

JOBS FOR LIFE SITE LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Small Group Leader

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION LEADER

Job Description: To facilitate a small group discussion of 3-4 students during each JfL class; effectively lead the group time to engage each group member; encourage and shepherd students along the way. Small-group discussions will review and reinforce key lesson principles and skills. The number of Small Group Discussion Leaders needed will be determined by the course instructor and by the number of students.

Reports to: Site Leader

Works closely with: Course Instructor, Champion Relations, Student Relations

Estimated Time per Week: up to 4 hours

Small Group Discussion Leaders play a vital role to Jobs for Life community building. This role can be filled by a Champion or a volunteer who commits to serve as a dedicated discussion leader for the full duration of the JfL training course, (a Champion and a volunteer discussion leader could co-lead a small group, rotating leadership responsibilities). Discussion Leaders will have the opportunity to “shepherd” and build relationships with group members. Once a week discussion leaders should meet with the Site Leader or Instructor to evaluate student progress and group activities. This can be completed in a short period of time before or immediately after class.

Small group discussions, facilitated by designated leaders, will cover the principles taught in the lesson. They provide 1) a time for students to share and learn from one another as they process and internalize key teaching points, and 2) an opportunity for the JfL Instructors, discussion leaders and the Site Leader to observe and evaluate student progress. (A Small Group Class Discussion Overview that breaks out each small group discussion is available on the JfL CD of Forms for download and distribution.)

It is not intended for the discussion leader to teach or instruct the small group, but to facilitate and guide a discussion with questions from each lesson that produce a group response and involvement, and help assess students’ understanding of JfL trained concepts and principles. The responsibility of the Discussion Leaders is to serve as a JfL support member who will:

- Assess student understanding of JfL training concepts and principles
- Facilitate and guide all group members
- Encourage and stretch students in their thinking
- Facilitate the process of group members getting to know one another.
- Build a safe place, a small caring community of support with their group members
- Help review and document completion of student work assignments.

Building Community: In the classroom discussions, students can be moved around to provide the opportunity to connect to more people. Yet, to establish a point of consistency for students, JfL suggest that, whenever possible, maintain the same small group throughout the JfL training course. This creates a “safe place” for sharing from class to class and builds a smaller community of support for each group member. It is in this setting that students begin to support and care for one another and learn how to hold one another accountable for their actions.

Many JfL classes teach both men and women. Valuable interchange occurs in class discussions

between men and women. However, issues that come up in small group discussion are often very personal. A group of the same gender provides a more comfortable, open environment for sharing. Each participant will have the opportunity to express how learned principles or job training skills apply in his or her own life and relationships. For some participants, this setting may provide a rare opportunity where they share on a deeper level.

Small Group Discussion

Class 1-15

Facilitating a Small Group Discussion

The following guidelines will help Champions and Discussion Leaders lead effective small group discussions that promote open exchange of information and life change.

- Create a relaxed atmosphere that promotes a sense of belonging. Arrange the chairs in a circle so that participants can face and hear one another.
- For the first several JfL classes, greet each student by first name, then introduce yourself to the group and briefly explain the role of a Small Group Leader. Then have each group member briefly introduce themselves by first name to the group.
- Remember that the role of a Small Group Leader is that of a facilitator. This is a time where the students do most of sharing, while the facilitator of the group directs and leads the discussion along.
- Encourage students to participate and to be open to one another's input. Creatively draw each group member in to the discussion rather than force student participation. Always ask for volunteers to read aloud rather than call on students by name. Be prepared to read if needed.
- Make sure every group member has an opportunity to share.
- Set boundaries early on. Do not permit a group member to verbally abuse another member.
- Serve as an encourager and a model. Show a warm, caring and accepting spirit, while holding the group accountable for their time and input.
- As a facilitator, do not talk too much. Do not be afraid of periods of silence for it often serves as time for gathering thoughts. Your role is to listen, observe, absorb and guide the discussion.
- Be an active listener. Listen intently. Affirm the importance of what someone has shared.
- Rather than giving answers or solutions, gently lead students toward a point of discovery and growth, allowing them to reach a conclusion on their own as they are ready. Be creative in ways to stretch the group in their thinking.
- Be sensitive to student's particular needs during discussion time, yet be cautious not to permit this need to monopolize the group time and prohibit others from sharing.
- Keep the majority of the time focused on the class lesson content and application.
- Be flexible, but do not allow the discussion to veer off on a tangent. Reel the group back in by returning to questions that redirects the focus to lesson content and application.
- Encourage and lead students to share their insights about what they have learned and how they plan to apply the principles and skills to their own life.
- Be personally involved without relinquishing leadership. Be open and willing to share your own feelings and responses when appropriate.
- Do not rush the discussion. It is better to camp around one or two key questions that generate a healthy exchange than to rush to get through all questions with minimal benefit. Bring proper closure to the small group discussion by recapping the time together. If necessary, offer to continue the discussion at a later time either with the group or privately with the person if the topic does not relate to the entire group.
- Be sensitive to the allotted time given to small group discussion - begin and end on time.