

Creating a Community of Care

Five tips for a more caring small group

Jay Firebaugh

My good friend and mentor Jim Egli has this to say in *Small Groups, Big Impact*: "People want to join groups where there is a strong level of care. That is, when group members really care about each other, when they pray for one another, eat together, and have fun together, taking time with one another in between their meetings, new people want to be part of the group. Groups with a high level of care effectively assimilate others into group life."

Leaders tend to focus only on the meeting, but the meeting is probably only about 25 percent of what really matters in making your group successful. Yes, if your meeting is disorganized and boring, that won't help create a healthy group. But for the most part, you can have average meetings and still have a mega-successful group if you create a community of care. And that's the 75 percent you need to most focus on as a leader. Here are some tips to get you started.

1. *Genuinely care about your group members.* Regularly think about them and what's going on in their lives. Make them part of your ongoing thoughts and not just something you think about on Tuesday nights.
2. *Pray for your group members.* Jim's research has shown that the most significant thing a small-group leader can do to help group success is to pray daily for the people in the group. Not technique, flare, giftedness, or style—just forming the habit of daily prayer for each group member.
3. *Cultivate a climate where people can share authentically about their lives.* If the conversation is only superficial or sticks solely to Bible facts, then it's hard to really care about each other. It's quite a different matter when you begin to intertwine your hearts as you truly get to know each other. When that occurs, care happens naturally. Help set a caring climate by being open and honest in your own sharing. This will encourage everyone else in your group to do the same.
4. *Do things together beyond the meeting night. Sit together at church.* Go out to dinner. Watch the big game. Help each other out. Serve as a group. Spending informal time together will help deepen your friendships.
5. *Work at creating cross-care.* Leaders always set the pace by modeling, and when the people in the group start caring for each other, you'll know you've got genuine community. You can't do all the caring, and it means more to have the care from someone else in the group, too, so help your group members minister to and pray for one another. You'll know you're really there when you start finding out about things second and third hand!

It's not rocket science. Invest in doing the things that will make your small group a caring community. Watch your relationships grow deeper and your impact grow wider.

—Jay Firebaugh is the Director of Small Groups at New Life Church in Gahanna, Ohio. You can check out practical tools for pastors and small-group leaders on his [All About Small Groups](#) Facebook page. Used with permission from the author.