

New People Entering the Group

Any new member entering the group will change the dynamics of the group. The trick is to help them fit in to the group as quickly as possible and help the older members get to know the newbie quickly e.g. have a meal or social activity together.

Karen and Rod Morris in Leading Better Bible Studies (pages 113-119) say that a small group goes through 5 stages of development: Forming (all the processes of bringing a group together), Storming (increasing involvement in the group), Norming (normal operating procedures), Performing (maximum growth and caring for each other) and Mourning (winding down and grief over the termination of the group). They say that if a new member joins the group will regress at least one stage. If more than one joins then the group will go back to the Forming stage but progress through the stages will be made more quickly.

If the new member is a new Christian or not yet a Christian then he/she probably has got a lot less knowledge of the Bible than everybody else. You could either go back to the basics to cater for the new person or continue as normal and explain the biblical contexts more carefully, encourage questions and try not to use too many Christian clichés. Colin Marshall says that older members may become inhibited or go the other way and feel they have to “perform” for the unbelievers (Growth Groups page 77). Perhaps it would be even better to work one to one with the newbie until they get up to speed with the rest of the group. Larry Osborne says it is best to get new people “into a situation where they can rub shoulders with longtime Christians and benefit from life-on-life modelling and mentoring from those who’ve learned what it means to live out their faith on a day-to-day basis.” (Sticky Church page 69.)

Another strategy would be to set up a new and separate group just for new or not yet Christians. This could be for a short term of 4 to 6 weeks in order to explain the basics of the gospel. After that individuals could then decide if they wanted to join a regular group. Osborne suggests that this type of group works particularly well because “the strong similarity among the group members is not so much a shared interest or station in life as it is a shared lack of established relationships.” (Sticky Church page 79.)