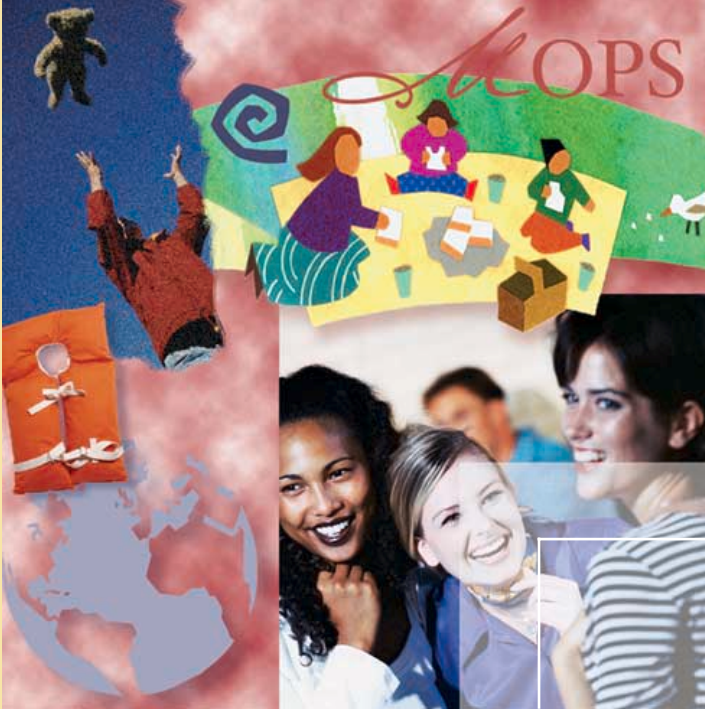


MOTHERS OF
MOPS
PRESCHOOLERS



M  P S I N T E R N A T I O N A L
...because mothering matters

..... *Discussion Group*

The Purpose of Discussion Groups

Discussion Groups are caring and sharing units focused on development and reinforcement of the teaching at a MOPS meeting. A woman can be guided and encouraged through these small groups to look at her involvement in the needs of her family, her involvement with her own needs and those of others, and her need to be involved with Christ.

Discussion Groups:

- ② Provide a sensitive, accepting climate in which the women feel free to share their thoughts and feelings.
- ② Provide an essential “connecting” place where the women develop a sense of belonging and experience the opportunity to develop significant relationships.
- ② Provide a nurturing atmosphere where a woman is gently challenged to examine her relationship with Christ and encouraged to make a commitment to him—the ultimate goal of the MOPS ministry.

The Discussion Group Team Leader is involved with setting the tone for honest sharing and for participation of all the women. She guides the Discussion Group Leaders, who are the “front line” of women reaching out to each mom who attends MOPS. Her contagious appreciation of each woman’s contribution helps promote open sharing. Her priority is to direct women into helpful, practical discussion in which each woman can take part.

Perfume and incense
bring joy to the heart,
and the pleasantness
of one’s friends springs
from their earnest
counsel.



Proverbs 27:9



Discussion Group Team Leader Job Description



Personal Characteristics:

- ④ Demonstrates a growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - ④ Shows sensitivity to and an understanding of the needs of mothers of preschoolers.
 - ④ Demonstrates an ability to effectively work with small groups.
 - ④ Understands the basics of small group dynamics and knows how to share them with the Discussion Group Leaders.
 - ④ Shows warmth and acceptance to women from every background, demonstrating discretion about the personal lives of others.
 - ④ Shares her testimony comfortably with others on appropriate occasions and knows how to lead another to Christ.
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Position Responsibilities:

- ☉ Coordinates the Discussion Group Leaders and is an example and encouragement to them. (She is the Discussion Group Leader for these women.)
- ☉ Leads Discussion Group Team meetings, identifying training opportunities and needs and finding ways to meet these needs.
- ☉ Promotes confidentiality and sensitivity within the individual groups, recognizing the need to refer to a more experienced person for counseling when appropriate.
- ☉ Works with MOPS group speakers to create discussion questions.
- ☉ May substitute for Discussion Group Leaders who are absent.
- ☉ Serves on Steering and attends meetings.
- ☉ Reads the *MOPS Handbook* and the *Discussion Group Handbook* and understands the vision of MOPS and her relationship to the MOPS group.
- ☉ Disciples her team and encourages each member to grow in her relationship with Christ.

Because the Discussion Group Team Leader essentially serves as a Coordinator for Discussion Group Leaders, many groups have found this to be a good Coordinator-in-training position.






Discussion Group Leader Job Description



Personal Characteristics:

- ④ Demonstrates a growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - ④ Shows sensitivity to the needs of other mothers.
 - ④ Risks some vulnerability and transparency as she interacts with other mothers.
 - ④ Shows warmth and acceptance to women from every background, demonstrating discretion about the personal lives of others.
 - ④ Feels comfortable sharing her testimony with others on appropriate occasions and knows how to lead another to Christ.
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Discussion Groups are where it all happens for our MOPS group. It is where we reach women without a church background and meet their needs. I don't think enough can be said about the Discussion Group Leader's position. Our leaders become transparent and open, so that each woman can see Christ through her. These connections are what have kept moms coming back year after year, allowed us to start a second group, find new leadership, and nurture every mom.

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Position Responsibilities:

- ⑥ Functions as a facilitator for small group discussion and leads the direction of the discussion as needed.
 - ⑥ Promotes an atmosphere of safety, acceptance, and belonging for each woman.
 - ⑥ Listens to each group member, particularly in relation to her faith.
 - ⑥ Is committed to each woman in her group, staying in regular contact with her.
 - ⑥ Becomes involved in seeking appropriate resources to minister to each woman as specific needs are identified within her group.
 - ⑥ Attends Discussion Group Leader meetings to continue learning group dynamics and communication skills.
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General Guidelines for Discussion Group Team Leaders

Size

A good size for MOPS Discussion Groups is eight to twelve women. When groups get larger than this, people can't do the in-depth sharing that encourages community. If a group is smaller, it may not provide the diversity of opinions and perspectives that help women to grow. A group of eight to twelve also ensures a healthy mix between those who express their views and those who remain silent.

Grouping

There are many different ways to assign women to Discussion Groups. While many enjoy the security found with an old friend in a new place, it can also be stimulating to meet a cross-section of women. Try to arrange groups so that there are women with different backgrounds, Christians and non-Christians, and a variety of lifestyles in each group. As women are added and others leave MOPS, try to keep group size and diversity balanced. Consider changing groups each year, providing women with the opportunity to meet new people.



How can you separate women into Discussion Groups?

- ② Randomly hand out colored sheets of paper or nametags during the first meeting. Group colors together.
- ② Divide intentionally by areas of commonality: where they live, ages of children, age of the mom, occupation, etc. in order to encourage deeper friendships.





Schedule

Provide Discussion Group Leaders with the meeting's topic in advance, so that they can prepare to follow up on the principles presented during the teaching. Encourage leaders not to follow a list of questions at the expense of genuine sharing and interaction. Each leader has the responsibility for maintaining balance and ensuring the discussion ends according to the MOPS meeting schedule.



Encouragement

Be sure to communicate with each Discussion Group Leader between MOPS meetings. Find out how her group is going, encourage her, and make yourself available for prayer and spiritual support.



When I came to MOPS, I was not a Christian. I was desperate for friends, though, and I found them in my Discussion Group. These women showed me that they cared about me by being interested in my life, by meeting me for coffee and coming with me to my child's doctor appointments. But mostly, they showed me what it means to be a Christian. I found out that Christians still ask questions, and lose their tempers, and make mistakes. It was through the genuineness and honesty of my Discussion Group that I discovered the love of Jesus.






Discussion Group Leader Meetings

Schedule regular times for Discussion Group Leaders to get together for fellowship, training, and prayer. These meetings may be structured similarly to your Steering Team meetings.


Discussion Group Leader meetings may include:

- ④ **MOPS meeting information**, such as themes, activities, Steering Team decisions and policies, etc. Keeping your leaders informed will ensure that they have accurate information to provide to group members.
- ④ **Training**. Identify needed group-leadership skills, such as group dynamics, communication, and lifestyle evangelism. Present information on these topics using resources from this handbook, MOPS International, guest speakers, or materials supplied by your Chartering Ministry.




Discussion Group Leader meetings can be held on off-MOPS meeting weeks, if your group meets bi-weekly or monthly, or on a different day or evening. Offer childcare if possible so that women are able to concentrate.





🕒 **Troubleshooting as needed.** Ask for reports from each group. Find out if a Discussion Group is facing a particular issue or has a question, and work with your team to find a solution.

🕒 **Prayer.** Continue to disciple Discussion Group Leaders and help them grow spiritually. Their personal relationship with Christ will be the most obvious witness to many of the women attending MOPS.



How can you encourage an attitude of trust and intimacy among Discussion Group Leaders? One sure way is by being willing to demonstrate your own vulnerability. Share your own testimony with them during your first meeting together, both to help them get to know you and as an introduction to lifestyle evangelism and sharing their stories.





For a man who had all the answers, Jesus asked a lot of questions.


Candy Davidson



Designing Questions

Writing and using good questions in Discussion Groups is vital to the success of your small group. Why? Because good questions:


- ④ Make people think.
- ④ Make people talk. Talking aids learning and makes things easier to remember.
- ④ Clarify whether each member of the group understands the issues.
- ④ Help the Discussion Group Leader direct the discussion and keep the group focused.



Good questions are open questions, which do not suggest an answer but encourage group members to think and learn. Work with each person who will be teaching or sharing at your MOPS group to formulate relevant and appropriate questions.

Discussion questions may include:

- ④ One to two “warm-up” questions that encourage each woman to think/respond to the topic.
- ④ Two to three questions based on the teaching topic, to encourage each woman to respond/utilize/clarify what she has heard.
- ④ One “take-home” question to encourage each woman to do more thinking about the material, to discuss with her family, or to challenge her to apply something to her life. This question may be heavier in its focus.



Ice-Breakers and Heart-Warmers: 101 Ways to Kickoff and End Meetings by Steve Sheely, Serendipity Press





The following “generic” questions can be used as a handy resource. Select one or two from each of the four categories.

Warm-up questions — To initiate discussion among group members:

- ☉ Describe a memory related to this topic that you have from your own childhood.
- ☉ In what ways can you identify with the subject presented?
- ☉ What information presented today took you by surprise? (It wasn't what you expected to hear.)

Content questions — To facilitate discussion of the topic presented:

- ☉ In your own words, what do you think was the speaker's main thought?
- ☉ Share a helpful idea you heard.
- ☉ Discuss what the speaker said that made you think about this topic in a different way.
- ☉ What additional questions have been raised in your mind as a result of something you have heard?
- ☉ What idea did the speaker share that you disagree with?
- ☉ In your opinion, what was left dangling or unresolved?

Application questions — To apply the discussion to the individual's life:

- ☉ How were you encouraged in your role as mother/woman by what was taught?
- ☉ What is something that you would like to try in your family, based on what you learned?
- ☉ In what way have you been challenged today?
- ☉ Specifically, how will you use an idea that you learned from our discussion?

Provide Discussion Group Leaders with questions in advance, so that they can consider the meeting and teaching time in relation to the conversation that they will later facilitate.






Leading a Discussion Group

Discussion Group Leaders have the special opportunity to “shepherd” a MOPS woman toward discovering and developing her relationship with Jesus Christ. The primary goal of Discussion Group Leaders is to provide the opportunity for each MOPS woman to encounter Jesus.


Keep in mind the following tips for group leaders as you organize groups and train Discussion Group Leaders:

Before the meeting:



- ☺ Pray daily in preparation for each MOPS meeting. Pray for the MOPS speaker, each woman in your Discussion Group, and the overall dynamics of the MOPS meeting.
- ☺ Get excited! Come into the discussion looking interested, letting the women present know that you are enthusiastic about their presence and about the discussion material. A leader who approaches the group time looking bored is going to make her group feel like they're a burden.



This section and the rest of the *Discussion Group Handbook* contain information relevant to all Discussion Group Leaders. Consider reproducing pages to distribute and discuss during Discussion Group Leader meetings.



During your Discussion Group:

- ☺ Welcome each new mother with a smile and eye contact, acknowledging her by name. Familiarity helps people open up later in a group setting. Make room for her in the group by providing a chair, introducing her to women she does not know, and including her in the discussion. Remember something specific about her that you can ask about the next time you see her.
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- ⑥ Spend a few minutes at the beginning of your Discussion Group time asking ice breaker questions or talking about each woman's day as a way to get women talking.
- ⑥ Remember that you're a facilitator. The goal is interaction between group members, not a lecture by you. Be careful not to intimidate or threaten by making initial strong statements about the material, which can cause someone who disagrees to clam up, and can polarize people within the group.
- ⑥ Be an active, alert listener. Practice good body language (lean toward the woman speaking, don't cross your arms) and make eye contact.
- ⑥ Allow participation at each woman's pace: not forced if shy, not kept out if hesitant, gently restrained if too verbal. Don't put a mom on the spot by asking direct questions until you know she is comfortable with the group and the subject.
- ⑥ Use language that everyone can understand. Using "inside jokes" or Christian lingo will confuse women rather than draw them into the conversation.
- ⑥ Respect each woman as a person, even if other group members do not share her ideas and opinions.
- ⑥ Give freedom to "think out loud," to examine issues, ideas, beliefs, misconceptions, etc., without having to take or defend a position.





Keep icebreakers or other activities simple, so that they don't distract from your real purpose of discussion. Asking each woman to spend one minute talking to the person on her right and then introducing her to the group will help build relationships without taking a lot of time or energy.



Real Small Group Don't Just Happen: Nurturing Relationships In Your Small Groups by Neal F. McBride, NavPress



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- ④ Think before you respond, listening to the feelings or needs being expressed; give honest input without giving simplified answers. Resist the temptation to pose as the “devil’s advocate.”
 - ④ Be careful about making assumptions that “everyone” in the group feels the same way about sensitive issues, like spanking children, breast vs. bottle feeding, working vs. staying at home, etc. Do not take positions on these issues and gently guide the conversation to more appropriate topics.
 - ④ Offer solutions. While you don’t have to be the “answer woman,” you can facilitate and direct toward solutions. Don’t let the group become a complaint or gossip session.
 - ④ Be flexible and sensitive to when a woman’s needs may supersede the goals of staying on track, discussing every question, and finishing on time.
 - ④ Talk about your relationship with God when it feels natural and appropriate. Don’t feel a need to spiritualize all of the discussion. Be committed to loving each woman and sharing about God as the Spirit leads, but understand that converting them is not your responsibility, making people feel more like projects than people.




The decisions you have made about your own life, particularly about how you parent, may affect your openness to hear what others believe. Be aware of sensitive issues that may provoke personal reactions, and think about your answers or reactions in advance, to help you move your group smoothly past any troubling point.





After the Discussion Group:

- ② Continue to initiate conversations on a one-to-one basis after the discussion is over. Let women know that you appreciated or enjoyed what they had to say. Validate and encourage them. Thank those who shared openly, whether to present a problem and ask for help, or to offer suggestions and solutions based on their own experiences.
- ② Continue to listen. Let women express their objections and questions. Clarify their positions, but don't feel the need to always come to agreement.
- ② Be sensitive to the woman standing alone. Take the initiative to talk with her.



Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another, And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3:12-14



Responses: Stifling or Stimulating?

How you respond to women in your Discussion Group will greatly impact the atmosphere of openness and sharing.

While conversations will need guidance occasionally, and while you will not always agree with everything that is said, there are different ways to express your reactions. You have the opportunity to stimulate further conversation and growth, even in a difficult situation, or unwittingly create a defensive feeling that will be difficult to overcome.

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.

Proverbs 18:2



Consider the power of the following reactions.

Responses that Stimulate

When stating your position, preface your remarks with tentative statements. You may be absolutely sure of your position, but using a softer tone promotes an atmosphere of openness and enhances the quality of the discussion.

- ☉ I understand what you're saying, but let me tell you how I see it.
- ☉ I'm just wondering, have you ever considered _____?
- ☉ In my opinion...
- ☉ How would you respond to this: _____?

When you want another person in the group to say more, respond this way:

- ☉ I'm not sure I understand what you're saying; tell me more.
- ☉ What do you mean by the term _____?


- ☞ Can you explain (or illustrate) that?
- ☞ I'm not sure I see where the conflict is.
- ☞ It seems like you're saying _____.

When you want to express your disagreement, try these responses:

- ☞ What you're saying raises some red flags in my mind.
- ☞ I'm not piecing together the facts in the same way.
- ☞ That would make a lot of sense to me, but _____.
- ☞ I appreciate that perspective. However, let me tell you how I view it.

When you want to stimulate discussion:

- ☞ I'd be interested in _____'s reaction to that...
- ☞ How does what you're saying relate to her comment?



During a Discussion Group Leader meeting, brainstorm other phrases that stifle and stimulate. Consider how leaders can move conversations past difficult comments from other women in the group, and genuinely use stimulating responses to encourage all members.



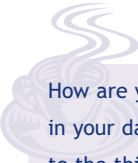


Reactions that Stifle:

Beware of these responses. When someone forcefully expresses a view that belittles or puts down another person's view or beliefs, emotions may soar and it is easy to respond with the following kinds of statements, which are "discussion stiflers:"

- ☞ It's a proven fact that...
- ☞ There's no question about...
- ☞ Only fools believe...
- ☞ You don't know what you're talking about.
- ☞ That's ridiculous.
- ☞ That just doesn't fit the facts.
- ☞ Well, if you believe that, then...
- ☞ That's been totally disproved.
- ☞ You're being totally illogical.
- ☞ They say...
- ☞ The Lord told me...

This material has been adapted for the use of MOPS International with the permission of Search Ministries.



How are you reacting to others in your daily life? Pay attention to the things you say all day. Are you encouraging the people around you or are you stifling them?



Handling the Hard-to-Handle

In a group of twelve women, Discussion Group Leaders will probably discover some that they get along with well, and some whose personalities don't seem to connect with their own.

There are some specific “personality types” who can disrupt even the best planned Discussion Group. Here are some tips for handling those who may present challenges in your group:

During a Discussion Group Leader meeting, role-play different situations leaders may face with hard-to-handle moms. Take turns being the “leader” and the “group members.” Practice handling different situations that may come up.



Wool-Gatherer/Bunny-Trail Taker:

- ☉ The Person: Finds it impossible to keep her mind on the subject; she daydreams, misses points, and contributes irrelevant information.
- ☉ The Solution: Suggest that her conversation would be a good topic to pick up later. Bring the group back to the topic by summarizing where discussion is.

Monopolizer/Overly Talkative:

- ☉ The Person: Focuses attention on herself with a constant flow of words; she loves to hear herself talk and interrupts others to do so.
- ☉ The Solution: Sit at a 90-degree angle and avoid eye contact. Tell her that she made an interesting point, and invite the group to share their reactions.



Status-Seeker:

- ☉ The Person: Tries to impress with what she knows; her comments are more like “pronouncements” offering the last word.
- ☉ The Solution: Thank her for her ideas and ask the other group members for their thoughts. Acknowledge that you do not know all the answers.

Aggressor:

- ☉ The Person: Disagrees whenever possible; looks for exceptions and has a combative personality. Disapproves of the values, acts, or feelings of others; jokes aggressively.
- ☉ The Solution: Find merit in her points and move on to something else. Let the group deal with her, or talk to her privately when needed.

Dominator:

- ☉ The Person: Tries to assert authority in manipulating the group; she flatters, gives directions, and interrupts the contributions of others.
- ☉ The Solution: Attempt to involve her, giving her tasks to diffuse her need to be in control. Be gentle but firm, not allowing her to take over the group.

Clown:

- ☉ The Person: Distracts the group, interrupting with horse-play or cynicism; shows mild contempt for the group, resents the knowledge and abilities of others.
- ☉ The Solution: Use her humor as a tension-breaker, and then focus back to the discussion; involve her in a constructive way, helping to identify abilities that are more appropriate. Let the group handle her behavior, or deal with it privately.

Personality Clash:

- 🌀 The Situation: Two or more members clash personally; this can create tension and divide the group.
- 🌀 The Solution: Do not let the situation interfere with the group. Meet with the women involved outside of group time to emphasize points of agreement and help each side to clearly understand the other. Ask that personality differences be accepted.

Expect Leader To Give Opinions/Answers:

- 🌀 The Situation: A group member may try to put the leader on the spot or may see the leader as the expert with all the answers.
- 🌀 The Solution: Explain that your job is to help your group discuss issues and explore possibilities, but that you are not the one with all the answers. Participate in the discussion, but be cautious of dominating the group.

What happens when we encounter a woman we find difficult to love?

FIRST, stop trying so hard. Let the Lord do his work to change your heart for this woman.

SECOND, seriously begin to pray for this woman, whose depth of need can be met by the Lord.

THIRD, step back and let the Holy Spirit work in both of you.






Discussion Group Leader's Checklist

When a Discussion Group is over, each Discussion Group Leader should take a few minutes to ask herself these questions.


1. Did everyone present take part in the discussion?
2. Was it a lecture, conversation, or discussion?
3. Did anyone become the group teacher?
4. Did the discussion expand on the material discussed in the talk?
5. Did you guide the discussion with questions?
6. Did you keep to the subject? (Brief digressions are okay if the group expressed interest in one individual's vital concerns. This requires sensitivity and balance.)
7. Did you finish on time?
8. Was anyone interrupted at any time in the discussion?
9. Did anyone seem to open up? Close up?
10. Did anyone seem to express a change of opinion as a result of the talk or the discussion?
11. Did anyone leave with an air of dissatisfaction?
12. What can I be praying for this week?

If you are not satisfied with answers to any of these questions, refer to the appropriate section of this handbook and consult with your Discussion Group Team Leader for her guidance.



A Discussion Group Tracking Form is available on the MOPS CD-ROM and on the MOPS Leaders' Web site.






Where words are many,
sin is not absent.

Proverbs 10:19





Keeping Confidences/ Referral Procedure

Be sensitive with information that you may want to share with someone else. Some women may find it upsetting to know that anyone other than the person they confided in knows details of their lives, even if the information doesn't seem confidential to you. Never share a situation or prayer request given to you unless it is requested by the woman herself or she has given you permission to share it.



Confidential information about the women in your group should not be shared with anyone. Exceptions to this are 1) you feel that professional/pastoral counseling or intervention is necessary or helpful (discuss this privately with your Coordinator before acting on the decision), or 2) your Chartering Ministry's policies dictate a procedure to be followed.

On occasion, needs will be disclosed which require in depth counsel. In such instances, your Steering Team should develop a procedure for referral to the Chartering Ministry staff or to other qualified professionals. This procedure should be discussed with and approved by the ministry staff and/or governing board.



Be sure that there is an attitude in your Steering Team and Discussion Group meetings that encourages discretion and privacy. Don't ask personal or leading questions about those who are not present. Accept prayer requests as they are given, without pressing for more details.





Follow-Up



Each Discussion Group Leader has the responsibility for following up with the women in her group. Most often this follow-up takes the form of a phone call. Try to call or e-mail every woman regularly as long as she is active in MOPS. A vital relationship will not result from just a few minutes at MOPS meetings.

Follow-up opens doors to:

- 🌀 Friendship
- 🌀 Prayer needs or problems
- 🌀 Encouragement
- 🌀 Information (special announcements, MOPPETS information)
- 🌀 Feedback on MOPS issues or meetings

Plan get-togethers between MOPS meetings for the Discussion Group. A lunch or dinner together, a leisurely cup of coffee, or an afternoon at the playground gives moms the time they need to form friendships that will last long past the time they are a part of MOPS. Schedule baby showers, meals, and send birthday cards.





Contact one or two Discussion Group members each month, before meetings, making sure you contact all the members regularly.

1. Pray and gather your thoughts first.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. Ask how she and her family are doing.
4. State why you are contacting her.
5. Encourage relationships by sharing names of other moms in your Discussion Group who live or work nearby, have children the same ages, or have other common ground.

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The friends that I made in MOPS were the women in my Discussion Group...because they were the ones who knew about my life outside of MOPS. I knew my group leader really cared about me when she called to ask me questions about a hobby I had talked about at the last meeting.



Other ways you can follow up:

- 🕒 If appropriate, give her something to read or a tape to listen to that addresses issues she brought up during your Discussion Group. Develop a MOPS library or become familiar with resources in your church or local library.
- 🕒 If you have an opportunity, write a note expressing your appreciation of something she has done.

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