



How to Set Your Connect Group Up for Success at the First Meetings

Your Connect Group's first meeting can set the tone for the rest of the season. If members feel welcome, encouraged, and engaged from the get-go, they'll view attending as a blessing and be more willing to show up and contribute each week. Keep these tips in mind as you prepare for your group's first meeting:

Pray over your group. Have a personal conversation with God. We're not going to tell you what to pray (that's between you and Him), but here are a few jumping off points:

- God's blessing on your group and your leadership
- The hearts of your members
- Wisdom in facilitating the group
- Strong attendance

Prepare the environment. A cozy, inviting space will help members feel more comfortable. Ensure there are enough seating options and arrange them in a way that allows everyone to see each other. Make sure each seat has adequate lighting to read and set the thermostat at a neutral temperature (not too hot or cool).

Meet members at the door. Don't yell, "Come on in!" from the other side of the room or have a sign that says, "Head downstairs for Connect Group!" Smile and shake each member's hand while introducing yourself and telling them how glad you are that they're there.

Provide name tags. Meeting 10-15 new people and immediately remembering their names is nearly impossible. Help everyone avoid the awkward "What's their name again?" moment by handing out name tags for members to wear at least for the first meeting (and maybe the first few).

Allow the members to mingle. Wait 10-15 minutes for group members to chat and get to know one another a bit. Provide refreshments, desserts, or snacks, set some quiet music, and make your way around the room, getting to know introductory details about each member.

Start with an icebreaker. Help settle any nerves with a fun question that allows members to show their personalities and start getting to know each other. A few ideas:

- If you could get a ticket to any show/concert of all time, who would you see?
- Take one meaningful item out of your purse/wallet and explain why you keep it with you.
- If you could be guaranteed to have a wish fulfilled this year, what would you wish for?

- If you could only eat at one fast food restaurant for the rest of your life, which would you choose?

Set group expectations. Communicate the purpose of the group and what you expect from each member (watching a weekly video, reading study materials, etc.). Make it clear that everyone is expected to contribute to group discussion and will be given equal time to do so. Most importantly, establish confidentiality. Connect Groups are all about trust. Everyone needs to have a complete understanding that nothing said in the group leaves it.

Don't get too deep. This first meeting is all about getting to know one another and setting expectations. You are free to briefly discuss the materials you'll be studying, but don't worry about fully diving in yet.

Pray as a group. About 15 minutes before your meeting time ends, gather everyone to pray. Don't take prayer requests yet — that's for future meetings. Rather, pray generally for your group and that God would bless you all in this journey together.

Remind everyone of important details for the next meeting. As you thank everyone for coming, remind them of the time, date, and location of the next meeting, as well as what they'll need to do during the week to come prepared.

End on time. If members prefer to mingle and chat after the meeting's conclusion, that's great! However, some may be on tight time constraints, and you want to respect that. Honoring the time commitment communicates value and starts building trust.