



Small Group Leader Orientation Guide

Dear Small Groups Leaders,

Our mission is to build a life-giving church that lasts! That means we value every generation and look to invest in our community by showing them the love of God in everything we do. East Coast Groups exist to bring people together and lead them toward community and freedom found in Christ. We love God, love people, and love life—together.

As the Pastor of Small Groups at East Coast Church, I want to personally welcome you to the team! Groups are a place where people can have fun, develop friendships, grow spiritually, serve others, experience authentic biblical community, and raise up future small group leaders.

We hope that this guide will be a valuable resource for you. It will give you the “why” behind groups, what groups look like, and how to lead a group everyone wants to be a part of. Life change happens in the context of relationships. That’s what small groups are all about.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 - “Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help...”

As you begin your ministry, I want to say how excited I am about this next step in your walk with the Lord. If you have any questions, please contact me or Charlotte Lawrence.

Thank you for helping carry out the vision of Discipleship and Evangelism! You are making a difference!

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WHY DO WE HAVE GROUPS?

Small Groups are relational:

- We are created for relationships.
- God created us in His image to have a relationship with Him and with one another (Gen 1:26).
- When God wants to do something incredible in your life, He will begin linking you up with the right people. When Hell wants to destroy what God is doing in your life, you'll become isolated from those people. Remember, temptation begins with isolation. (James 1:14)

Small Groups are authentic:

- People grow deeper in authentic relationships as modeled by Jesus and the early church.
- Jesus calls the disciples His friends (John 15:15) and allows them to see His pain and struggle with following God's will. (Matthew 26:36-37)
- In the early church, they connected for fellowship, meals, prayer, and discussion of spiritual growth. (Acts 2:46-47)

Small Groups nurture and mature:

- Honest friendships help us grow and mature in Christ.
- Group environments create opportunities for people to become more fully devoted followers of Christ through lasting friendships.
- By speaking the truth in love, we grow mature in Christ. And the body of Christ grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Small Groups provide spiritual strength:

- Relationships make us stronger spiritually and prevent spiritual drifts. (Hebrews 2:1)
- The Bible describes Christ-followers as a body, and no body-part can remain alive and strong if disconnected from the rest of the body. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)
- Jesus describes Himself as the "Good Shepherd", and as His followers, we share in this ministry of caring for and protecting each other. (John 10:14; John 13:34-35; Galatians 6:2)

Small Groups mature and equip future leaders:

- Part of East Coast's mission is to reach people for Christ, raise them up to become followers of Christ, and release them into their God-given purpose.
- As a Small Group Leader, you are on a mission to identify and raise up potential leaders to further impact God's kingdom.

WHAT DO SMALL GROUPS LOOK LIKE?

Small Groups can meet:

- Weekly, monthly, semi-monthly, seasonally, etc.
- In homes, coffee shops, church spaces, parks, etc.

Small Groups are designed around common interests with the goal of building relationships and growing spiritually.

Small Group Types include:

- **Life Stage Groups** – Marriage, Parenting, Youth, Young Adults, Empty-nesters, etc.
- **Study Groups** – Bible Studies like Sisterhood and Wolfpack, Curriculum Studies, etc.
- **Activity Groups** – Golf, tennis, knitting, walking, praying, etc.
- **Church-wide Groups** – Freedom, Rooted Discipleship, Financial Peace University
- **Care Groups** – Provide safe space to share experiences, find understanding, and receive guidance.
- **Serving Groups** – Dream Teams, Food Pantry, etc.

NUTS & BOLTS/DO'S & DON'TS

Small Groups are fun and relational.

- Our church services and events are fun, energetic, and relational. Our small groups reflect these qualities with icebreakers, games, music, etc.
- Group outings can include road trips, camping, shopping, meals, BBQ's, etc to build a sense of belonging outside normal group times.
- It's great to build relationships at your first meeting by having members tell how they got connected at East Coast. When we understand each other's story, friendships are formed.

Small Groups are catalysts of spiritual growth and transformation.

- Ask questions about life experiences but avoid doing all the talking.
- Your role is to guide the conversation, not control it.
- Encourage the quiet ones in the group to participate.
- If conflict occurs during the discussion, encourage members to respect and care for each other even when they don't agree.

Small Groups develop future leaders.

- Invite members to share responsibilities of the group such as hosting, co-leading, leading a discussion, or being in charge of food.
- Cast vision at every meeting for members to consider leading a group in the future.
- Pray and ask, "God, who are You already stirring in this group?"
- **Key points to look for in future leaders:**

- Are they grounded (humble and possessing integrity)?
- Are they gifted (have natural strengths)?
- Are they growing (possessing a hunger to learn)?
- Do they follow through on commitments and show up regularly?
- Do they make others feel seen and welcomed or notice if someone is missing?
- Do they support East Coast Church leadership and direction, and live out godly values in everyday life?

Small Groups serve each other, their local church, their city, and the world.

- Meet the practical needs of members going through hardship. For example, bring meals to someone after surgery, mow their lawn, or visit them in the hospital.
- Pray for and with members who are going through hardship or celebrating life's special moments.
- Serve as a group in an area of the church on one of our Dream Teams or together on Super Serve Day.

Small Groups allow dialogue for everyone wherever they are on their spiritual journey.

- Sometimes people who have not experienced Jesus as their Lord and Savior attend groups. It's important to have a safe place for members to bring their unsaved friends or co-workers.
- Allowing group attenders to investigate faith and belong before they believe is often the tipping point that allows God to bring people to saving faith.

Small Groups have clear communication.

- Contact your new signup within 24 hours of joining your group through PCO.
- All meetings should be scheduled in PCO. An automatic reminder is emailed to the members. Please reach out to members of your group via calls, texts, or emails when there are changes in schedule or location. However, try not to make frequent changes after the group begins.
- Coordinate signups for food and/or refreshments if needed.
- Pray for your group members and connect with them throughout the semester to encourage and support them. GroupMe is a great tool to use for group texts, prayers, and praise reports.

Small Groups create a safe group environment.

- **Confidentiality** – What is said in the group, stays in the group.
- **Honor and Respect** – We can disagree respectfully and grow through loving conflict.
- **Appropriately Transparent** – Some subjects should be saved for a close friend, coach, pastor, or counselor. *For example, something your spouse is not comfortable with you sharing with the group or a past abuse or trauma.*
- **Avoid Over-Participation** – Allow everyone to speak and give guidelines such as go around the circle, take 60 seconds to answer, let's hear from some of you that have not answered yet.

- **Avoid Negativity** – Groups are a place for positive growth in our walk with God. Steer discussions away from gossip about other people in or outside the group, churches, or politicians, etc.
- **Avoid Focused Problem** – Avoid the group being centered on one person's problems.
- **Impermissible Practices** – The following are not permitted in East Coast Groups:
 - Alcohol or tobacco. We never want to cause someone to stumble.
(Romans 14:21 – *It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*)
 - Be careful what you put on social media! As a leader of East Coast Church, please avoid divisive political, or opinion posts.
 - Recruiting for businesses. Small Groups are a place for spiritual and relational growth, not financial gain.
 - Offer collection. Please do not take up an offering during group meetings. This is handled during our weekend services only.

Q & A's

How do I form my group?

- Once you know the kind of group you want to lead, go to myEastCoast.Church/groups and click "Lead A Group" to get the process started.

How do I name my group?

- What you name your group is very important! Make sure you give the person searching for a group a clear picture of what they are joining.
- It can be the name of the actual study you'll be using like "Are My Kids on Track?" or the name of a women's group which will continue doing one Bible study after another like "Brighter & Brighter Women."

How do I promote my group?

- Word of mouth is best! Tell your family and friends about your group.
- Promote your group on Facebook or Instagram, for example.

How does someone join my group?

- Potential members will be able to join a group by signing up through our website at myEastCoast.Church/groups and click "Small Groups."
- You will also be able to send invites directly to members through PCO Groups.

How should I prepare for my group?

- Review your material ahead of time and pray over it.

- Pray for each member of your group. Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussions as you help others take steps toward Jesus each week.
- Honor people's schedules by beginning and ending on time. Know how much time you need for each portion of your meeting (prayer, icebreakers, check-ins, study/video, discussion).

How should I conduct my group?

- As guests arrive, welcome them and ask them to sign in. Using a sign-in sheet, which can be a simple piece of lined paper, is the best way to track who attended.
- Use the sign-in sheet after group to record attendance. Please note, taking attendance is **MANDATORY**, as it is the only metric we have for determining how many people are connecting relationally. If a group member misses a meeting 2 or 3 times in a row, please call or visit the member.
- Make any introductions and announcements. This includes setting ground rules such as confidentiality, respect, and kindness. Start your first meeting with an icebreaker.
- Icebreaker ideas:
 - "Who's been an encouragement to you recently?"
 - "If you can travel anywhere, where would it be?"
 - "What's your favorite worship song?"
 - Would You Rather:
 - Early bird or night owl?
 - Mountains or beach?
 - Plan everything or go with the flow?
 - Finish the Sentence:
 - "One thing I'm hoping for this season..."
 - "One thing I'm grateful for this week..."
 - "Something that helps me feel connected is..."
- Open with prayer. Simply invite the Holy Spirit to speak personally and powerfully to each person.
- Encourage and facilitate discussions. You do not have to have all the answers. Saying, "I don't know" or "I'll find that out" are perfectly fine responses to questions.
- Give everyone who wants to speak an opportunity to do so. Not everyone will want to, and that's ok. Politely redirect discussion if anyone dominates the conversation. Moments of silence are ok too. This allows the Holy Spirit to stir hearts.
- When someone shares, affirm them for speaking up and thank them for their helpful response. Build connections with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things, for example.

- Remember, God's Word is truth. Opinions and experiences can be useful and helpful, but God has given us His Word to be the authority and His Spirit to work in people's lives. Continue pointing members to the Bible and to take their next step of faith.
- After the first meeting, send an email through PCO Groups to thank them for coming and remind them of any details for the next group.
- Calling or texting members, acknowledging birthdays and special occasions, and praying for their families are great ways to create community!

What resources do I have available to me?

- **Your Coach and Lead Coach** – You are not leading alone! You will be provided with a Small Group Coach who has been chosen by leadership, has led East Coast Groups, and has been trained to help you become the best Small Group Leader you can be. They will pray, encourage, and support you on this journey. So don't hesitate to reach out to them.
- **East Coast Care Team** – Quite often group discussions will uncover or trigger personal issues that are best discussed in a counseling setting. Our Care Team offers pastoral care, financial education, encouragement, as well as marriage and care mentors to walk with you during seasons of need. If professional help is needed, they will point you in the right direction.
- To access the Care Team, direct your group member to:
myeastcoast.church/ministries/care
- **Small Group Leaders Training Resources and Video** – myeastcoast.church/small-group-training

Small Group Leader Commitment Form

Please use this link or QR Code to sign the Small Group Leader Commitment Form:

<https://eastcoast.churchcenter.com/people/forms/1017196>

