

Facilitating a Small Group in JHYM

1. Enjoy this time with the young people in your group. Don't stress it – some groups gel and some don't. Think about what you needed when you were in middle school. Most JH'ers would like to have a real conversation. Some have a lot of fear being authentic or honest. Fostering a safe and respectful community is primary.
2. Be open to the leadings of the Spirit. If you have an idea of a game, story, or direction to head towards, and your co-leader affirms it, please go there, Friend!
3. Begin the first small group of every retreat or Yearly Meeting reviewing confidentiality and mutual support. "What gets said here, stays here, unless it's a concern for your safety or someone else."
4. Start every small group with a round of check-ins. Review what these are. Check-ins happen out of silence and may or may not go in any particular order. Check-ins are time to share what's on your heart, what's new in your life, or what your hopes or fears are for the weekend. Everyone else listens without verbal comments; no one can read during this time. The important thing is that each person feel deeply heard. Leave a little silence between sharings for reflection. It's okay to pass; we encourage saying "Just Listening." You may want to designate one person to start – ask a person who you know will give a real check-in – this sets a tone that it is OK to really share and go deeper.
5. If someone shares something really heavy or something that seems unfinished, ask if they would like some of the group's time – to listen more, to ask questions, to pray. etc. This is always our first priority.
6. Some group times will be very centered, and some may be exceedingly unsettled. Be gentle with yourself and the group about this, and don't stress about making it do something it won't. The primary goal of these groups is to build community and provide a safe, more personal place to share something of ourselves with each other.
7. If one or two junior highers are giving you or the group a hard time:
 - a. Try a favorite phrase from Kevin Lee: "You can do better."
 - b. Try directly naming the problem: "You/your side conversation is distracting and makes me feel like you don't think the rest of us are important."
 - c. Start a game, like Hot Seat, and make them the center of attention first.
 - d. There are occasionally times when someone just needs to leave for quiet, unstructured time out of the group. A staffer should leave with this person. Let Gretchen know if you need help. It helps to check in with that young person later.
8. Try to formally close the group. Name something you appreciated about the group and either share a small ending ritual or some "fast silence." Thank them for their work and community together.
9. If you are leading a Small Group alone (I try to avoid this), be kind to yourself and check-in with another adult between groups about how it is going.