

ASHLEY BOHINC
CRYSTAL CHIANG



the art of group talk

FREE SAMPLE

how to lead
better
conversations
with



teenage girls



the art of group talk

HOW TO LEAD
BETTER CONVERSATIONS
WITH TEENAGE GIRLS

**“Why are my parents trying to
make my life so miserable?”**

AMBER, 8TH GRADE

**“I have a prayer request.
I killed my hamster.”**

JESSICA, 11TH GRADE

**“I think you may have just
shared a little too much.”**

SASHA, 7TH GRADE

**“Do we have to be vegans in heaven?
That’s what I heard.”**

EMILY, 6TH GRADE

**“I’m not sure what I think about God,
but I feel like it’s okay for me to say
that out loud here.”**

CAROLINE, 12TH GRADE

The Art of Group Talk: Teen Girls
Published by Orange, a division of The reThink Group, Inc.
5870 Charlotte Lane, Suite 300
Cumming, GA 30040 U.S.A.

The Orange logo is a registered trademark of The reThink Group, Inc.

All rights reserved. Except for brief excerpts for review purposes,
no part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form
without written permission from the publisher.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from
the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright
© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by
permission of Zondervan.

Other Orange products are available online and direct from the
publisher. Visit our website at www.ThinkOrange.com for more
resources like these.

ISBN: 978-1-63570-079-4

©2018 The reThink Group, Inc.

Authors: Ashley Bohinc, Crystal Chiang
Lead Editor: Afton Phillips
Contributing Writers: Steph Whitacre
Lead Small Editing Team: Mike Jeffries,
Sara Shelton, Adriana Howard, Steph Whitacre
Art Direction: Ryan Boon
Project Manager: Nate Brandt
Design: FiveStone

Printed in the United States of America
Third Edition 2018

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

4/12/18

Table of Contents

| | |
|------------|--|
| 10 | INTRODUCTION |
| | CHAPTER 1 |
| 18 | PREPARE |
| | CHAPTER 2 |
| 34 | CONNECT |
| | Before a teenage girl can connect with God, she may need to connect with people who are connected with God. |
| | 2.1 - Connect with them. |
| | 2.2 - Help them connect with each other. |
| | CHAPTER 3 |
| 60 | KNOW |
| | Before a teenage girl can know God, she may need to be known by people who know God. |
| | 3.1 - Know them. |
| | 3.2 - Help them know each other. |
| | CHAPTER 4 |
| 94 | ENGAGE |
| | Before a teenage girl can engage in a life of authentic faith, she may need to engage in a conversation about authentic faith. |
| | 4.1 - Speak less, listen more. |
| | 4.2 - Control less, lead more. |
| | 4.3 - Script less, improvise more. |
| | CHAPTER 5 |
| 146 | MOVE |
| 154 | CONCLUSION |
| 160 | AUTHOR BIOS |

Foreword

This is a book about how to have better conversations with teenage girls.

Because, as a small group leader, you lead a conversation with teenage girls every single week.

Conversations about . . .

their lives.

their dreams.

their friends.

their more-than-friends.

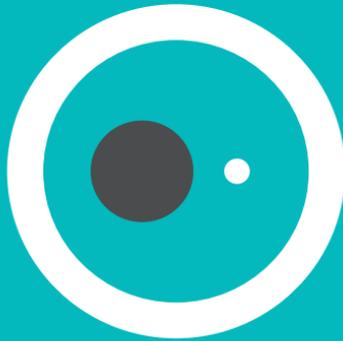
and their definitely-not friends.

And sometimes, you even manage to lead conversations about faith.

This is a book to remind you that your small group conversations—even the ones that don't go exactly as planned—**really matter.**

But there are a few ways to make your conversations **matter even more.**

**create a
safe place**



**clarify their
faith as
they grow**

Introduction

You probably signed up to be a small group leader (or SGL for short) because you wanted . . .
to make a big difference.
to change the world.
to invest in a few teenage girls so you could help them develop a lifelong, authentic kind of faith.

We call that **leading small**.

Maybe you didn't know exactly what you were getting into when you signed up to be an SGL, but you probably at least knew this:

Leading a small group means leading a weekly small group conversation.

Kind of obvious, right?

But the truth is that figuring out how to lead a conversation with a group of teenage girls isn't always obvious. It's definitely not like leading a conversation with a group of adults.

I (Crystal) learned this the hard way. When I signed up to be an SGL, I had some pretty big expectations for how those weekly small group conversations should look. At the time, I thought leading a small group of teenage girls would be pretty much like leading a conversation with a bunch of me's—but shorter, louder, and better dressed.

Before I became an SGL, I expected to lead small group conversations where every girl . . .
paid attention.
participated.
cried.
asked deep theological questions.
decided to devote themselves to full-time ministry.
read the Bible every day just because they wanted to.

^ attempted to lead
But then I ~~led~~ my first small group of ninth grade girls and, well, you can guess how that went. I remember feeling like I was at a zoo where someone had left all the cages open. Most days getting them to sit in an actual circle without shrieking like hyenas was a win.

If you've been an SGL for more than five minutes, then you already know what I've learned—that leading a conversation with a group of teenage girls doesn't always live up to your expectations. (Especially if your expectations looked anything like mine.)

If you have any SGL experience whatsoever, it's probably safe to say **you know what it's like to have a small group conversation totally bomb.**

Maybe you led a small group where your girls weren't exactly talkative.
You tried to get the conversation moving, but you were met with . . .
the sound of crickets.
blank stares.
the backs of their phones as they tried a new Instagram filter.

Or maybe they were a little *too* talkative.
Maybe you had to scream the discussion questions at the top of your lungs while they . . .
made plans for the following weekend.
watched a viral YouTube video.
asked you to judge their impromptu talent show.

Or maybe they were just the right amount of talkative, but you're convinced volunteer training didn't prepare you for the kinds of topics they wanted to talk about.

When leading a small group of teenage girls, sometimes you have to beg them to say something—anything.

Other times, you wish they would all instantly get laryngitis at the same time.

And more often than you'd like, you probably head home after a particularly challenging small group and wonder, "Did I say the right thing?
Were they even listening?
Do these conversations matter at all?"

If you've ever been there, you're not alone. Everyone who has ever led a small group of teenage girls has, at some point, wondered if they were completely wasting their time. (We don't exactly have the statistical data to support this claim, but we're pretty sure it's true.)

Especially on days when your group spends more time taking selfies and looking out the window for boys than engaging in a conversation about faith—those questions are understandable.

But the next time a conversation goes completely off the rails and you wonder if you're a terrible small group leader (or if leading a small group of teenage girls should be classified as a new form of torture), there are two things we hope you'll remember.

Here's the first:

Your small group conversations matter.

And we don't just mean those once-in-a-lifetime conversations where everyone cries and hugs and gets saved (again). We mean every small group conversation.

The one with way too many awkward silences? It mattered.
The one where you didn't get through a single discussion question? It mattered.
The one where your group wanted to know if God could make a mozzarella stick so hot that even He couldn't eat it? It mattered.
And the conversation you're about to lead this week? Yep. It's going to matter too.

The good news for SGLs like you and me is that the quality and effectiveness of the conversation you'll lead this week won't determine your ultimate success or failure as a small group leader. Sometimes a conversation will bomb, and that's okay, because that one conversation isn't the only conversation you'll ever have with your few.

In the book *Lead Small*, we talked about the importance of showing up predictably—weekly, in fact—for your few. Actually, it's the very first thing we talked about. That's because showing up predictably, consistently, and regularly in the lives of the teenage girls you lead is the foundation of leading your small group (and of leading a small group conversation).

I (Crystal) lead a group of sophomore girls, and I have to admit that last year, when they were freshmen, I had more of those "Does this even matter?" moments than I could count. As someone who creates small group resources for a living, I thought, "I should be better at this! Our conversations should be *better* than this!" It really wasn't until summer camp—a whole year after our group started—that I began to see a turn in our conversations.

They became more honest and less awkward. Part of it was my girls were growing up and less interested in cartwheel contests during small group, but another part was that it took an entire year of not-so-awesome group talks for the girls to learn to trust me and trust each other enough to have real conversations.

When you show up predictably, you begin to understand that one conversation doesn't determine your success as a small group leader. Your success is actually determined by every small group conversation you've ever had, added up and then multiplied by factors we haven't yet identified. When you combine the dozens, or hundreds, or thousands of conversations you've had with your small group, they equal something pretty significant. They equal . . .

Relationships.

Trust.

Influence.

I (Ashley) am still in contact with girls who were in my middle school small group nine years ago. Many times we laugh uncontrollably at the things they remember. I am reminded often that even though we talked about many important topics like friendships, boys, decision-making, forgiveness, and, most importantly, Jesus, they also remember me talking about how much I love butterflies and putting on new socks. There are days I wonder if I was a good SGL. But then I remember how each of those girls came to me a few years down the road when they were in high school because they were going through difficult situations. They trusted me and leaned on me because they believed I was a safe place, and that I was for them. And maybe even better, they trusted and leaned on each other. The sum of the small, relational deposits made over their three years in middle school—even the non-spiritual ones—added up to something more significant than I could have ever imagined.

So you see, your small group conversations matter—even the ones that are difficult, or frustrating, or don't exactly go according to plan. They matter because each

of those weekly small group conversations is part of something bigger.

Ten years from now, the girls in your small group will probably not remember much of what was said during your small group conversations, but they will remember how those consistent, weekly conversations resulted in relationships that made an impact on their lives. It may even cue them to go looking for those kinds of meaningful relationships again. That's the power of showing up consistently.

So next time a small group conversation doesn't quite meet your expectations, remember: **your small group conversations matter—maybe more than you think.**

But here's the second thing we hope you remember:

Your small group conversations can matter more.

In fact, that's what this book is all about—practical ideas and strategies to help you make the most of your conversations with your small group.

While the one conversation you lead this week will not determine your success as a small group leader, it will affect it. The influence you're building through your weekly conversations is important, but if you never actually use that influence to help your few build a more authentic faith, then you'll have missed it.

But you're not going to miss it. We know that because you're reading a book about how to make your small group conversations matter more, and that's a pretty good sign. You're already on your way to leading better conversations—ones in which the girls in your group will not only be able to engage, but will be able to . . . be themselves. share their doubts.

ask tough questions.
share their struggles.

It isn't always easy to lead those kinds of conversations, though. So if you've ever looked at your small group of teenage girls and wished you knew . . .

what to say
what not to say
what to ask
how to ask it
when to speak
when to listen
how to make them talk
how to make them stop talking
. . . then keep reading.

We don't know everything about leading conversations for teenage girls, but we've spent a lot of time leading small groups, talking to other small group leaders, and learning the art of group talk. And now we want to take the things we've learned and share them with you. Things that we hope will help you make the most of your limited opportunities to lead a conversation with your small group.

So remember.

Your small group conversations matter. They matter because with every conversation you lead, you're building influence, trust, and relationships with your few that have the potential to influence them for a lifetime.

But your small group conversations can matter more.
And here's how . . .



chapter
one
prepare

Prepare

Picture this.

You just got out of work. It's been a long day. Nobody told you that you were going to have your picture taken. Your hair was out of control. Plus, your lunch meeting required you to talk so much you couldn't eat your food, so now you're starving.

But the day is finally over!

You head to your car. Beyoncé is on the radio (win!). As you pull out of the parking lot, all you can think about is getting home, putting on sweats, and relaxing. Then you remember that tonight's small group. So, instead of heading home, you . . .

race to a drive thru,

scarf down a taco,

drop by the house to let your dog out,

swing by a coffee shop and *pray* the caffeine kicks in,

screech into the parking lot right on time,

greet Jana, Jenna, and Jayna as they walk in (and try to remember which is which),

and begin to catch up with your few.

Finally, when the music starts to cue the beginning of worship, you realize that *you have no idea what you're supposed to be talking about tonight.*

Ever been there? We sure have. Don't get us wrong. We love our small groups. We care about them. We're

committed to them. We want to have great conversations together. But . . . well, we're not always as prepared for our conversations as we should be.

Maybe you can relate. Maybe you know what it's like to fly through the church doors, desperately searching your phone for the email from your student pastor about what in the world you were supposed to talk about in small group. During the message, you tried to skim through the discussion questions, but you found it hard to concentrate with your student pastor talking so much. Then when you got to small group, you realized you didn't really hear much of the message and you couldn't *exactly* remember all the small group questions, so you read them from your phone until one of your girls reminded you, "Um, those are the questions we answered *last week*."

If we're honest, we've all had weeks like that. It happens. If you've been with your group for some time, they might not have even noticed how much you were winging it. But on your way home, you might have wondered, *What kind of conversation could we have had if I'd been just a little more prepared?*

If you want to get serious about making your conversations with your few matter more (and we know that you do), then we've got to talk about **preparation**. That's why the first step in leading a better small group conversation is to . . .

PREPARE

We know.

You're a volunteer. You don't get paid to lead a small group. You've inserted yourself into the tumultuous lives of a few teenage girls, and you're going to get absolutely nothing in return, except maybe a free T-shirt and some sub-standard pizza. You're already giving a *ton* of your time by showing up and leading these conversations, and

now we're suggesting you spend more time preparing for those conversations?

Well, yes. But it's simple. We promise!

There are four things you can do to prepare for your small group conversations each week. And you can do them all from your couch.

If you want to prepare for your small group conversation, READ your email.

We know that email is outdated. (That's why we created the Lead Small app.*) That's what our small groups tell us anyway. But we're not teenage girls. We're grown-ups. And grown-ups check their email.

We don't mean those emails about buy-one-get-one jeans or free shipping this weekend. Those emails probably won't help you prepare for your small group (although you should probably bookmark them just in case).

We're talking about the weekly communication your student pastor sends you through email, the Lead Small app, a Facebook group, or by carrier pigeon.

We may not know your student pastor, but we're going to assume a few things about what they do every week. We're guessing your student pastor, youth director, or coach . . .

cares about your small group conversation.

thinks about your small group conversation.

has a plan for your small group conversation.

sends you the plan for your small group conversation.

Hopefully, that communication from your student pastor tells you important information like **what they'll be**

* Find out more at LeadSmall.org.

teaching and **what you'll be asking** in small group each week.

Ring any bells?

No?

Then you probably need to update your contact information in the church database or check your Recently Deleted folder.

But if you've checked, and double checked and are absolutely positive your student pastor doesn't communicate with you weekly, try not to be too hard on them. We're sure they really want you to succeed as a small group leader!

So don't get mad. If your student pastor doesn't send you a weekly email, try this . . .

1. Open your email app.
2. Write a new message to your student pastor.
3. Say something like this:

Hey _____! I've been thinking about how to continually improve group time with my girls. I was thinking it would be awesome to get an email every week—maybe a few days in advance—that helps me get ready for my small group. My girls are crazy, and I think my small group conversations could be a lot better if I had a little time to think about what we're teaching and read my small group questions beforehand. Is that something that would be possible? Thanks for everything you do. You're awesome!

Pretty simple, right?

And if your student pastor already sends you a weekly update, then your job is even easier:

1. Open your email, app, or window (for the carrier pigeon).
2. Read it.

If you already do this, way to go! You are a very prepared SGL. And hey, here's a thought: If you love getting those emails in advance, take a second to hit "Reply" to your student pastor's weekly email and say, "Thanks for sending this!" They'll love to hear their weekly emails aren't disappearing into inbox oblivion.

If you want this week's small group conversation to matter more, then you need to know what the small group conversation will be about—you know, *before* you walk in the door.

Prepare for your small group conversation. READ YOUR EMAIL.

If you want to prepare for your small group conversation, REHEARSE what you'll say.

Have you ever had an **imaginary conversation**?

Sure you have. Maybe it was when you were . . .
getting ready for a first date.
preparing for a tough conversation with your boss.
thinking of some killer comebacks for that troll
on Facebook.

Having imaginary conversations simply means mentally rehearsing what you're going to say before you say it. Imaginary conversations are helpful when you're preparing for a date, and they're also helpful when you're preparing for your not-so-imaginary small group conversations, too.

We're not saying you should memorize lines or write a monologue for your small group conversation. In fact, please don't. That's weird. We're just saying that **what you say can probably be said better if you rehearse what you're going to say (or not say) before you say it.**

Just like . . .

a teacher practices before taking on a classroom of students

a hair stylist practices before actually cutting a human's hair

a professional musician practices before the big show

. . . you should practice for your small group conversation.

As an SGL, having an imaginary conversation means trying to anticipate how your small group conversation will go *before* small group so you'll be less likely to be caught off-guard *during* small group.

So how do you do that? Well, once you've read your email from your student pastor, ask yourself a few questions about **what they'll be teaching** like . . .

- What do my girls know, think, or feel about this topic?
- How does this topic relate to specific situations in their lives right now?
- How will _____ respond or feel when we talk about this?

Next, take a look at your small group questions for the week, and ask yourself a few questions about **what you'll be discussing** like . . .

- Will these small group questions make sense to them?
- How are my girls going to answer these questions?
- Will they feel comfortable answering them honestly?
- Do I need to rephrase any of these questions for my group?
- Is there anyone in my group I need to connect with beforehand?

See? It's simple, but it's so important!

When you have a weekly imaginary conversation with yourself, you'll be able to better . . .

clarify your thoughts.

refine your words.

anticipate their responses.

lead the conversation.

Maybe this week you'll be talking about going through difficult times, and you know one of your girl's grandma just passed away, and she is a mess about it. Connecting with her prior to group will help her prepare her emotions so she has a better chance of engaging with the group in a way that's beneficial and includes the group in what she's experiencing.

Or maybe you will be talking about sexual integrity, and you know one of the girls in your group was sexually abused in her past. Because this is such a sensitive topic, you want to make sure she has a heads up on what the questions will be, and confirm that she feels comfortable.

Remember, if you want this week's small group conversation to matter more, you want to think about how the conversation will go *before* the conversation begins.

Prepare for your small group conversation.

REHEARSE WHAT YOU'LL SAY.

If you want to prepare for your small group conversation, PACK a survival kit.

No, we don't mean bandages and disinfectant (although, with teenagers, that's actually not a bad idea).

We mean the kind of supplies that will help you rescue your small group conversation in the event of emergencies like . . .
out-of-control talkers.
awkward silences.
irrelevant rabbit trails.
general chaos.



We'll talk about how to use these supplies later in this book. **Just look for this symbol.** For now, just trust us. You'll need:

- A confetti popper
- A stack of icebreaker questions
- A noisemaker
- A stress ball
- A deck of cards
- A zipper lock bag
- Pens
- Paper
- Tissues (Note: You're leading teenage girls, so maybe pack twice the amount you think is necessary.)

Remember, if you want this week's small group conversation to matter more, you want to be ready for anything.

**Prepare for your small group conversation.
PACK A SURVIVAL KIT.**

If you want to prepare for your small group conversation, PRAY for your few.

If you're anything like us, praying for your small group is, unfortunately, sometimes more of an afterthought than a vital part of your weekly preparation. Some weeks, you may only manage a hurried, well-intentioned plea to God on the way to small group. Other weeks, the only time you pray for your few is *during* your small group.

But no matter how many times you've prayed for your few in the last week, month, or year, we've discovered there are at least two reasons why praying for your small group should be an every week kind of thing.

Pray for your few because they need it. Being a teenage girl is hard. Like, really hard. Besides school, sports, drama, breakups, gossip, parents, siblings, and everything else your small group is dealing with, every teenage girl is also wrestling with big questions about who they are, why they matter, what they believe, and who they'll become. That's a lot for any teenager to manage. So as you prepare for your small group each week, don't forget to pray for your few. They need it.

(And when you pray for your few, don't hesitate to send them a text to let them know you were thinking about them. No matter how old you are, it's always nice to hear somebody's praying for you.)

But there's another reason you should pray for your few.

Pray for your few because you need it. When you pray for someone else, it's usually because you want God to do something for *them*. But what if, when God told us to pray for each other (which He did quite often), He had a second purpose in mind? What if He designed prayer in such a way that praying for the other person didn't just result in change for *them*? What if it changes *us*, too?

When we pray for someone else, we learn to . . .
consider their needs.
imagine their world.
feel their emotions.
understand their perspective.

One of the most helpful things you can do is pray for a kid (or parent or co-leader) you *don't* like that much, because you need God to change your heart toward them. In other words, **when you pray for the teenagers you lead, you develop more compassion for them.** And as an SGL, you'll need that compassion when . . .

- the conversation gets awkward.
- someone rolls their eyes.
- they ask a tough question.
- confidentiality gets broken.

As you prepare for your small group this week, don't let prayer be an afterthought. Be intentional about it. Maybe that means you . . .

- pray for a few girls each day.
- write their names on your calendar.
- set reminders in your phone.

However you decide to remind yourself, make praying for your few a habit. Remember, if you want this week's small group conversation to matter more, you want to have a conversation with God *before* you have a conversation with your few.

Prepare for your small group conversation.
PRAY FOR YOUR FEW.

So there you have it. Four ways to **prepare** for your small group conversation every week. We said it would be simple, right?

- Read your email.
- Rehearse what you'll say.
- Pack a survival kit.
- Pray for your few.

And now that you're (mostly) prepared for your small group conversation, let's talk about how to lead that conversation.

QUIZ:

HOW WELL DO YOU PREPARE FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP?

Throughout this book, you'll find a few quizzes we've created as self-evaluation tools. Circle your answers (or just think them), and at the end of this book, you'll be able to see which areas of group conversation you're stellar at, as well as the areas where you might have a little room to grow.

Answer honestly, and have fun!

Did you get an email from your student pastor this week? Did you read it?

Yes

No

Um, I don't know.

Do you pray for your few regularly? You know, other than the times they're crying in front of you about their latest break-up?

Yes

No

Define *regularly*.

QUIZ


Do you have a system for reminding yourself to pray for your few?

Yes

No

I don't need reminders.
I'm amazing.

Do you usually know what your conversation is going to be about before you arrive?

Yes

No

Why ruin the surprise?

Do you know the topic so well that you could lead your small group conversation with your eyes closed? Well, we're not saying you should, because that would be weird. But could you navigate most of the conversation without looking at your small group questions?

Yes

No

Sometimes

author bios

Author bios

**ASHLEY BOHINC**

Ashley serves as the Director of Middle School Strategy at Orange. She has worked with students in public education, athletic, and ministry settings since 2005. Ashley is most passionate about resourcing the local church, communicating on stage, developing leaders, working with students, and world missions. Additionally, she is the USA Director of Carry 117, a ministry in Ethiopia, which focuses on orphan prevention and family preservation by empowering women. In her downtime, you'll find her watching *Friends*, cheering on the Cleveland Cavaliers, traveling, or on one of her Fairytale Friday Adventures.

**CRYSTAL CHIANG**

Crystal Chiang is the Director of XP3 High School Curriculum. Before joining the team at Orange, she spent 10 years as a high school Spanish teacher and student ministry leader, doing everything from small groups to speaking to curriculum design. She currently volunteers at her church as a leader to sophomore girls whose numbers are creating what might be deemed a not-so-small group. They keep her laughing, praying, and constantly on her toes. Crystal and her husband, Tom, live in Atlanta, GA with their embarrassingly ill-tempered chihuahua, Javier.



LEARN MORE
ABOUT LEAD SMALL
+
DOWNLOAD OUR
UBERCOOL AMAZING
FREE APP
@ LEADSMALL.ORG

LEADING A CONVERSATION WITH A SMALL GROUP OF TEENAGE GIRLS ISN'T ALWAYS EASY

Sometimes they talk too much – way too much. Sometimes they don't talk enough.

And sometimes you're pretty sure your volunteer training didn't quite prepare you for the sort of things they'd like to talk about.

Actually, if you've been a small group leader for at least five minutes, you probably already know what it's like for a small group conversation to totally bomb.

So if you've ever looked at your small group of teenage girls and wished you knew what to say, what not to say, when to speak, when to listen, how to make them talk, how to make them stop talking then this book is for you.

The Art of Group Talk helps small group leaders like you have better conversations with teenage girls. Because, as a small group leader, you lead a conversation with teenage girls every single week. Conversations about their lives, their dreams, their friends, their imaginary friends, and their definitely-not friends.

And sometimes you even manage to lead conversations about faith.

This is a book to remind you that your small group conversations—even the ones that don't go exactly as planned—**really matter.**

But there are a few ways to make your conversations **matter even more.**

With personal insight and practical advice, Ashley Bohinc & Crystal Chiang will help you discover helpful tips and strategies for ~~surviving~~ leading conversations with your small group of teenage girls.



WWW.THINKORANGE.ORG

ISBN-13: 978-1-63570-079-4



9 781635 700794