



Group Leader Toolkit

Starting Strong, Finishing Well

Hello Connect Group Leaders,

Welcome to a new season of Connect Groups. Whether it's your first time leading, or you have been leading for a long time, we are grateful for your willingness to serve. Your "yes" will bring others together and help them take the next steps in their faith journey. In this Toolkit you will find helpful information and resources to prepare you for this season of leading.

- **The Group Development Plan** is our leadership roadmap to a successful Connect Group. It helps leaders articulate what they would like to accomplish while leading their groups. Not only does this facilitate better leadership, it also aids your coach in providing the resources and support you need to achieve your goals.
- **Connect Group Commitment** will help set the expectations for your group (leader and member copy included).
- **The First Night Agenda** is a resource to assist you in launching your group with an impactful first night experience. Think of it as a template to build upon.
- **Pastoral Support** will provide resources for those with needs that go beyond your abilities as a group.
- **Serve Projects** will help you find or create the right project for your Group.

Additional resources can also be found on our Group Leader Resource page at <https://hopecity.com/lead-a-group/>.

Thank you so much for all you do as a Group Leader. We are praying that God richly blesses and anoints you as you lead your Group.

The Connect Group Team
Hope City

Group Development Plan

Roadmap for Group Success

If you want people to follow you, you must first know where you're going. The Connect Group Leadership Development Plan will become your personalized roadmap to a successful Connect Group. Make it your own and get started as soon as possible. Feel free to reach out to your Coach or Hub Coordinator if you need help getting pointed in the right direction.

My Vision for our Connect Group is:

Need help filling in the blank space? That's okay. Your vision is God-inspired, important to Hope City, and vital to your Group. It's worth getting right. Take some time now to pause, pray, and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Remember, groups are all about helping others make connections, find freedom, and take next steps in their faith. Use the questions below to prayerfully discover your vision. After you do, write a brief vision statement in the space above.

What are my unique experiences, passions, and gifts that can be used to help others take next steps?

What do I think relationships should look like in my group?

How will people in my group become better versions of themselves?

What impact will my Group have on Hope City and the community where we live?

When we get together, my Connect Group will:

The foundation of Groups at Hope City is built on the **ESPN** model: **E**ncourage, **S**cripture, **P**rayers, and **N**ext Steps. Below are some common elements that make up a Connect Group and some information to help you fill in the space above. The format for your Group is up to you. Mix and match the parts to write a brief description of what you will do when you get together.

Eat Together - Some groups enjoy coffee, a light snack, or even a meal together. What will that look like for you? Are you meeting at a restaurant or coffee shop where people

can treat themselves? Will you be meeting at your home (or someone else's) and ask people to bring something to share? Eating together leaves room for casual conversation and personal relationships to grow.

Have Fun - Some groups are activity-based and participate in things like bike riding or ultimate frisbee. Even Bible study and discussion groups can engage in an icebreaker or game before digging into the content. These activities open the door for folks to let down their guard and relax.

Grow Together - All groups make time to “spur one another on to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24) through intentional discussion. What will you discuss?

Discussion options:

- Hope City Sermon Discussion: <https://hopecity.com/sermon-resources/>
- Hope City Featured Curriculums: <https://hopecity.com/connect-group-leader-resources/>
- Resources found on Right Now Media: <https://bit.ly/2Qvn25O>

If you want to use a curriculum that is NOT included in one of these resources, please submit it to our Group Director for approval before beginning.

Serve Together - Groups that serve together, grow together. The strongest groups serve together at their campus and with our local mission partners.

<https://hopecity.com/get-connected/missions/local-missions/>

Here are some project ideas:

<https://hopecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/First-Saturday-Serve-Ideas.pdf>

Pray Together - Prayer is the foundation of everything we do at Hope City and so it should be in our groups as well. Healthy Groups share their needs with each other and pray together each time they meet. Not everyone needs to pray out loud, but that would be a great goal as you grow together.

Are we open to having children attend our group? If so, what will that look like?

Our Connect group will meet at a great place:

Our Connect Group will get together on these days at this time:

Our Connect Group will not be empty because we are going to:

Here are some tips to fill in the space above and your Connect Group.

1. Invite people you already know.
2. Sign up to serve for the Connect Group Launch at your campus and personally invite people.
3. Invite people with shared interests. People you serve with, work out with, pick up kids from HCKids with, or share a hobby with.
4. Register your Group at <https://rock.hopecity.com/LeadAConnectGroup> and respond quickly and personally to people who inquire. Sample: <https://bit.ly/3LpJTrp>
5. Post it on all of your social media outlets: FaceBook, Instagram, LinkedIn, NextDoor, etc.

I'm going to own my growth. Here's my development plan:

Our personal growth is essential. We have provided some ideas to help you fill in the space above. But you must take ownership of your growth first. You will grow most when you get into the game and begin to lead your Connect Group. As you encounter challenges and opportunities, we want you to have access to the resources you need.

- Commit to daily spiritual habits: prayer, worship, Bible reading, journaling, sharing your faith
- Make use of our leadership tools:
<https://hopecity.com/connect-group-leader-resources/>
- Make arrangements to meet with your coach regularly
- Commit to discover who God created you to be:
 - [Personality Type](#)
 - [Spiritual Gifts Assessment](#)
 - [Strengths Finder](#)

I need to follow up with my Coach concerning:

Thank you for your YES! Connect Groups are foundational to Hope City, and they don't happen without people like you. You have boldly stepped up to open your hearts, homes, and schedules to those around you. We believe in you and will be with you every step of the way.

Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. Proverbs 3:5-6 MSG

Connect Group Commitment

Commitment is an important piece to any relationship. The purpose of this document is to help clarify our group's goals, expectations, and commitment to each other over the next few months.

Connect Group Purpose

We believe that Connect Groups function to connect people, help them find freedom, and bring them to next steps in their faith. We accomplish this by focusing on four priorities that we intentionally plan for at each group gathering (**ESPN**).

ENCOURAGE

Each week we will demonstrate compassion by having open and meaningful conversations about what is happening in our lives. We will withhold judgment, choose to inspire courage, and let each other know that there is hope.

SHARE SCRIPTURE

Scripture is God's love letter to humanity. It is the very breath of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that you and your group can be thoroughly equipped to live out your faith and make a difference in the world (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Regardless of the type of group we are, we will always use Biblical truth to guide our conversation and point us to the answers for all of our life situations.

PRAYER

We believe that God hears and answers the prayers of the righteous. We will make time at each group gathering to listen to prayer requests and pray together. We will also carry those requests in our heart and pray throughout the week for each other.

NEXT STEPS

We are all a work in progress being perfected in the image of Christ. No matter how long we have been a Christian, we all have next steps. Together, we will support and resource everyone as they discover and take their next steps in faith.

Marks of a Healthy Connect Group

There are many signs that a group is healthy, but here are a few that we will look for and measure.

- Centered on Christ: regardless of the content or activity of the group, Christ is central, the gospel is promoted, and God is honored in all that takes place.
- Authentic Community: Committed to make everyone feel loved, accepted, and cared for. Committed to attend and participate in the group.
- Maintain Health: Willingness to receive feedback, be held accountable, and work to maintain one's relational, emotional, physical and spiritual well being (REPS).
- Promote Growth: Seeks to stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24) and move others to their next steps. (Prov 27:17)
- Looks to Serve Others: Demonstrating love in action by intentionally serving others on the dream team or through Serve projects.

Guidelines and Commitment

1. We will meet on _____ nights for _____ weeks. Our final group meeting will be on _____.
2. We can arrive between _____ & _____ but we will begin at _____. We will end our night no later than _____.
3. We will end our time together in prayer for one another.
4. Our group will focus on _____.
If our group requires a book: _____.
5. Joining our Connect Group requires a commitment to attend each meeting time (and complete the homework ahead of time if applicable). Of course we understand that life happens, and you can't always make it.

If you can not attend a meeting, please call or text _____ at this number _____ no later than 30 minutes before the meeting.
6. Concerning Children:
7. Food:
8. Serve Projects: Our groups will perform at least one Serve Project during the semester and our goal is for everyone to participate. As a group we will agree on the details and work together to serve our community.

We agree to honor this commitment throughout the semester.

LEADER's Connect Group Commitment

Commitment is an important piece to any relationship. The purpose of this document is to help clarify our group's goals, expectations, and commitment to each other over the next few months. **Everyone will need to sign a copy by week three. (Leaders, the sentences in red are a script you can use when going through this document.)**

Connect Group Purpose

We believe that Connect Groups function to connect people, help them to find freedom, and to bring them to next steps in their faith. We accomplish this by focusing on four priorities that we intentionally plan for at each group gathering (ESPN).

ENCOURAGE

Each week we will demonstrate compassion by taking time to have open and meaningful conversations about what is happening in our lives. We will withhold judgment and choose to inspire courage, and let them know that there is hope.

"Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ...And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up"
(Galatians 6:2 & 9).

SHARE SCRIPTURE

Scripture is God's love letter to humanity. It is the very breath of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that you and your group can be thoroughly equipped to live out your faith and make a difference in the world (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Regardless of the type of group we are, we will always use Biblical truth to guide our conversation and point us to the answers for all of our life situations.

PRAYER

We believe that God hears and answers the prayers of the righteous. We will make time at each group gathering to listen to prayer requests and pray together. We will also carry those requests in our heart and pray throughout the week for each other.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6).

No one will ever be asked to pray out loud if they are not comfortable, but the goal is to gain the boldness to pray together

NEXT STEPS

We are all a work in progress being perfected in the image of Christ. No matter how long we have been a Christian, we all have next steps. Together, we will support and resource everyone as they discover and take their next steps in faith.

Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:25).

"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13b-14)

Marks of a Healthy Connect Group

There are many signs that a group is healthy, but here are a few that we will look for and measure.

- Centered on Christ: Regardless of the content or activity of the group, Christ is central, the gospel is promoted, and God is honored in all that takes place. **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt 6:33).**
- Authentic Community: Committed to make everyone feel loved, accepted, and cared for. Committed to attend and participate in the group. ***Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God (Rom 15:7).*** Everyone will have the opportunity to respond or not. We will hold to the 70/30 rule where the leader only speaks 30% of the time. No one should dominate the conversation. **ASK: What have your previous experiences with Groups?**
- Maintain Health: Willingness to receive feedback, be held accountable, and work to maintain one's relational, emotional, physical and spiritual well being (REPS). **Healthy leaders produce healthy groups and healthy groups stay together longer and reproduce - multiply. Ask: What are some ways that we can do this as a Group together?**
- Promote Growth: Seeks to stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24) and move others to their next steps. **(Prov 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.) (See also 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 12:2) Ask: On a scale from 1-10 how would you rank yourself spiritually? Where do you want to be?**
- Looks to Serve Others: Demonstrating love in action by intentionally serving others on the dream team or through Serve projects. **We will decide as a group to either create our own project, or take part in one of the pre planned projects using the Serve App. Have them take out their phones and download the APP.**

Guidelines and Commitment

1. We will meet on _____ nights for _____ weeks. Our final group meeting will be on _____.
2. We can arrive between _____ & _____ but we will begin at _____. We will end our night no later than _____.
3. We will end our time together in prayer for one another.
4. Our group will focus on _____.
If our group requires a book: _____.
5. Joining our Connect Group requires a commitment to attend each meeting time (and complete the homework ahead of time if applicable). Of course we understand that life happens, and you can't always make it.

If you can not attend a meeting, please call or text _____ at this number _____ no later than 30 minutes before the meeting.
6. Concerning Children:
7. Food:
8. Serve Projects: Our groups will perform at least one Serve Project during the semester and our goal is for everyone to participate. As a group we will agree on the details and work together to serve our community.

We agree to honor this commitment throughout the semester.

You can have each group sign their own, or have all group members sign one copy that you can bring to every meeting. If new members join, you can still give them a digital or paper copy of the commitment and speak to them personally about it. Then have them sign it as the rest of the group has.

Launch Night

Preparation

A failure to plan is a plan to fail. Flying by the seat of your pants is not a spiritual gift. You must prepare yourself spiritually (heart), physically (body), and mentally (mind). We firmly believe that everything begins and ends with the foundation of prayer. However, we also need to prepare for what happens in between those moments.

Now that you have filled your roster with people that you have personally invited to join your group, you need to communicate with them about the details - the when, where, why, how, and who. Here is Hope City's standard for accomplishing this: [Click Here](#).

Next, you need to prepare for your participants by thinking ahead about how you will engage their five senses. It's about the atmosphere. How will you cater to their 5 senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, & taste? Think about what they will see as they approach your driveway: is your location visible? What will they hear, see, and smell as they walk into your home (or location)? Who will greet them at the door? What refreshments will be offered (taste)?

Goals for the First Meeting

- Connect & Build relationships
- Review vision, purpose, expectations, and commitments
- Have fun

Items Needed

- Refreshments
- Copies of the Connect Group Commitment (1 page double sided)
- Name Tags
- Pens
- Icebreaker Game

Three Essentials

1. First impressions are lasting impressions.

Within the first seven seconds that a person arrives at your Group, the individual is assessing whether you're likable, trustworthy, and competent. Again, prepare the atmosphere. Smile. Introduce yourself. Keep eye contact. Learn their name. Thank them for coming. Then, mingle and chat with everyone while you eat.

2. Diving In

After about 20 minutes of mingling, bring everyone together to officially begin your meeting time. Use an icebreaker or game to calm any nervousness and help the group get to know each other a little better. If you need some ideas you can click [HERE](#).

Some groups also like to add worship into the mix. It is optional but a great way to connect spiritually as a group. You can use live musicians or take advantage of some great resources found on YouTube. You can check out Hope City's channel [HERE](#).

Hand out copies of the Connect Group Commitment and review it together. As you go over each section, ask if anyone has any comments or questions. On the back page, you will have them fill in the blanks accordingly and discuss what you will do as a group regarding refreshments, child care, and a potential Serve project.

In the discussion time, remember the 70/30 rule. The leader does 30% of the talking and the participants handle the other 70%. Setting the tone for this on the first night is very important. Use the open ended questions provided in the leader's notes to promote conversation and responses.

3. Prayer

For some, the group prayer time is the scariest part of groups. Sometimes that's because of negative past experiences, and other times it's just because they have never done it and they think they are going to be asked to pray in front of others. Remember, you will most likely have people at various stages of spirituality and experience, so put their minds at ease and don't make it weird.

You can say something like this:

"We believe that prayer is fundamental to faith. It's a simple conversation between us and God. We also understand that prayer in a group setting is something that many may not have done. We will never force you to pray. We will, however, always make

room for everyone to ask for prayer. Then, those willing can lead us in prayer for the needs mentioned.”

At that point, you can receive prayer requests and offer the opportunity for others to lead in prayer to close out the time.

Another option is to split into smaller groups for your prayer time. A few points to consider with this option:

- Give the groups a time limit
- Break into gender groups
- Ensure that there is at least one person in each group that is comfortable to pray out loud with others
- Play some soft instrumental worship music to set the atmosphere

Additional Tips

1. Never underestimate the significance of the time after the meeting.
2. Start giving jobs away from day one: greeter, attendance, refreshment planner, co-leader, etc.
3. Send out a summary email within 24 hours and include action items or next steps.
4. Visit the Leader Resources web page for additional tools - [Click Here](#)

Pastoral Care

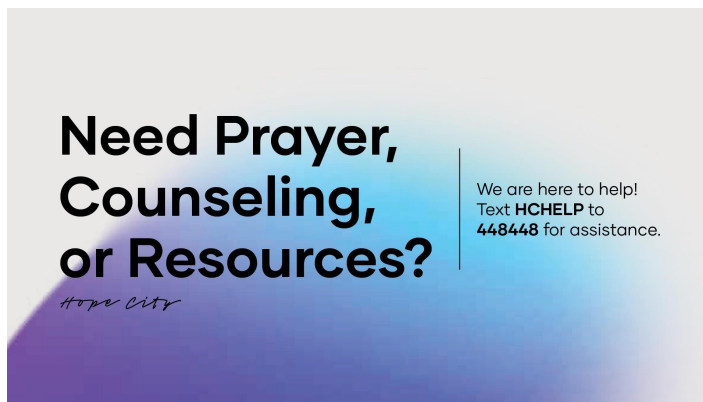
The Pastoral Care Team is available to minister to people who need more help than what they can get in a prayer line or Connect Group. We help people who are going through a personal crisis with problems such as:

- Marriage & family problems
- Financial issues
- Domestic violence & abuse (current or previous)
- Employment
- Counseling
- Inner healing
- Trauma
- Mental health
- Substance addictions - sexual addictions
- Senior services

We are not here to replace the Connect Group Leaders but are here to come alongside them. Text **HCHelp** to **448448** for assistance.

You may also contact me personally at 713-899-3149 with information about the person in your group who needs help. This number should only be used by the Group Leaders. We love you and we are here for you!

Kandace Della Femina
Hope City Pastoral Care Coordinator



Project Ideas

There are a number of different ways you can make a difference in your community.

Start by asking yourself these questions:

- Who in your community or neighborhood has a need?
- What individuals, ministries or organizations around you could benefit from your skills?
- Are there any needs in your community that stand out?
- What project types best suit your group's ages and abilities? (physical labor, prayer, outreach, worship, teaching, etc)

General Ideas

- Host a free garage sale
- Provide yard clean up/beautification for elderly, widowed, or single mom
- Bring free lunches to service people in your area
- Give out free bottled water
- Kids host a free lemonade stand
- Provide home repairs for elderly or disabled
- Kids host a free toys and games giveaway/garage sale

Remote and Virtual Ideas

- Decorate lunch bags for your local Meals on Wheels program
- Create fidgets/sensory toys for local organizations
- Write/Decorate a hope note or card for nursing homes, hospitals, etc
- Create quarantine kits for your local community center or homeless shelter
- Host a Shoe Drive (Samaritan's Feet)
- Create no-sew blankets for hospitals, homeless shelters, care facilities, or pet shelters
- Put together goody bags for service members

Community Outreach

- Assemble and deliver hygiene packs to people experiencing homelessness in your community
- Do a community prayer walk and trash clean up
- Renovate a run-down park or playground in the area
- Host a clothing drive for a local shelter
- Trash pick up in your community or neighborhood
- Volunteer at a local food pantry

Landscaping and Minor Home Repairs

- Adopt a block/trail in your neighborhood, local park, or community
- Clean and decorate for a single parent, elderly, or widower
- Indoor or outdoor painting project for elderly, disabled, single parent, or community partner

Skilled Construction

- Home renovation projects for single parent, elderly, or widower
- Fence repair for single parent, elderly, or widower
- Built a wheelchair ramp for elderly or disabled

Local Partners

HoustonFoodBank: [Volunteer Link](#)

Heights Interfaith Pantry: <https://himfoodpantry.org/home/volunteer/>

The Beacon: <https://www.beaconhomeless.org/schedule>

KidsMeals,Inc: <https://give.kidsmealsinc.org/charities/4136-kids-meals-inc/volunteer>

Wesley Community Center: <https://wesleyhousehouston.org/volunteer/>

Westbury Community Garden: <https://westburycommunitygarden.org/volunteer/>