

The Perfect Welcome

Greet visitors and guests with warmth and a little common sense.

by Reid Smith

Note: In the next few weeks, we'll be introducing some "blogging all stars" from the world of small-groups ministry. Reid Smith has been doing small groups for a long time, and he's been doing it online almost as long. You can read some great training resources at www.2orMore.org.



When people visit your small group for the first time they come with all sorts of questions: Will we like it? Will we connect with the people there? Will this be helpful for us? It can be intimidating for people entering a new group because they don't know how they'll be received, if they'll feel like they fit, and if they'll want to return.

Fortunately, there are things you can do as a group leader to help ease any tension that guests may be feeling, and instead help them feel more "at home." Here are some tips to help guests feel more comfortable, received, and accepted in your group.

1. **Greet guests as soon as they come in.** Introduce yourself and let them know it's great to have them at your group.
2. **Learn a little about them as they're coming in** (this will help you introduce them to others).
 - Learn their names, and if they live nearby or have attended your church before.
 - If they have kids, ask names and ages of children - this helps the whole family feel welcomed.
 - Find out how they heard about your group (member, website, friend, etc.).
3. **Limit your first questions to between three and six** so they don't feel like they're being interviewed or interrogated.
4. **Introduce them to at least two other group members** using the information you just learned.
5. **Before you return** to greeting other group members:
 - Ignite a conversation between the guests and other group members.

- Offer to get them something to drink.

6. When everyone has gathered in one room, try to **acknowledge the presence of new guests** without making them feel awkward. This can happen if they feel like too much attention is being placed on them for too long. To avoid this faux pas, introduce your new guests to the whole group immediately. Don't leave it up to them to introduce themselves—get the process started for them based on details you learned as they entered the host home.

For example, "Hey everyone, I'd like to introduce a couple who is visiting our group for the first time. This is John and Jane and they live in Wilsonville. They learned about our group from our church's website and have two kids, Jack and Jill. It's great to have you here with us tonight. [looking at guests] Is there anything else you'd like to add?"

Notice several things that were done in this introduction:

- You got everyone's attention and immediately introduced your guests, which extinguishes feelings of intrusiveness they might have felt if they hadn't been recognized early on.
- You said they were "visiting" versus "joining," which relieves any pressure of commitment they might have.
- You broke the ice for them by providing just enough background, but not too much.
- You used their names and their kids' names, which makes the introduction more personal and warm.
- You left it up to them on if and how they'd like to respond so that they wouldn't feel put on the spot with specific questions like, "Why did you choose to come to our group tonight?" By providing a basic introduction yourself, they could pass on adding anything to what you said and not come across as being overly-reserved.

7. **Keep it brief.** This is important because if you focus too much or too long on your new guests they might feel like a spotlight is on them and become uncomfortable.

8. **Thank your guests** for being with you at the end of your group's study and discussion time. Let them know it was great having them. If they participated in the conversation, tell them you appreciated their input and insights.

9. **Try to introduce your new guests to two more group members** before they leave, unless you sense they are eager to make an exit. Make it a goal to encourage face-to-face conversations with at least half of your group by the end of their first visit. This will make their reflections on their group experience more personable and warm, which will encourage their return.

10. **As your guests are leaving** after your gathering, give them your contact info versus asking for theirs and include specifics of your next meeting. Let them know you'd love to have them come back, and that they can contact you if they have any questions.



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