

The Living in Love and Faith Course: Introduction to leading a group with young people



LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

Welcome and thank you for offering to lead a group with young people! In addition to this introduction, there are additional notes for each of the 5 sessions of the Course. Please do read these as well. If you have any questions, do get in touch with your Diocesan LLF Advocate or with the national team via llf@churchofengland.org.

Resources for leaders

If you are leading a group, either buy a copy of the LLF Course booklet from [Church House Publishing](#) or download a copy from the [LLF Learning Hub](#). This will help you prepare for the sessions and give you confidence in enabling your group to learn well together. You may also want to have access to the LLF Book, available in digital, e-book and print formats from the LLF Learning Hub and Church House Publishing, respectively.

The *Notes for Leading a Group with Young People* for each of the sessions offer additional guidance to help you. It is also important to have a co-leader and to reflect together at the end of each session to see if there are any concerns raised, questions that need to be answered or adjustments made for the next session.

Commitments

Matters of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage are deeply personal, and may be the cause of both deep joy and pain in people's lives. That's why it is important to pay close attention to how members of the group relate to one another. The goal is to create a space where everyone can feel free and safe to be as open and honest as they wish to be without fearing judgement, hurt or rejection. It is about encouraging kindness and building trust.

At the beginning of Session 1, groups are invited to make a number of commitments. These can also be found in the LLF Course booklet. You may want to send these to participants in advance, so that the young people have a chance to think about them and consider any questions they may have. In the first session, spend some time going over these together, checking that everyone understands them and is happy to commit to them. The group may wish to add to them.

Consider inviting the group to a 'pre-course' session during which the participants can get to know one another and can talk through the commitments as well as their hopes and fears in an unpressured way.

Depending on the age and maturity of your group participants, you might want to make sure that parents/guardians are aware of the issues that will be covered in the course.

Pastoral Principles

Each session begins by exploring one of the Pastoral Principles. They are an important part of the course because they encourage everyone to examine attitudes that can be roadblocks to learning together, and to loving and trusting one another.

The Pastoral Principles can be downloaded from the Church of England website (<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/bishops/pastoral-advisory-group/pastoral-principles>). It's a good idea to read through the relevant Pastoral Principle in preparation for leading each of the sessions and to consider how best to introduce/express these for the young people with whom you are meeting:

- Session 1 – addressing ignorance & paying attention to power
- Session 2 – casting out fear
- Session 3 – acknowledging prejudice
- Session 4 – speaking into silence
- Session 5 – admitting hypocrisy

Story films

Each of the sessions 2 to 5 contain two story films. These films are powerful. Some members of the group will find a film disturbing or uncomfortable, while others may find the same film reassuring. **It's important to be aware that the films are likely to trigger strong emotional responses and to allow space for that. Leaders are strongly advised to view these in advance, consider which will be most appropriate for the group with whom you are meeting, and to let the group know beforehand which story films will be viewed.**

The purpose of the films is to remind us of the diversity that exists among followers of Jesus in our churches and to remember that questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage have real-life impact on us all in different ways. The films do not necessarily reflect the teaching of the Church of England, but they enrich our learning together as we encounter people seeking to follow Christ. They invite us to allow their stories to take root in our hearts and prayers.

The films are to be received and prayed about, not to be dissected or analysed. Each film has been agreed by the person or people and is told in their own words. It may be helpful to think of the people in the film as being 'in the room' as the group engages in learning, discussion and prayer together.

You might find it helpful to place a chair in your setting for the 'unseen guest' of the film (labelled with their name) as a physical reminder of the lived lives of these people.

Discussing and reflecting together: timings

After each of the 'learning together' and Bible study sections, there is an opportunity for the group to spend some time interacting with the material together. Further details about these can be found in the Notes for Leaders for each session.

It is your role as leader to map out the timing of the group's interaction, depending on how much time there is available and how many people there are in the group. The course films usually suggest at least 15 minutes for discussion or reflection together. Feel free to adjust this according to your particular circumstances. By way of a guideline, here are approximate timings for a session that lasts 1.5 hours:

Welcome and opening prayer or reading	5 minutes
Pastoral Principle	5 minutes
Story film	5 minutes
Learning together 1	20 minutes
Story film	5 minutes
Studying the Bible	20 minutes
Learning together 2	20 minutes
Closing reflection and prayer	10 minutes

You may find that this is too 'rushed', not allowing enough time for in-depth discussion. However, for most young people this will be the limits of the time they can be with you, so consider inviting participants to watch at least some elements of the videos before they come to the group, to save time.

Responding to the session

Encourage your group to complete the 'Reflections on the session' in the LLF Learning Hub, either individually or as a group.

You might also consider having a 'Question Box' in which participants can place questions or comments that they have but felt unable to voice during the session. Review these after each session with your co-leader and consider if/how they need a response.

Going further

Depending on the age/maturity of your group, encourage members to explore the 'Going further' section of the LLF Learning Hub for each session. Here they will find more story films to watch, podcasts and further reading.

Safeguarding and pastoral support

Questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage are very personal and there are disagreements about them in the church today. Using these resources on your own or

in group discussions may bring painful experiences to the fore or may challenge fervently held convictions.

As a group leader it will be important to be aware if someone in the group needs pastoral support. Do encourage members of the group to contact your local church leader or pastoral care team, or to do so yourself.

Safeguarding and the Church of England

If you are worried about a child or adult, please contact your [Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser](#) (DSA) without delay. If a child or adult is in immediate danger or requires medical attention, call the police and/or social services immediately. For more information about safeguarding, visit www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding

Be prepared for young people being honest

Having empowered through learning, you might find that young people are more open about their sexual experiences and feelings. If someone talks to you about their feelings or experiences, whether they are struggles or hopes, listen well. Your initial response – facial expression, tone of voice and body language will be noted and make a significant impact. A helpful potential response involves four simple steps:

1. “Thank you” – thank the young person for sharing this with you. The amount of courage it takes to share is incredible – acknowledge the privilege of them sharing this with you.
2. “God knows you and loves you” – affirm the love of God for the young person.
3. “We know you and love you” – affirm your care for the young person.
4. “I would love to hear more of your story” – take a good amount of time to listen to the young person’s story.

Young people who share their stories make themselves vulnerable. They need to know they are loved and cared for. Remind them often that you care for them and that they are deeply loved by God.

Unless explicitly stated otherwise, we should always keep the confidentiality of young people who are open about their experiences and feelings, especially when a young person may be disclosing their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity. We should never pressure a young person into disclosing details of their sexual orientation or gender identity to anyone else, and the young person should only reveal this to others if and when they feel comfortable, safe, and confident to do so. If a safeguarding concern is raised within a conversation, this should be reported separately through the appropriate channels.

Sharing your learning with the wider Church

There are three ways you and the members of the group can share the experience, learning and insights they gained from participating in a *Living in Love and Faith* group.

1. Complete the online survey. Everyone can do this, even without registering on the LLF Learning Hub. Do share the link: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LLFcourse>.
2. Offer a creative response as individuals or as a group. This is further explained here (and does require registering on the LLF Learning Hub): <https://llf.churchofengland.org/course/view.php?id=27>.
3. Offer a 'snapshot' of your group's experience, with a photo of the group (making sure everyone agrees to sharing the photo publicly) and sharing some of the highlights of the group's discussions, learning and experience either as an audio recording, a video or in written form. As for (2), this is further explained here: <https://llf.churchofengland.org/course/view.php?id=27>.