

Respecting Confidences

As a Leader, you may be entrusted with information that is not for public consumption. Even the fact that a person is a single parent may be something that she or he may want to talk about when they feel ready. Respect all confidences that are given to you and make sure that you are not perceived as prying when someone is not willing to give much information about themselves.

Welcoming New Members

As Leaders, you need to make a special effort to welcome new members into your group and to make them feel at home. Remember how it feels to come into a group where everyone already seems to know each other. Make sure all your members realise this so that they do not become complacent, form cliques or relate only to the friends they already have in the group. This could easily happen if people are having such a good time together that they forget how those that are left out might feel.

Benefits of Being a Leader

As a Leader, you are offered the unique opportunity to put your faith into action in a quiet, practical, everyday way. You will improve your communication skills by working with different kinds of people. Your own family will see, by your example, what it's like to reach out beyond your own family and help create a community in which people know that others genuinely care about them. At all levels of the Family Group Movement the emphasis is on love and support. There can be no doubt that the rewards of this ministry bring the Gospel alive as we love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. It must surely be one of the most exciting and fulfilling ministries in the church.



What does Leadership of a Family Group involve?

The role of a Leader is to facilitate the smooth running of the group. Good Leaders are vital to the growth of a Family Group. They help the different members to get to know one another and encourage them to use their own unique gifts for the development of the group. Leaders need to be aware and sensitive to people's needs and it is important for them to help everyone feel welcome and integral to the group. Leaders are in many ways the servants of the Group: they are there to make sure it develops without dominating or seeking to be in a position of control.

Christian Ministry

Leaders are *not* chosen for their administrative skills or their cleverness. They are chosen because they have shown that they have the interests of the community at heart. They are willing to do something to help others in the parish because they genuinely wish to put their Christian faith into practice. Even if they are quiet, shy people, Leaders who want to serve are always more valuable than "capable" people who are too bound up in their own lives and goals.

Simplicity

A group that is ticking along, with everyone becoming involved and sharing the responsibility for organizing functions, allows the Leaders to relax and enjoy being part of the group. The more the members become involved with the organization and decision-making processes in the group, the more they will feel that it is *their* group too. Family Group Leadership can best be seen as a responsibility for *setting the wheels in motion*. And it shouldn't be seen as a huge burden. Most of us have enough responsibilities without feeling that we bear the responsibility for 10 to 12 other families too. The beauty of Family Groups lies in their simplicity and absence of formal structures. So look at yourself as a catalyst for friendships, not the Prime Minister of a small nation state.

Involvement of the entire Group

Groups are advised to meet and plan their activities at least six months ahead. Many groups start the year with a planning meeting in early February and plan through to December. After this meeting it is a good idea to send a list of dates and all activities to each family.

It helps to encourage greater involvement if different families are asked to organise an activity. In the early stages of the group some may feel too shy to do this and it is often a good idea for two families to work together to organise a function. Those who feel uncomfortable taking the lead should not be pressurized to do so. Leaders need to ensure that suggested functions allow the entire group to participate. Low- to no-cost activities are encouraged. There is no substitute for a simple meal shared with friends. Encourage the family doing the organising to contact all the other members before the function to re-confirm the date, time, place etc.

Caring by Example

The best way to foster the kind of caring that needs to be developed in the group is through your own example. Remember that this is a new experience for most people. Being involved and looking after people that are not members your natural family is unusual in our society. Make sure that you talk to everyone and that everybody is made to feel welcome. Circumstances and other commitments may prevent a family from coming to gatherings for several months, and when they do return they may feel that they no longer belong. Absences like these are an opportunity to ask other members to keep in touch with families, perhaps passing on any news, keeping in contact and generally keeping the lines of communication open. In a group there will be those who are quiet and shy and others who are louder and more dominant. You will need to ensure that the quieter members' voices are heard and that their needs are not overlooked. It takes time to get to know people and to build genuine friendships and support structures, but once this occurs, the love and support will follow on naturally.

Celebrating Diversity



Although there is great satisfaction in being a Leader, there can also be times of pain, frustration and disappointment. It doesn't take long in the development of a group before members start to recognise that there are differences in the way that they and other Family Group members think, feel, act and relate. The key to good

Leadership is not to take any negativity from or in the group personally. Encourage people to accept these differences and to think of them as a source of enrichment for the group. Family Groups provide one of the best learning grounds for living our Gospel values.

Support for Leaders

As Leaders are continually supporting others, their support needs also need to be met. One of the most effective means of support is through the Leaders' Group. Leader support is found through attendance at regular Leaders' meetings which will also be attended by your Coordinators and ideally, the Parish Priest. At Leaders' meetings, you can share the successes and challenges you have encountered and seek advice from fellow Leaders and the Coordinators. You will gain a great deal from other people's ideas and experiences as they too will gain from yours. As Family Groups develop in your Parish community, these systems of mutual support, encouragement and strength will naturally grow too.



A Family Group is:

A Family: Somewhere we can share laughter and tears, ups and downs, food and fun through thick and thin

Where everybody is welcome: inclusive and accepting, respecting differences: a family for all

A Movement: God's love, in action

About People and the Community: building a sense of parish in the community; community in the parish

For more information please contact: