

STUMMIN

SMALL GROUP
LEADER GUIDE

MIDDLE
SCHOOL
FOCUS

YOUR NEW PLAYLIST

APRIL 17, 2024

Week 3 of a 4-week series
about mindset

BOTTOM LINE

Quiet the critic.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 4:18-19, 21b NLT

*“Isn’t this the carpenter?
Isn’t this Mary’s son and the
brother of James, Joseph,
Judas and Simon? Aren’t his
sisters here with us?” And
they took offense at him.*

-Mark 6:3 NIV

*Commit everything you do
to the Lord. Trust him,
and he will help you.*

- Psalm 37:5 NLT

GOALS OF SMALL GROUP

To encourage students to
recognize the critical voices
in their lives and minds
and to give them practical,
healthy ways to quiet them

>> BEFORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS: A lot of middle schoolers tend to think of the critics in their lives as the adults. The people defining and enforcing the rules, giving the feedback, directing them in life—those tend to be the voices they see as critics in this phase. Is it because their parents, guardians, teachers, coaches, and other adults in their lives are actually being critical? Typically, the answer is “no.” It’s likely because middle schoolers are struggling to find freedom and autonomy, and the adults in their lives who inhibit that can feel like their biggest critics. So, be careful not to pile on and villainize the voices of the adults or authority figures in their lives. Instead, work to help your middle schoolers discern the difference between helpful guidance and feedback and critical words and thoughts that are unhelpful, harmful, and negative in nature.

>> DURING GROUP

This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions and activities as needed, and don’t feel like you need to do, or ask, everything you see here.

DISCUSS THIS:

- What’s the last song you listened to on repeat? (Bonus points for anyone willing to sing it!)
- What are the similarities or differences between a judge, a coach, and a critic?
- Have you ever felt like you were being criticized? Tell us about it.
- What can we learn about the way Jesus handled being criticized by others?
- What might change if you chose to listen to God’s voice over the voice of any critics?

DO THIS:

Hand out the provided journal page and pens, and give your group time to work on completing the journal during your time together.

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>> BEFORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS: There are two major types of criticism your students are under—criticism from others (external) and criticism of themselves (internal). Sometimes the voices of others become the critical thoughts on repeat, and sometimes it’s their own self-doubt and insecurity that impacts their playlist. Be sure to help students distinguish between the two as they work through the critical thoughts they have in their minds. As you do, remind them that it doesn’t really matter where the thoughts come from; what matters is the way they let those thoughts become true if left unchecked. Focus on encouraging them to replace those thoughts with the truth of Scripture so they see themselves (and others) the way God does.

>> DURING GROUP

Create meaningful conversations. Adjust the questions as needed and ask thoughtful follow-up questions as the conversation unfolds. Don’t feel like you need to answer every question.

DISCUSS THIS:

- What’s the last thing you got some major recognition for? How did that recognition make you feel?
- What about the last time you experienced criticism? How did that make you feel?
- Why do you think people can be so quick to be critical of others?
- Why do you think we tend to be critical of ourselves, too?
- What can we learn from Jesus’ example about quieting the critics in our minds?
- How would your thoughts be different if you were brave enough to show up and be your authentic self?
- How might listening to more truth from Scripture help you do that?

DO THIS:

In an effort to help your students quiet their critics, intentionally celebrate the positive qualities you see in them. Share openly during Small Group or message them individually to make sure each student feels seen and celebrated by you. It’s a great first step to replacing critical thoughts about who they are with something true about what you see in them.