



grow group

**Leader & Host Orientation
Handbook**

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Why Grow Groups?

The quality of our lives is determined by the quality of our relationships.

God designed us to have quality relationships. In Genesis 2:18 God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." So for Adam, he made a companion. And for us, he made the church."

"They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity - all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved." (Acts 2)

They encouraged each other. Served each other. Prayed for each other. Had fun with each other, all the while growing in the grace and knowledge of God. (2 Peter 3)

At SHBC, we want everyone in our church body to be building quality, meaningful relationships with other Christians that help them become more like Jesus. We believe the best way we can help these relationships happen is through Grow Groups.

We want all our members to commit to consistently coming on Sundays to worship together. But equally so we want to challenge all of our members to commit to a Grow Group as well. It is our goal to have every member of our church body growing in Christ with one another.

"Under His direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." - Ephesians 4:16

What is the purpose of the **Grow Group ?**

To help our members grow in the grace and knowledge of God through the development of quality, meaningful relationships with other Christians.

What is the purpose of the **Grow Group Leader?**

To ensure that his or her Grow Group members experience the development of quality, meaningful relationships with other Christians, and intentionally foster those relationships.

What is the purpose of the **Grow Group Host?**

To provide/create an environment for the Grow Group to meet that intentionally encourages and promotes the development of quality, meaningful relationships between Christians.

Why does it matter?

It would be wrong to say that the Grow Group Leader's only responsibility is to nurture relationships. Among other things, there is a Bible discussion to be facilitated, fellowship time to be coordinated, and prayer time to be led.

To say the host's only responsibility is to provide an environment that lends itself to good relationship development would also be wrong. There are houses to clean, snacks to be prepared, and personal touches to be added.

While all of these responsibilities are expected of our Leaders and Hosts, they all serve to fulfill the relationship-focused purpose of the Grow Group.

A well-facilitated Bible discussion that leads to life change is a wonderful element to have in our Grow Groups, but if it happens in the absence of growing relationships, we've missed the mark. A fun fellowship time in a clean house with great music and snacks is ideal, but if it doesn't encourage quality relationships between members, we've missed an opportunity.

We believe that through prayer and purpose-driven preparation, our Grow Groups will thrive, and the church body will grow in Christ together.

Grow Group Session

While we want to encourage our Leaders and Hosts to be creative and allow each Grow Group to reflect the personalities of its members, we want the structure of the Grow Group session to be consistent for all of our Groups.

Fellowship (15-20 minutes)

Time set aside for friendships to grow, snacks to be eaten, and fun to be had.

Some groups may connect right away, and need no help in have fun and fruitful fellowship. Others may take a little extra to connect and get going, so each week's discussion plan will also include ideas for easy icebreakers, games, and conversation starters.

Bible Discussion (45-60 minutes)

Time to open the Word and discuss it with your Group. Discussion plans will be provided by Pastor Ted and the Grow Group Team at the beginning of each week and will normally be further discussion on biblical truths explored in recent sermons and how to apply those truths to our daily lives.

Prayer (15-20 minutes)

Purpose-driven prayer time focused on the growth of your Grow Group members and preserved by a simple set of purpose-driven guidelines. The method by which your prayer time is carried out will be designed to create the best opportunities for life-change and growth.

Expectations for Leaders

Preparation

When it comes to leading your Grow Group, preparation is everything. It is expected that for each Grow Group session you lead, one hour is spent preparing. How you use that time is up to you, but we would like it centered primarily on two items

1. Praying for your Grow Group
2. Fellowship/bible discussion preparation

We list “Praying for your Grow Group” first, because we want it to be prioritized in your preparation time. We would rather too much time be spent on prayer for your Grow Group and not enough for fellowship/discussion preparation than too much time on fellowship/discussion preparation and not enough time for prayer. However, it is our hope that you allow sufficient time for both.

Communication

...with your Grow Group

In addition to your preparation, it is expected that you communicate intentionally with your Grow Group. This includes:

1. Informing members about GG meeting times and location
2. Emailing/texting weekly “teasers” about upcoming GG meetings (sent with curriculum)
3. Checking-in with GG members who had unannounced absences
4. Following-up with GG members who have shared personal struggles or serious prayer requests.

Consistency in communication will encourage consistency in attendance, which is key to the development of relationships. Getting members excited about the upcoming discussion, letting absent members know they were missed, and reaching out to the struggling are all ways we can promote consistent attendance in a positive manner.

...with your Host

You and those serving as your host(s) are a team.

Your hosts are more than just the owners of the home you meet in, or the person who turns on the coffee machine. They are your most immediate source of support and encouragement. They have your back. The relationship between you and your hosts can be a fruitful collaboration.

Keep them in the loop as much as possible. Consider how they can help you (and how you can help them) lead the Grow Group to fulfill its purpose. Make sure you have regular conversations with them reflecting on how the Grow Group is going, and what needs to be done to continue with excellence.

...with your Pastor

We encourage our Grow Group members to open up and share with the other members in their Grow Group, so that the group knows how to pray for and encourage each other.

In the same way, it's important that you share with your pastor, so he can know how to pray for and encourage you. Things worth sharing could include:

1. A personal struggle
2. Legitimate concerns about an individual in your GG
3. A serious prayer request from within your group that warrants attention

We understand that there will be lots of unforeseeable issues and questions that will arise once your Grow Group gets underway, especially in regards to leading a Grow

Group session. For these kinds of items, see the section titled. **“Accountability & Support”**

Care

Whether you realize it or not, your willingness to lead a Grow Group indicates that you care. It indicates that you care about the well-being and spiritual growth of people you may not even know yet. Your care and compassion for this group of people is what qualifies you to lead your Grow Group more than any of the other skills or gifts you possess.

Nonetheless, it’s important to note how we can be intentional when caring for our group. Here are a few simple actions that let your Grow Group know you care as you are starting out:

1. Make an effort to get to know “the basics” of everyone in your group. Where are they from? What do they do? How did they get here? If someone outside the group asked about “the basics” of anyone in your Grow Group, would you be able to give a good answer?
2. Exchange contact information. Merely exchanging the information indicates that you plan to use it.
3. Look for members that may be on the “fringe” of the Group, and find ways to better connect them with other Grow Group members.

Celebrating birthdays, honoring anniversaries, going to a member’s special event, cooking for a member who is sick or hurting....there are countless ways to show that you care, and you probably have some ideas of your own. As you consistently show care for your Grow Group, we believe that your Grow Group members will follow suit.

Live (and Lead) Above Reproach

It goes without saying that all of your actions in and out of your Grow Group should be of God and for God. You know this, and we know you know this. Unfortunately, some actions with pure intentions can be perceived as less than pure.

By definition “reproach” means *the expression of disapproval or disappointment*. Living “above reproach” means that not only are our actions pure and biblical, but are carried out in such a way that does not leave room for disappointing or disapproving perception from our Christian brothers and sisters.

Such awareness can be as simple as recognizing how your style of prayer is being perceived, and making sure it can only be perceived as humble and genuine.

It can also be as complicated and troubling as needing to reach out to a member of the opposite gender to follow-up about a prayer request or an absence, but understanding that even a one-on-one text with pure intentions can be perceived by the recipient or someone else as something different entirely.

Bottom line, **“living above reproach” means protecting your reputation and credibility as you live for Christ.**

Protect yourself. Protect the men and women in your Grow Group. If any situation arises that could be perceived in a way that threatens your or someone else’s integrity, take actions to prevent that perception. Bring in a third party. Delegate a task to a more appropriate Group member. Do all you can to ensure you are living and leading above reproach.

Be in Worship

At Somerset Hills Baptist Church, our strategy for disciple-making is simple:

Worship

We want 100% of our church body committed to consistently attending Worship.

Grow

We want 100% of our church body to be committed members of a Grow Group.

Serve

We want 100% of our church body to be serving God and others through our church once a week.

Be for others a strong example of what it looks like to be a member at Somerset Hills Baptist Church. Because you are leading a Grow Group, you are already a member of the Grow Group (check!), and serving God through the church as well (check!).

It's so important that you attend Sunday morning worship consistently, and encourage your Grow Group members to attend faithfully as well. Corporate worship is an irreplaceable part of your group members' growth process, and we want them to follow your lead.

Terminology

This one might seem petty, but its important:

The group you are leading is a **Grow Group**. Our Grow Groups are different than our previous discipleship programs. A Grow Group is not Sunday School, nor is it Prayer Meeting. It's not even just "Bible study." It's a Grow Group, it's new, it's different, and it's important for Grow Group members to fully experience that difference.

As we transition to this new season at Somerset Hills, it's so important that leadership only refer to "Grow Groups" as "Grow Groups." For many of us it will be a challenge not to refer to them by other names out of habit, but it is expected that an effort be made to only use "Grow Groups."

Leaders-in-Training (LIT)

You committed to lead an 8 to 10 week Grow Group. We're not asking for more than that. We understand you may feel led to lead again in the next semester, but we also expect (and encourage) you to take semesters of rest.

We also expect your Grow Group to thrive. As it does, we expect it to grow in numbers, to the point that eventually, in another semester, it's necessary to start an additional Grow Group.

The best way we can prepare for these moments is by intentionally raising up Grow Group members to be leaders *now* so they are ready to go *then*.

No one will know your Grow Group better than you, so the Grow Group Team is relying on your wisdom and discernment to identify individuals to recommend to the Grow Group Team to be Leaders-in-Training. After a quick review process, the Grow Group Team will likely give their blessing for the recommended individual, and will reach out to that individual to begin the onboarding process.

Contingency Plan

While it should be your priority to be at all Grow Group sessions, we know that life happens. Scheduling conflicts arise. Emergencies emerge.

For both planned or unplanned situations where you or your Grow Group Host are unable to be at a Grow group session, a plan needs to be in place to maintain that the session still takes place.

A session can be led by a Grow Group Host, by a Leader-in-Training, or by a trusted member of the Group in the event you can't be there. If for some reason the Grow Group Host home is unavailable (illness, travel, etc.), the Grow Group can meet in another home or at the church.

However you arrange it, make sure you, your host, and your Grow Group know what your plan is.

Cancellations

A Grow Group session should **ONLY** be cancelled in the presence of dangerously severe weather conditions or other unpredictable hazardous circumstances.

Rain is not a reason to cancel a session. Expecting low-attendance is not a reason to cancel a session. There are very few reasons to cancel a session.

Grow Group Session Leader Values

Start on Time:

Starting on time indicates you value the time you have with your Grow Group. Use each minute well, even in Fellowship.

End on Time:

Ending on time indicates you value your Grow Group member's time, as well as the time and hospitality of your Grow Group Host. Situations may arise that call for an extended time, but unless the Host and Leader have discussed a later end-time in advance, these situations need to be the exception.

Maintain Direction:

Because the largest portion of a Grow Group session is a discussion, there will be lots of opportunities for the conversation to steer away from the direction you have planned. It will be up to your discernment to recognize the difference between the Holy Spirit guiding your conversation in a new direction, and a wandering rabbit trail. If it is clearly the latter, quickly and gracefully guide the conversation back on track.

Maximize Interaction:

Relationships require interaction. Design and plan your fellowship and discussion time to be the best opportunities for group member interaction.

Talk Less; Listen More:

It's important to use your voice to guide the discussion, to encourage, or to spur conversation. It's equally important to let other voices be heard. Try to limit yourself to being no more than 30% of the conversation.

Prioritize Prayer:

Just as you do in your prep. time, value prayer in your Grow Group. Bible discussion should start with prayer, end in prayer, and sometimes even have prayer throughout. Encourage others in your group to pray. Cultivate a culture of prayer in your Grow Group.

Discourage Unbiblical Behavior:

Conversations during fellowship and discussion time can lead anywhere. Be prepared to gracefully and lovingly discourage openly unChristlike behavior if confronted with such a situation. This can range from foul language, inappropriate comments and **political banter** to a member disrespecting another group member, disputing Biblical truth, or causing division in any way. The growth of the individual and the group relies on your quick action in these moments.

Encourage Biblical Behavior:

Again, conversations can lead anywhere, hopefully more often than not to good places. Be prepared to encourage Christlike behavior when the opportunity arises.

Have a Good Time:

Prepare enough that you are able to have a good time and be yourself during your Grow Group session. The fellowship time is as important for your growth as it is for the other members in your Group. Enjoy it!

Expectations for Hosts

As stated earlier in this handbook, the purpose of the Grow Group host is to provide/create an environment for the Grow Group to meet that intentionally encourages and promotes the development of quality, meaningful relationships between Christians.

Hospitality

The Setup

Regardless of meeting space, here are some universal needs for all Grow Groups:

1. An primary area with places for Grow Group members to sit in a circle, facing inward towards each other. *Preferably with access to a television for certain Grow Group media needs*
2. A second area, removed from the first, to serve as needed for split male/female prayer time or other moments that call for privacy. *Preferably far enough removed that conversations at a normal volume are not heard between the two rooms.*
3. An area for eating and fellowship, if this need is not already being met by the primary or secondary area.

Housekeeping

Whether your Grow Group meets at your house or at the church, it's important you view your meeting space as you would your home. Consider things like:

1. Is it tidy?
2. Is the temperature comfortable?
3. If it's dark out, are the outside lights on?

If you are hosting a Grow Group at the church, you will need to give yourself enough time to make sure these and other housekeeping items are set **before** the Grow Group members arrive.

Snacks

We do not expect you to provide a meal for your Grow Group each week. In fact, we don't want that at all.

Snacks, however, are a different story. Snacks are great. Snacks encourage fellowship. Snacks provide incentive to show up on time. Snacks spur conversation. There should be snacks at every Grow Group Session. With that said...

...It is not your job to provide snacks each week, but rather to make sure that snacks are provided each week.

If you feel called to provide snacks every week, we can't stop you. But allow your fellow Grow Group members the opportunity to provide snacks as well. Create a schedule at the beginning of the semester for members to volunteer to bring snacks each week.

Don't let it be a financial burden. If providing snacks becomes such an issue, please let the Grow Group team aware.

Background Music

Background music is a gift from God. It can lift spirits, encourage conversation, and prevent awkward silence. There's a reason background music is played in every restaurant and hotel lobby you go to. Consider playing some music in the background of your fellowship time. Worship music is great, but so is some instrumental music. If you need help or ideas, contact the Grow Group Team.

Support Your Leader

While your primary responsibilities mostly involve hospitality, you are also the most immediate support system and source of encouragement for your Grow Group Leader.

You and your Grow Group Leader serve to fulfill the same purpose. You are a team, and you need each other. Support your leader. Have their back. Understand what they are trying to achieve, and help them achieve it. Help them make fellowship fun and great. Help the discussion keep moving when it needs a boost. Answer a question. Lead a prayer. Be passionate about your Grow Group.

Children

While we offer a Grow Group for children on Wednesday evening and an adult Grow Group at the church during that time, we know that some parents will want or need to attend Grow Groups at other times during the week.

The Grow Group discussion and prayer time needs to be reserved for the adult members of the Group only. It will be the responsibility of the Grow Group Leader and Host to work out with their Grow Group a plan for children as needed so that this time remains adults only. Some ideas:

- Consider pooling money for a babysitter
- Allow an older child or youth to be responsible for overseeing some of the younger children.

If you need help coming up with a solution, reach out to your Grow Group Team and we can help. **We strongly advise communicating this policy to your Grow Group early**, to avoid confusion or conflict surrounding this policy later (even if it is not immediately a concern).

Accountability & Support

You are not alone! Each week that you lead a Grow Group, several others you know are leading Grow Groups as well, experiencing similar things in similar environments. Your pastor and the Grow Group Team are praying for you, and are here to support you in your leadership.

Pastor Ted or a member of the Grow Group Team will be regularly checking-in with you to make sure you have what you need to successfully lead your Grow Group. We want to know: *how is it going? What's been going well? What hasn't been going well? Are you finding you are able to meet the expectations of a Grow Group Leader? If not, what's holding you back, and how can we help you overcome it? Do you or your Grow Group have any needs that we can help meet? How can we help your Grow Group thrive?*

We also want to provide an opportunity for Grow Group Leaders to support and encourage each other. To do this, Pastor Ted will host regular conference calls/videos just for our Grow Group Leaders. These calls will be a brief time of sharing, exchanging Leader tips, troubleshooting, and encouragement designed to build up our Leaders throughout the week.

If you run into an issue when leading, please be open with us. Let us help. If something exciting happens in your Grow Group, please tell us! Let us rejoice with you. We are here for you.

Calendar

Week 1:	October 1st - October 7th
Week 2:	October 8th - October 14th
Week 3:	October 15th - October 21st
Week 4:	October 22nd - October 28th
Week 5:	October 29th - November 4th
Week 6:	November 5th - November 11th
Week 7:	November 12th - November 18th
Week 8:	November 19th - November 25th Thanksgiving*
Week 9:	November 26th - December 2nd
Week 10:	December 3rd - December 9th

*Grow Groups will decide as a Group whether or not they will meet during Thanksgiving week/weekend.

External Resources

A collection of resources written by small
group experts designed to help you be a better
Grow Group Leader