

WHOLEHEARTED UNIVERSITY *COORDINATORS GUIDE*

WHAT EVERY LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW

Leading a group through Wholehearted University is life transforming for the participants—as well as the coordinator(s).

The following key points will set you up for success:

➤ **You need to be trained.** You and your volunteers:

- Should complete this training guide to understand the basics of Wholehearted University (WHU) and how to run a group at your gathering or church.
- Will need access to the internet and an electronic display for every meeting.
- Will need to be aware of the main objectives each week and read through the “Part 1: Prepare” section in WHU online curriculum (and)
- Will need to instruct your class to do the “Part 1: Prepare” section prior to your group meeting.

➤ **Never journey alone**

Just as the participants need support, so do the leaders. Don't attempt to lead alone. Recruit others to help you. Why?

You need a Co-leader: It's always good to have co-leaders. If someone is sick or running late, another leader can step in so that session can carry on. As Ecclesiastes 4:9-10a says, *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up."*

You'll also avoid burnout: If one person tries to do everything during the 9 sessions, it can lead to burnout.

Working through this journey can be emotionally challenging, so lighten the burden by sharing responsibilities, from administrative tasks to emotional support. In the Bible, Moses' father-in-law wisely advised him to share his responsibilities: *"What you are*

doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Exodus 18:17b-18).

You'll cover your bases: It's best to have a team to cover all the bases. Having both male and female team members makes it easier and safer to come alongside and support group members of each gender (if you are leading a co-ed group). Having multiple volunteers allows you to designate tasks such as promotion, refreshments, greeting/prayer, and facilitating the discussion time.

Self-care in ministry

As you care for others in your group, it's important to take care of yourself too. This not only keeps you healthy, but also lets you better serve the people in your group.

Healing takes time

As you lead WHU, keep in mind that this 9-week program won't be an instant fix, as people process circumstances and new ideas at different rates. Expect ups and downs and zigs and zags as people progress. And remain patient, because these stops and starts are normal.

It's common for people to go through the group two or three times. Let members know they are welcome to do this!

GROUP GUIDELINES

The goal is to facilitate an environment of kindness, compassion and confidentiality with each class. Begin each session with a reminder of these expectations. We always want to provide an environment that is conducive for healing.

It's important to talk about group guidelines during your first group meeting and in those that follow, especially as newcomers join. Group members will feel more comfortable knowing there are expectations for people to follow regarding sharing, listening, giving advice, confidentiality, etc.

When you go over the guidelines with the group, clearly communicate that these are guidelines for acceptable behavior in your group and that anyone who does not adhere to them will be kindly asked to no longer attend the small group (indefinitely or until the following semester). This will help to ensure that participants have the greatest opportunity to experience a warm, healing, supportive environment

LEADING YOUR GROUP

Your group will likely include a mixture of people and ages. Many may be nervous about being there that first meeting —especially about the group sharing time. Let them know

you understand this and encourage them to stick with the group. It's important to work on helping each person feel comfortable and accepted. While many will feel better by the end of the first session, others will take two to three sessions to become comfortable with the group process. Encourage them to commit to attending at least three sessions. Going forward, your group will begin to develop patterns and its own personality. This can be really exciting. While this can be so, you may also see unhealthy patterns (such as group members who dominate conversation.) Please do your best to keep the group healthy and focused on the purpose of that particular session.

- There are two different options for class timeframe. Below you will find a guide for both 90 and 120 minute sessions.

60 minute meeting outline:

Class Objectives are given to the facilitator at the beginning of each session's Coordinator Guide. You will find the specific class activity that addresses the objective after it—in **bold**.

Open the session by greeting participants and sharing the group guidelines (e.g. **kindness, compassion & confidentiality**) (5 minutes)

- Respond Questions: Ask and discuss questions 2 & 3 (only) (15 min.)
- Watch the apply video (15 minutes)
- Apply Questions: You will find the answers to the questions bolded for you. (20 minutes)
- Wrap up: Encourage participants to complete "Part 1: Prepare" in their online curriculum, prior to the next class/gathering. If able, they should review the "reflect" section as well. The questions and activities are designed to move them through the healing process. During the weekly meeting, you'll spend time talking about what participants learned from their exercises. (5 minutes)

90 minute meeting outline:

Class Objectives are given to the facilitator at the beginning of each session's Coordinator Guide. You will find the specific class activity that addresses the objective after it—in **bold**.

Open the session by greeting participants and sharing the group guidelines (e.g. **kindness, compassion & confidentiality**) (5 minutes)

- Interview question- Ice breaker question (30 minutes)

If you're answering this in a group setting, partner off. Then take turns asking your partner the question. Both individuals should be prepared to introduce their partner and share their story/answer to all the other the others in your group.

- Respond questions: You will find the answers to the questions bolded for you. (15 minutes)
- Watch the apply video. After the video, it's time for group members to share their reactions to the video and talk about what they learned. (15 minutes)
- Apply Questions: You will find the answers to the questions bolded for you. (15 minutes)
- Wrap up: Encourage participants to complete "Part 1: Prepare" in their online curriculum, prior to the next class/gathering. If able, they should review the "reflect" section as well. The questions and activities are designed to move them through the healing process. During the weekly meeting, you'll spend time talking about what participants learned from their exercises. (5 minutes)

120 minute outline:

Class Objectives are given to the facilitator at the beginning of each session's Coordinator Guide. You will find the specific class activity that addresses the objective in bold.

- Open the session by greeting participants and sharing the group guidelines. Encourage participants to go through the "prepare" section prior to meeting (5 minutes)
- Reflect video: Allow participants to share their thoughts on the video. (15 minutes)
- Interview question- Ice breaker question (30 minutes)

If you're answering this in a group setting, partner off. Then take turns asking your partner the question. Both individuals should be prepared to introduce their partner and share their story/answer to all the others in your group.

- Respond Questions: You will find the answers to the questions bolded for you. (15 minutes)
- Watch the Apply video. After the video, it's time for group members to share their reactions to the video and talk about what they learned. (15 minutes)
- Apply Questions: You will find the answers to each questions after it—in bold. (30 minutes)
- Wrap up: Encourage participants to complete “Part 1: Prepare” in their online curriculum, prior to the next class/gathering. If able, they should review the “reflect” section as well. The questions and activities are designed to move them through the healing process. During the weekly meeting, you'll spend time talking about what participants learned from their “*Your Wholehearted Journey*” exercise. (5 minutes)

TOP 5 TIPS FOR LEADING GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Whether you've led group discussions for years or it's your first time ever, these tips will help you create a supportive, more comfortable environment for your group members.

1. **Don't try to counsel**—If you have someone in your group that may need further counsel or coaching, encourage them to reach out to a WHU coach. This takes the pressure off you to have all of the answers! Your job is to simply facilitate discussion—never counsel. You're here to encourage discussion, sharing, and learning, not solve all the participants problems.
2. **Be okay with silence**—Many times in a small group, people are uncomfortable with silence. Let your group know how valuable silence can be and how to use it. They can pray for those around them, pray for their situation, listen for God, or sort through feelings. Reassure them that you don't expect them to answer right away. They can slow down and think before responding. (And don't feel compelled to fill the silence with your own thoughts or story! Your primary job is to encourage others to share.)
3. **Encourage participation**—Use eye contact to encourage people to talk. Hesitant talkers may need a verbal prompt: "Jen, I'd really love to hear what you have to say if you feel comfortable sharing." Be careful not to pressure anyone to speak who is not ready. If one or more "talkers" start to monopolize discussion time, you can ask the next question and say, "Let's hear from some others who have not had the opportunity to share much yet."

4. **Watch body language to guide discussions**—You'll want to keep your group on track, but sometimes a tangent can be good. It may get people to participate. Just be careful not to let it go too far or long. Watch people's eyes and posture. Being conscious of everyone's eye contact and body language will help you determine if the group is discussing something helpful and of interest or if you need to redirect the conversation.
5. **Avoid debates**—Remember, your role is facilitator. That means drawing people out and helping them share. Debates, theological or otherwise, aren't helpful for this process. Avoid engaging in a debate with a group member, and if a debate begins between members, gently remind them that you're all there to support one another. Then, steer the conversation back to the original question or topic.
6. **Trust God with your group**—And remember, your group is ultimately in God's hands. Trust Him to meet the group's needs. Pray, pray, pray for your group, and be prepared to see God do amazing things!

HOW TO HANDLE SMALL-GROUP CHALLENGES

What if I don't know how to answer a question?

Deal with difficult questions honestly and biblically. Be willing to say, "I don't know," "Does anyone else have input?" or "That's a good question." Members are more likely to share with someone who is honest about his or her limitations than with someone who pretends to know all the answers. And if you don't know the answer to a question, be sure to add, "But I am willing to find out."

How do I deal with the person who talks too much? (And the one who doesn't talk at all?)

Going over group guidelines with your group at the beginning of each session reminds everyone about the importance of listening, being respectful, providing a safe place, and allowing everyone the chance to share.

But if someone monopolizes the discussion time, express appreciation for what the person shared and ask other people for more thoughts on the topic. Breaking eye contact with someone who is talking too much can sometimes give him or her a cue that it's time to stop talking. At times you may simply need to interrupt someone. Say, "I'm sorry to interrupt you." Thank the person for what was shared, and remind the group that you want to make sure everyone has time to talk. While you may hesitate to do this,

trust us-many of your group members will be hoping you'll speak up so that they, too, will have the opportunity to share.

If you sense that someone would like to say something but is hesitant, call on that person by name. But don't pressure the person to share if he or she is not ready. Sometimes quiet people are listening intently and receiving much from the conversation, but they may not be able to verbalize their own ideas at that point.

What if the conversation goes off track?

If the conversation goes in a different direction from the video, be willing to let it run for a time. It may be just what the group needs. The idea is to remain flexible. That said, you must recognize when it's time to bring the discussion back to the session's topic. Do this by watching people's eyes and posture and gauging whether it's hindering an opportunity for less talkative people to participate. But don't let tangents take up too much time or become the norm. Members are counting on you to bring the group back on track.

How do I handle emotional participants?

Don't be surprised if someone begins to cry during a meeting. It's normal. Just keep a box of tissues on hand in case they're needed. Then, let people cry. Tell them it's okay and that it's good for them to cry it out.

WHAT TO DO IF A MEMBER SEEMS SUICIDAL

In some cases, you may worry that a group member is suicidal. If you're concerned by a participant's comments in the middle of your group meeting, take the following steps.

1. Acknowledge the person's struggle

Suggest that the person talk with a group leader to discuss things privately, and not in the context of the whole group: "It seems like you're struggling right now. How would you feel about staying after class to talk things out?" If you have a co-leader, you could ask if they feel okay with stepping out to discuss with that leader.

2. Ask guided questions

In a private conversation, determine the potential of suicide with these guided questions:

- Do you feel depressed or very sad? How bad does it get?
- Have you gotten so low you've wished you were dead or thought of taking your life?

- What are your thoughts? (If they don't mention a plan of suicide, ask, "Do you have a plan to kill yourself?")
- If the person has a plan of suicide, ask a few more questions to determine the likelihood that it could be carried out.
- Have you gone through any parts of your plan yet?
- What do you think would happen as a result of killing yourself?
- Is there anything that would keep you from harming yourself?
- Have you ever tried to hurt yourself before, even in small ways?

3. Take action

Respond to immediate threats - If suicide seems imminent, act quickly. Call 911 if the person is a threat to themselves or others. If you are hosting a group in conjunction with a church, call the appropriate church leader to let them know the situation.

If a person isn't suicidal - Acknowledge the person's struggle again and let him or her know what you're going to do next. Also give the person the national suicide hotline number: 800-273-8255.

ENCOURAGING MEMBERS TO SERVE

A great way to help group members heal and grow is to encourage them to serve in the community or in the church when they are ready. Consider inviting group members to get involved with the Wholehearted team.

There are opportunities for all talents, skill levels, availability, and levels of healing. Here are a few ideas:

- **Administrative tasks** - Registration, email reminders
- **Publicity** - to spread the word about your ministry
- **Hospitality** - Greeter, check-in, snacks, setup/takedown, child care
- **Group facilitator** - Those who've experienced substantial healing could be mentored to lead the discussion time; talk to a Wholehearted leader for help in choosing group members who might be good small-group facilitators.

Keep your eyes open for people who could serve on your team and which areas you think would be a good fit. During the later weeks of your journey, let your group know you are looking for volunteers.

Two cautions - As you encourage people to seek serving opportunities, keep two things in mind:

1. **Their motivation:** Participants should be volunteering in order to help others. As they serve, their motivation should be to honor God and help others, not pursue any selfish agenda.
2. **Their limits:** Participants who are already feeling overwhelmed may not be able to handle something else on their plate right now.