

How to Host a Small Group Online



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We are facing a lot of uncharted challenges right now with the threat of COVID-19. Churches, schools, restaurants, and businesses are all being asked to eliminate gatherings of over 10 people.

This “social distancing” will eventually help stop the spread of this virus and limit the number of deaths around the world. This challenge is changing how we live our lives, but it doesn’t change our mandate to share the gospel and disciple people in our care.

Our groups may not be able to meet physically together for a while, but that doesn’t mean they cannot meet. We are seeing this take place with online streaming weekend worship services, and with free internet-based tools, our groups can gather as well.

Technology

The two most prominent platforms for hosting meetings online are Zoom and Google Hangouts. There are pros and cons to each one.

Zoom

- Pros:
 - There is a free version available.
 - Only hosts need an account.
 - There is a phone-in option.

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- Cons:
 - The free version is limited to 40 minutes; however, they have lifted the limit for some groups.
 - You must download and use the Zoom application on your desktop or mobile device to participate with video.
 - Capacity (up to 100 participants/devices in one meeting)
- How To Use:
 - Open Zoom in a web browser or mobile app (apple device, android device, chrome web browser extension)
 - Login
 - Click “Host a meeting with video on”
 - Click “Invite participations”
 - Select how you’d like to send an invite:
 - Default Email, Gmail, Yahoo to send email invite or “copy URL”, “Copy Invitation” to copy a link and send it via a text message, email, Facebook message, etc.
 - You can also schedule a meeting on the zoom website and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting (See instructions).
- [Watch tutorial videos in Zoom video library.](#)

Google Hangouts

- Pros:
 - It’s free to use with a google account.
 - There are no time limits.
 - It’s accessible via a web browser on any computer or mobile device.
- Cons:
 - It requires a Google account for all participants.
 - A phone-in option not available unless you have a business account with Google.
 - Capacity (25 participants/devices per meeting)
- How To Use:
 - Open Google Hangouts in [web browser](#) or mobile app ([apple device](#) , [android device](#), [chrome web browser extension](#))
 - Login
 - Click “Video Call” button
 - Click “Invite People” and type in their email address (If they don’t have a google account it will send them an invite to setup an account)
 - You can also schedule a meeting on your google calendar and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting (See instructions).
- [Watch a six-minute YouTube tutorial.](#)

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Best Practices for Online Meetings

As you might imagine, having an online group experience is considerably different than sharing a living room or classroom in person. Here are a few tips for participating in or facilitating an online group experience.

1. Recommend group members to download meeting software at least 30 minutes prior to meeting, just in case they have technology issues they need to work out.
2. Make sure your face has sufficient lighting.
 - Lighting works best in front of your face, not behind.
3. Make sure your face is centered in the video camera.
 - Members probably don't want to see only your forehead or neck throughout the meeting, so position your camera accordingly.
4. Select the quietest room/location you can find.
 - Turn off anything making noise in the background (TV, radio, appliances).
 - Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet.
5. Only use one device per household.
 - When two devices are used in the same room, it produces feedback that affects all group participants.
 - If two people feel more comfortable participating with their own devices than sharing the same one, each should have his or her own room for doing so.
6. Mute your computer unless you're talking.
 - If everyone's microphone is turned on at the same time, the sound quality can be an issue and it can be hard to hear the person who is talking. The best policy is to mute yourself when you are not talking.
 - If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them.
 - You will be muting and unmuting a lot, so get used to it.
 - Also, you'll get called out if you don't unmute, so don't be offended.
 - The host may mute you if you don't do this yourself, so don't take that personally.
7. Be an assertive moderator.
 - The moderator/host of the group will need to be welcoming and in charge. Make sure as host you jump on a few minutes early to welcome everyone.
 - Redirect the conversation or mute participants as necessary. This may feel rude at times, but it is necessary to manage a good online experience for the group.
 - Generally speaking, the moderator should talk 30% of the time and listen 70% of the time.
8. Create a plan for participants to indicate they'd like to talk.
 - Since participants will often be muted, having a plan will help you know when to mute and unmute.
 - You may try something like raising a hand, answering in a specific order, or another signal.

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- Utilize the “chat” features to post questions for discussion.
9. Give your full attention to the group experience, resisting the urge to multi-task.
- When participants are not paying full attention, it can be a big distraction online just like an in-person group.
 - When talking, spend some time looking at the camera, not just the screen. This digital form of “eye-contact” goes a long way toward creating a sense of connection and community.
10. Stay in touch afterwards.
- Assign prayer partners to call each other after group is over and pray with them.
 - Or text each other in gender specific text chats to share requests.
 - Leverage GroupMe, Facebook Groups, WhatsApp, etc. as a place to stay connected and keep the conversation going throughout the week.

Our groups may not be able to meet physically together for a while, but that doesn't mean they cannot meet at all.

Consider making use of these wonderful online platforms with your groups during this season and watch God do amazing things in and through all of you.

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<https://factsandtrends.net/2020/03/19/how-to-host-a-small-group-online/?ecid=PDM204940&bid=667258155>