

How to Introduce Grace Groups to Church Leaders

Church and ministry leaders are frequently approached with requests to implement new programs and resources. As they aim to make wise decisions about serving their churches and communities, there are simple ways to make their process faster and easier. The best way to approach your church or ministry leaders with your desire to start a Grace Group is to make sure you have all of the right information beforehand. They will want to work with a clear vision, an understanding of the reasoning behind the groups, and a structured plan for how they will be implemented.

Here are some simple notes to help you have the best experience possible in introducing Grace Groups to your church or ministry leaders:

1. KNOW THE REAL STORY & NUMBERS

Be prepared with simple facts. Use the information to reveal the challenges, not as a scare or guilt tactic. Provide a glimpse into the overall need and how Grace Groups will be a unique solution for the church.

- Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 5 U.S. adults were affected by mental health difficulties. Since the start of the pandemic, 1 in 3 people are now impacted.
- The majority of suicide is due to an underlying mental health difficulty, and suicide is on of the leading causes of death of ages 15-24.
- **27% of church congregations on any given Sunday are dealing with mental health and experiencing 2x stressors and a decrease in faith values or beliefs.**
- Over 50% don't reach out for help due to accessibility and affordability.
- The church is where people go for help before going to a professional.
- 71% of pastors feel ill-equipped to respond because of a lack of education, training from seminary, and in-house ministry training.

2. KNOW WHY GRACE GROUPS WORK (what are they & how they work)

Family Grace: for families & spouses who have a loved one experiencing depression, anxiety, or any mental health condition

Living Grace: for adult individuals experiencing depression, anxiety, or any mental health condition

Redefine Grace: for young adults (high school/college students) experiencing depression, anxiety, or any mental health condition

- **16-Week User-Friendly Experience**

Grace Groups are designed with a user-friendly, 16-week topical curriculum and simple group format for lay- or peer-led facilitation. The group model is simple and easy to facilitate and reproduce. Grace Groups can divide the 16-week curriculum into 8 weeks per semester (Fall/Spring; Spring/Summer; Summer/Fall).

- **Integrated with Evidenced-Based Science, Tools, & Biblical Values**

The Grace Group curriculums integrate neuroscience, psychology, and biblical insights (scriptures) with simple therapeutic tools and exercises. The material follows a whole-health (holistic) approach (Physical, Mental, Spiritual/Faith, Relational). The goal of the group is to see participants educated and empowered to have transformative whole-health outcomes. Grace Groups are based on empowerment principles:

- a. **Discovery-Based Education:** science and faith principles (self-awareness; self-actualization)
- b. **Experiential Learning:** discovery-based learning; self-determination
- c. **Community Engagement:** empathy, healthy environments, encouraging communal growth

- **Published Research with Positive Results**

The Grace Alliance curriculums have published efficacy research showing participants (including those with serious mental illness) having significant reduction of symptoms, overall mental health recovery, and renewed faith.

- **Simple Small Groups - NOT Clinical Support Groups**

As noted in published research, the Grace Groups have positive therapeutic benefits and results. However, they are not clinical support groups. Additionally, the Grace Groups are designed with healthy validation for challenges, but they do not follow the model of “venting groups.” The Grace Groups provide a healthy structure and a positive environment.

- **Grace Groups are successful across the world, across denominations**

There are over 500 Grace Groups across the U.S. and around the world. The groups spread across multiple denominations and venues, including megachurches, small churches, ministries, community programs, Christian universities, non-Christian universities, and more! Our marketing of the Grace Groups is minimal. Yet, the valuable experience is spreading to others: just in the past three years (2018-2021), Grace Groups have grown by over 125% simply by word-of-mouth!

3. KNOW THE PROCESS OF GRACE GROUP TRAINING, WORKBOOKS, COST

- **FREE online training and NO memberships fees or subscriptions:**

The Grace Alliance offers a FREE high-quality education and training for anyone who wants to start a group or be a Grace Group facilitator. The training can be completed at your own pace and takes 45 minutes. There are no substantial training costs or membership/subscription barriers (*saving you thousands of dollars!*).

The Grace Groups includes these advantages for facilitators:

- + **FREE** access to a private Facebook page to engage and support one another.
 - + **FREE** access to special webinars specifically designed for facilitators (conducted by the Grace Alliance team).
 - + **FREE** access to the Grace Alliance team for any ongoing support or questions.
- **Affordable Cost for Workbooks ... that's it!**
The only cost associated is the purchase of the affordable workbooks. Physical and digital copies are available and free shipping is available on purchases of 10 workbooks or more.

4. KNOW THE DETAILS ABOUT STARTING GRACE GROUPS

Know the answers to these questions:

- When do you plan to start the Grace Group(s)?
- When and where will you host the Grace Group(s) (time, place)?
- Which Grace Group(s) would you like to facilitate?
- Who will help co-facilitate the Grace Group(s)?
- Who would do you already know who would benefit from participating in a Grace Group?
- How would you like to promote and advertise the group at the church?
- Do you intend to collaborate with any other interested church in the area?
- How or who will purchase the Grace Group workbooks (church, participants, fundraiser)?
- What other questions do you think your pastor or pastoral care team will ask?

5. KNOW THE PROCESS TO MEET WITH YOUR PASTOR OR PASTORAL TEAM

- **Contact for a Meeting**
Be clear that you would like to discuss mental health needs in the church and submit an idea and solution that could be helpful **without adding extra work for the pastoral team.**
- **Humble Spirit and Submit**
Keep a peaceful and humble posture for the idea. If anything comes off as a pushy agenda, it will make for a defensive meeting and cause the pastoral team to shy away. Come with a humble spirit to submit it to the church, not push for it. If they say “no,” you can always follow up for helpful ongoing dialogue.
- **Have samples or a copy of the workbook**
Download free samples of the workbooks or purchase a couple of the workbooks. It's important for the pastoral leaders to see and even browse through the material. They need a visual as they listen to your idea.

Sample Meeting Outline:

1. **Submit the vision, the reason, and the plan**

Start the meeting with an overall statement or vision by sharing that you and your friends would like to...(come up with your own statement).

Example: *“We would like to have a simple community resource in the church for those experiencing depression, anxiety, or other mental health conditions that will give them hope and transformative outcomes.”*

2. Explain the reason – the why

Share your story or situation that explains the need and the hope you found (keep it brief). Then, share some overall statistics that prove the need and the opportunity for the church to be in a better position to help.

3. Submit the plan for Grace Groups

Share what, why, and how the Grace Groups work (info above). Then, share the costs and review many of your details to the questions listed above. Let them interject with questions during this dialogue.

4. Explain it is a simple function of care and support, not a ministry

The word “ministry” can imply a considerable budget, pastoral involvement, or other significant resources. Also, try not to use the phrase “support group,” as this implies a clinical focus or feel. Instead, this is just about having a simple small group and community resource for those experiencing these challenges. This group will actually relieve the burden of pastoral teams having to meet with families and individuals. Instead, they can refer people to the groups. The Grace Group provides an ongoing and proven community small group experience resulting in positive outcomes ... a healing experience.

5. Dialogue and Follow-up

After you finish, ask them what they think and facilitate their questions. Let them think and discuss it and ask when you can follow up with them.

6. Faith and Patience

Be patient and continue to pray for God to reveal His wisdom and creativity to everyone involved.