

7 KEYS TO LEADING A GREAT DISCUSSION

1. DO YOUR PREPARATION.

Read through the study and answer the questions.

2. DO THEIR PREPARATION.

Remind them weekly to bring their Bible and/or other materials. Bring extra pens if they will need to be taking notes or answering questions. Email a few days before your meeting with a reminder of time & location.

3. GET A FOCUS AND KEEP TO IT.

Have fun and goof off with them but when it's time for Bible study, shift gears (don't get too crazy beforehand or you won't be able to settle them down). Be sure they know that there is a time to play and a time to be serious. Hold them to this – challenge them to be mature. Speak plainly to them about this and they will respect and thrive within the boundaries.

4. INVOLVE EVERYONE.

Be strategic in how you set up and lead Bible study. Learn which kids are strong readers and which aren't, which kids are comfortable praying out loud and which aren't. We don't want to embarrass anyone or make anyone uncomfortable. At the same time, reading and praying are important skills and we want to develop them. Make sure to involve everyone in a way that they feel comfortable and valued (i.e. have the "less experienced" kids read shorter passages or direct them how to pray... for example... "will you pray that we will learn something from this Bible study and thank God for the chance to get together?"). Always encourage and thank kids when they read and/or pray for the group.

5. KEEP THE DISCUSSION FLOWING.

If kids write down answers – go around the room and have everyone read their answers out loud. Ask follow up questions. Ask for examples. Ask if others agree or disagree. When you receive "Sunday school" answers, challenge a deeper understanding. What do you mean by that? How does that actually play out in real life?

6. KEEP THE DISCUSSION ON TASK.

Avoid tangents. If individuals or even the whole group have thoughts or questions that are outside the scope of the study, they need to be reserved for another time. Let the kids know that for now you all are going to stay on topic but that at X time you will follow up on those questions etc. Be sure you don't just say this... remember to actually revisit at an appropriate time the tangents that they really want to chase. Also, we need to be sensitive to the innocence of many of our kids. If someone brings up an "edgy" topic, we need to be discerning enough to nip it in the bud (i.e. someone asks what a condom is etc). Fringe topics like this one and even controversial theological questions should be handled with care. Some can be answered one on one outside of the group setting, some should be directed to the parents, and others should be brought to FSM staff. In any case, handle tangents appropriately, and stay on task.

7. KEEP TO TIME.

Unless you are having an incredible, life-changing discussion don't get caught up on the first few questions and run out of time without completing the study. If you get done early, practice memory verses or review old studies. The key with timing is to always give the impression that you are under control and everything is going as planned. What I mean is, if you say, "Well, we finished early, what should we do now?" You've lost them with the word "finishes" and whatever focus was established is lost. Momentum is maintained when you say, "okay, now we're going to spend some time memorizing this verse so that we can take what we learned today with us."