

DIVORCECARE MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

NOTES

Finding and equipping leadership

One of the most important things you can do to ensure the success of your DivorceCare group is to find and equip the right leadership. Warm, caring, mature group leaders set the tone for the group discussion time that follows the video seminars. Having the right group leaders will help group participants feel comfortable, accepted and free to share their feelings and thoughts.

If your church is just beginning a divorce recovery ministry, you may be serving as administrator, group leader and snack caterer. If that's the case, this section can help you get started! As your group begins to grow, pray and ask the Lord to help you identify people who can assist you in leadership. This section will also help you identify and equip these future leaders. To prevent burnout or to overcome the feeling of being overwhelmed, remember: *Never do ministry alone!* If possible, always have someone serving with you.

If you are a pastor or a lay leader overseeing an existing divorce recovery ministry, you will also find help in this section of the Leader's Guide as you build your divorce recovery ministry team.

What kind of leaders do you need?

DivorceCare is a hybrid. It is part seminar, part "recovery" group. The seminar portion of our format is presented through the DVD videos seen by the group. After viewing the video seminar, the format changes to a recovery/support group(s) to talk about what has been presented.

Typically in a seminar format, leadership begins with effective and respected communicators who have appropriate expertise for the desired audience. In the case of a divorce recovery seminar, you would seek an expert or experts to deal with emotional, psychological, spiritual, theological, financial, relational and child development issues. Needless to say, that's quite an order!

The DivorceCare videos have been produced to help you conduct an effective "seminar" without having to recruit this kind of expertise or maintain a stable of speakers who can participate in a regularly scheduled divorce recovery ministry. Our videos feature some of the best expertise available on divorce and recovery issues from a biblical perspective. They are trusted and respected experts. This allows you to consistently present a high quality, reliable message to people who turn to your church after divorce.

A different type of leadership is needed for the recovery groups. The people leading these groups serve as "facilitators," guiding and shepherding the group. These group leaders do not need to be teachers or counselors (in fact, assuming these roles in a group setting is counterproductive). The primary role of the DivorceCare group leaders is to create an atmosphere of warmth, caring and

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trust in the discussion group. Group leaders must also encourage discussion about what was seen on the video and a time of personal sharing about what is going on in the lives of each group participant.

While finding leaders is never a trivial task, finding people in your church to serve as group leaders/facilitators is much easier than finding people to serve as seminar teachers.

Defining your leadership needs

You can begin your DivorceCare group very simply by recruiting a group leadership team, consisting of a group leader and a group co-leader. (One person can lead a group, but a team is preferable.)

As your program gets larger, you can ask other people to help with tasks like administration, publicity, food, registration, etc. Adapt the structure of your leadership team to meet the needs of your program and church. There's no best way to organize these kinds of responsibilities. Create an organization that works effectively for you!

Most of our focus in this section of the Leader's Guide will be on the development and selection of your group leaders. The right group leadership will be the glue that brings together all of the elements of the DivorceCare program. A wrong selection of group leadership can really hurt your program.

Identifying your group leaders

Effective group leaders can come from all walks of life. Here are some common characteristics to look for in potential leaders:

Profess a personal relationship with Jesus Christ

DivorceCare identifies a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as "the foundation for healing." Group leaders must be able to model the healing that comes through Christ.

Demonstrate spiritual maturity

Group leaders should be mature Christians with a consistent walk. New believers can be recruited to help with administrative and support tasks but should not be put in the position of leading a group.

We suggest that your group leaders be active and participating members of your church. Remember that these group leaders will be representing your church to many people who may not attend. There may be occasions where it is desirable to place someone from another church in a leadership role in your DivorceCare program. If you are considering such a person, discuss it first with your church leadership to ensure that you have their support.

Have experienced divorce

There *are* people who can be excellent group leaders even though they have not experienced divorce, but you'll have the most success in filling this job with people who have been through a divorce.

There's a scriptural principle at work here. In 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, Paul describes one outgrowth of the comfort we receive from God:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, *so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God*” (emphasis added).

People who have lived through and recovered from divorce have an intimate understanding of the needs of someone hurting because of the breakup of a marriage. It's also a great encouragement for group members to see individuals who have survived and substantially healed from divorce.

You'll want to talk with potential leaders about the circumstances of their divorce. If they have not modeled biblical principles in their own circumstances, then it would not be appropriate to place them in the position of leading a group.

Have recovered from divorce

It's essential that a divorced group leader demonstrate substantial recovery from his or her divorce. There's no precise mathematical formula to apply here, but you typically should not place a person in a group leadership position for at least two years after the divorce (many people take even longer to fully heal).

As you begin to have people “graduate” from your program, you will probably be approached by some of them about leading or helping with a DivorceCare group. Indeed, some of these people will become effective group leaders in the coming years. They have a heart for helping others and are enthusiastic about your ministry.

It's tempting to plug someone with such enthusiasm into a leadership position. We strongly encourage you to protect these people and your program by resisting this temptation. It's almost impossible to effectively lead a group until you have experienced considerable healing (even if you are highly motivated). People who are still healing also face an especially strong vulnerability to developing relationships with group participants. People who aren't sufficiently healed are also prone to quickly burn out.

There are other effective ways to channel the enthusiasm and commitment of such a person. As your group grows, you will need administrative, publicity, food, registration and other types of support. These are excellent “entry level” positions of service.

You can also develop a one-on-one ministry relationship between a future group leader and someone from your current group who is really hurting. Make sure these are same-sex relationships and you develop a system to monitor them. A person who is faithful and consistent in this kind of personal ministry will indeed make a good future group leader.

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