



# SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Trending / Stress and Anxiety

## LEADER PREP

### BOTTOM LINE

God gives us the tools to handle anxiety.

### SCRIPTURE

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you (Psalm 56:3 NIV).

Mark 4:35-41

Mathew 14:22-33

### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To create a safe space for students to process stress or anxiety in their lives and to help them take a step toward using some of the tools God provides them to deal with it.

### THINK ABOUT THIS

Remember that most (if not all!) of your middle schoolers haven't developed the self-awareness to know when and how much to share on potentially personal topics like stress and anxiety. Some will need help self-regulating what they're sharing with the group while others may fear speaking at all. One of the best things you can do for your students in a conversation like this one is to encourage them to share with you one-on-one. Take the ball out of their court to come to you, and instead, follow up with each student individually after group to open the door for potential deeper conversation.

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

*This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions and activities as needed, and don't feel like you need to do, or ask, everything you see here.*

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Mark 4:35-41 and Matthew 14:22-33.
2. In these stories, how is Jesus teaching his Disciples to put their trust in him when they are afraid?
3. What's one thing middle schoolers might be anxious or stressed about?
4. What are some ways you have found helpful when dealing with stress in your life?
5. How would you describe the differences between stress and anxiety to someone else?
6. How might someone know they are experiencing stress or anxiety?
7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how big of a deal do you think anxiety is for most middle schoolers? (1 being not a big deal and 10 being a huge deal.)
8. How might focusing on God instead of anxiety change the way someone might feel?

### XP (EXPERIENCE)

Pass out the provided anxiety resource sheet to your group. Suggest that they refer to it whenever they or someone in their life is dealing with feelings of anxiety. Brainstorm together how you can remember that God gives us the tools to handle anxiety in our own lives and to support others who are experiencing anxiety. Close in prayer for those struggling with fear and anxiety in our community.

## WHAT TO DO IF... YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY

*If you're feeling overwhelming, continuous, and long-lasting anxiety that affects your daily life, consider using these tools to navigate those feelings:*

- 1. IDENTIFY YOUR FEELINGS.** Think about exactly what you're feeling and then try to find the source. You might not be able to identify the cause of your anxiety, but trying is a great place to start.
- 2. FOCUS ON TRUSTING GOD.** Think about how big, powerful, and loving He is. He can walk you through anything you're feeling or going through because He can overcome it all. When you feel anxious, simply pray, "God, I trust You," to help shift your focus and remind you of what's true.
- 3. SEEK OUT TOOLS GOD GIVES US.** God gives you things like people, medication, and healthy habits to help manage your feelings of anxiety. You can start by:
  - **CARING FOR YOURSELF.** Be sure you're getting enough sleep, are eating well, and are exercising.
  - **TALKING TO SOMEONE.** Talking to a trained counselor can help you work through your feelings and move forward in a positive way. If you're nervous about this step, ask a friend, Small Group Leader, or trusted adult to help you.
  - **REMEMBERING WHAT'S TRUE.** Remember that Jesus says you are valuable, loved, and cared for.

## WHAT TO DO IF... SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY

*You can be one of the tools God provides to help that person deal with their anxiety. These are some ways you can support your friend:*

- 1. BE SOMEONE THEY CAN GO TO AND TRUST.** Let your friend know that they can talk to you openly and without judgment. Let them know you'll listen and your feelings or opinion about them won't change because of what they share.
- 2. LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK.** You can do this by making eye contact, putting away your phone, and not interrupting.
- 3. UNDERSTAND THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIX THEIR FEELINGS.** Your job is to be there for your friend and to support them, not fix what they're feeling.
- 4. CELEBRATE THEIR SUCCESSES.** When a friend takes a step toward confronting their anxiety, celebrate with them and help them feel proud of themselves.
- 5. ENCOURAGE THEM TO TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT.** Encourage your friend to open up to someone like a parent, Small Group Leader, school counselor, or professional counselor to work through their anxiety.

WHEN WE PUT OUR TRUST IN GOD AND USE THE TOOLS HE'S GIVEN US, WE CAN FIND WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD. GOD GIVES US THE TOOLS TO HANDLE ANXIETY IN OUR OWN LIVES AND THE TOOLS TO SUPPORT OTHERS.