



# Growing into Christian Community: Stages of Group Development

## *How-tos*

Faith sharing is a primary tool as a small Christian community grows through various stages of group development. Faith sharing can be a catalyst for individual growth and for increased intimacy within the group. The how-tos listed below are a brief guide to faith sharing at the various stages of development in the group.

### 1. How to handle the **Introductory Stage**:

- Share about appropriate concrete events of your day.
- Ask people about concerns they shared during the previous session.

### 2. How to handle the **Belonging Stage**:

- Remarks such as “I’m glad you came today” are helpful.
- Greeting each person is important.

### 3. How to handle the **Competitive Stage**:

- Be brief when describing your successes and giftedness.
- Thank someone for sharing during or after the group meeting.
- Make comments such as “This sounds like something that is very important to you.”

### 4. How to handle the **Conflict Stage**:

- Ask for other’s opinions after you share.
- Make statements such as “I can see that we disagree.”
- Ask someone, “How do you feel about that?”
- Remember that feelings are not evil in and of themselves, and they cannot destroy a relationship by themselves.

### 5. How to handle the **Togetherness Stage**:

- Tell people how much you value the group.
- Point out something concrete about the unique way that a particular person shares.
- Express real affection for others in appropriate ways.

### 6. How to handle the **Sharing Stage**:

- Help people in the group feel free to share moments of grace when God has touched their lives by listening without interruption or comment.
- Focus on sharing the *meaning* of events.
- Prepare for the meeting by meditating on a Scripture passage.
- Imagine how it would be if Jesus came into the meeting, and try to bring that feeling with you to the group.

### 7. How to handle the **Intimacy Stage**:

- Encourage people to reach a comfortable level of knowing and being known by others by maintaining confidentiality.
- Spend regular time outside of meetings communicating (phone calls, cards, letters, e-mails, meals, visits, etc.) with others in the group.
- Occasionally ask individuals and the entire group how they feel about the level of intimacy in the group.

- Use people's names and appropriate signs of physical affection.
- Schedule day or weekend retreats away together to spend extended time praying and sharing faith. The Gospel of Mark uses the phrase, "a lonely place," to signal an intimate encounter between Jesus and the disciples.

8. How to handle the **Separation Stage**:

- Leave room for grieving about losses from your group at appropriate times in your meetings together.
- Summarize your experiences in the group.
- Share memories about people who have left.
- Use good-bye rituals of some kind with people who are leaving the group (cake, cards, gifts, etc.).
- Keep up correspondence with absent and missing members.
- Invite new people to join the group.

To learn more about the group stages, contact your parish and/or diocesan/archdiocesan office for additional information. Look for opportunities to attend a workshop, bring in a speaker, or offer further study on group stages to parishioners.