORS CAN PREPARE FOR A GREAT START

- Be sure that there are at least two, and ideally three of you who are praying together and preparing for the initial meeting with these concerns in mind.
- Communicate an agenda with times, and stick to it.
- Reach out; listen and talk warmly with each person.
- Ask a non-threatening icebreaker question.
- Define your role.
- Clearly present the guidelines that will provide understanding and structure for the group.
- Be transparent and vulnerable.
- Stress confidentiality in the group.
- Make reading, praying, and responding to questions voluntary; don’t go around in a circle.
- Think back to another time when you were part of a brand new group of any kind, remember what helped the group to start well, and consider how to incorporate those elements in the first meeting of your new group.