

SUMMER FRIENDSHIP GATHERINGS

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DISCUSSION GROUPS

- The Summer Friendship Gathering events last three evenings and each evening is divided into three parts: fellowship meal, worship time with a large group lesson, and small group discussion. On the last evening there is a closing worship service, which replaces the Large Group Bible Lesson and Small Group Discussion time.
- The Discussion Group is a vital element in the Gathering. It is an opportunity for reviewing and discussing the Large Group Lesson with our friends. It is also a special time for small group prayers, crafts and service projects.
- Several of our friends with disabilities who will never say anything in a large group setting, may participate in a smaller group. It is a place where intimate Christian community can be formed.
- Some of our friends with disabilities do not use words and we may wonder if the discussion or prayer time is well spent. It is through the formation of these small Christian communities that the Holy Spirit can move hearts through listening to the Word, prayer time, and the conversation of others.



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DISCUSSION GROUPS CONTINUED

- Make sure to leave plenty of room in your group for the prayer time.
- **Romans 8:26-27** states, “...*the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.*”
- The discussion and prayer time should not be rushed. There may be something the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish through this time together as a small group.
- The Discussion Groups will meet following the Large Group Lesson on Days 1 and 2. There is no Discussion Group on Day 3. The Discussion Group room assignments will be communicated in an announcement at the end of the Large Group Lesson.
- Each group will be designated by a colored sticker placed on each person’s nametag. As each color is announced, the names in that group are called. The Discussion Leader and volunteers with that color will lead their group to the correct room. Leader’s, please know where your room assignment is before your group disperses.
- We ask that each Gathering group organize their Discussion Groups. The Gathering leaders will provide Connection Ministries with their Discussion Group assignments three weeks before the event. This will allow us time to prepare the nametags and small group rosters.
- Please have 1-2 volunteers available at the registration table to put stickers on the name tags if needed.

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- When deciding who will go in each Discussion Group, be sure to balance each group with friends who have a variety of intellectual levels, and ability to use words. Also include families and direct care staff in the group assignments
- The person leading the Small Group Discussion time should already be a volunteer companion who has established relationships with the Friendship group. The remaining Volunteer companions should be encouraged to participate in the event and be assigned to a Discussion Group and assist the Discussion Leaders.
- Each event will need 4-6 Discussion Groups and volunteers to lead, depending on the number of friends with disabilities, families, caregivers and volunteers that register.
- The Discussion Group Leaders and registered Volunteer companions should not only view this video, but also the Theme Overview video so they will have a good summary of what the small groups will be discussing. The Large Group Lesson videos for Days 1 and 2 are also helpful as they go deeper into the Bible lesson.
- Connection Ministries has also prepared a Discussion Group Leader's Guide that you can download and print either at home or through your church. If requested, we will mail you a copy. This guide along with the videos will prepare you to either lead or participate in the discussion time.
- This Small Group Leader's Guide Booklet is the same Discussion Booklet as our friends will receive. It includes the Bible lesson, illustrations, and the discussion questions with suggested answers. There is also a Helpful Hints page at the beginning of the leader's guide. It gives helpful hints for the lesson and discussion time, prayer time and craft time.

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- For every Gathering, Connection Ministries will bring enough Discussion Booklets for everyone. Be sure everyone writes their name on the front cover of the booklet. They will all be able to take home their Discussion Booklets at the end of Day 2 as there will be no small group on day 3.
- It is important to be prepared. The Discussion Leader should review each lesson before the Gathering begins. Make sure you are familiar with the Bible story, discussion questions, and key points that are in the Leader's Guide Booklet. You may want to note that the words in italics are taken from the scriptures.
- It is important to remember that the Discussion Group Leader is a facilitator, not a lecturer. The facilitator's goal is to encourage participation from everyone in the group. Some friends may not use words, but they can hear, listen, and learn from the conversation. The pictures can also be a good springboard to start a discussion.
- Reading aloud can be a helpful tool. Invite friends who you know are comfortable reading, to read aloud the Bible verse, small portions of the story, or discussion questions. You will not have enough time to read the entire lesson. The Booklet should only be used as a guide to discuss the lesson.
- Questions should be short and simple. "Yes" or "no" questions can be helpful. Those with disabilities may need extra time to process their response. After you give them time to respond, it's ok to whisper the answer in their ear. Include families and care staff; make sure everyone feels welcome participating in and answering questions.

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- If you are unable to understand what a friend is trying to say, ask them to repeat it. You may need to ask another volunteer or friend for help so they can be understood. Take your time; you do not want them to feel rushed.
- Volunteer companions in the group need to be ready to assist the Discussion Group Leader with additional questions or comments to help keep the conversation going.
- The discussion and prayer time will be just as important for the families, care staff, and volunteers as it is for our friends with disabilities.
- Prayer is an important time during the small group. It can be a time our friends open up about what they are thankful for, concerns they have, and what they need God to help them with. Be sure to also include families, volunteers, and care staff in prayer time. This can be a great way to build closeness and Christian community within your group.
- PLEASE and THANK YOU prayer cards are a way to help our friends pray. Each small group will receive one Please and Thank you card. They will be in your table tubs. On the front of the card it says “Thank you God for ____” On the back of the card it reads “Please God, help me _____”
- Leaders may need to help friends read the cards and think of what they are thankful for and what they may need prayer for. After a friend (or you) have prayed pass the PLEASE and THANK YOU card to the next person. Friends may need help praying by repeating a simple prayer after you. We encourage small group leaders not pray for the whole group at the end of the prayer time but give opportunity for our friends to talk to God themselves.

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- Craft time is a fun but busy time during your small group. It should be done after the discussion and prayer time. Directions and supplies for Day 1 and 2 crafts will be in the table tubs.
- The directions and supply list for this Summer's craft, along with a picture of the finished project will be in the Crafts and Service project video. You can also print step by step instructions from the note sheet next to the Craft and service project video.
- You may need to help friends with the craft. You can also ask friends who are able, to help each other. This is great way to build friendships, give them purpose, and HAVE FUN!
- If additional crafts or service projects are planned, leave adequate time. However, make sure the project is started after the discussion and prayers. Be sure to have enough volunteer companions in your groups who are able to help out as well.
- The Discussion Booklets will be collected and placed in the Discussion table bins after Day 1. The booklets will be used again on Day 2. Following the Discussion Group on Day 2, everyone can take their Discussion Booklets home.
- Small Group leaders need to be sure to collect their group's name tags and put in the table tubs after Discussion Group on Days 1 and 2, Name tags will be available again at the registration table the following day.

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- At the end of the Day 3 Worship Service, an announcement will be made that anyone who wants to keep their name tag can take it home with them.
- You are encouraged to review the notes for this presentation along with the Small Group Leader's Guide Booklet. The links to these resources can be found on the Connection Ministries website next to this training video. If you are planning to make a copy of the Leader's Guide Booklet please bring your copy to the Gathering.
- Thank you for your willingness to be a part of this year's Summer Friendship Gathering. If you have any questions or need additional information you can email us at connect@connection-ministries.org or call our office 317-646-5067.