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TCA Overview

What are Teen Challenge Alumni support groups? TCA is a new, international support system for addicts who are currently in recovery, specifically Teen Challenge graduates.

What is its mission? To provide tools for sustaining long-term recovery from addiction.

How does the program work? TCA basically encompasses three elements:

- Accountability-centered small groups for support and fellowship.
- Take-home Bible lessons in seven areas key to the ongoing spiritual development and character maturity vital to long-term recovery:
 - Battling Temptation
 - Dangers & Obstacles
 - Emotions & Thought Life
 - Life Structure
 - Relating to Others
 - Relationship with God
 - Worship
- A website — www.TeenChallengeAlumni.org — to help Teen Challenge graduates find each other, connect for support and encouragement and begin new TCA groups. It also includes downloadable versions of the enclosed materials as well as additional resources.

How did TCA support groups originate? Pastor Tim Batty has worked with the Teen Challenge center in Detroit since 1997, first as a staff member, then as a volunteer. Recognizing the need for post-graduation support, he began working with other staff members to develop TCA support groups and its lessons, which were then edited by Dave Batty. Since August 2006, this material has been used in a weekly TCA support group in Detroit to help graduates, as well as students in their last two months of the program, stay grounded in recovery.

Your TCA Support Group Resources

Now available for use in other Teen Challenge centers or similar ministries, the TCA support group resources can be downloaded free at the website:

www.TeenChallengeAlumni.org

This book includes a sample of those materials, including:

- Starting a TCA Group Steps & Tips
- Leading a TCA Group Steps & Tips
- Additional Tips for Effective Leadership
- TCA Support Group Meeting Schedule
- Recommended TCA Meeting Rules
- Lesson Introduction
- Seven TCA Support Group Lessons (Leader's Guide & Daily Exercises Sheet)

Questions and Suggestions

Far more important to us than how TCA stands now is where it's going. We consider this effort a work in progress, and we'd love your help in our efforts to make it an effective, powerful tool for recovering addicts. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or suggestions for improvement at TBatty@TeenChallengeAlumni.org or (313) 574-5847.

Starting a TCA Group

Steps:

1. **Spend time in prayer.** No better foundation will assure the success of this group than praying and getting others to pray for its success. TC alumni are facing spiritual battles every day, and the TCA group can be one tool for helping them win these battles.
2. **Get a conversation going.** If there is a Teen Challenge center and other similar ministries in your area, talk to the leadership about your interest in starting this TCA support group. Seek their help in identifying potential TCA group participants from their alumni records. Also consult the website to find alumni in your area. Group members do not need to have graduated from Teen Challenge.
3. **Reach out to potential group members.** Personally contact TC alumni and invite them to join this group.
4. **Find a meeting place.** Determine a location for the weekly meetings of your TCA support group. This can be in someone's home, a church or other public building, or at a Teen Challenge center.
5. **Recruit help.** You need people who will be the facilitators of the group. If you want to be one, raise up a second person to be your co-facilitator and help lead the group. You will also need people to help set up chairs, do snacks, pass out prayer requests, time people sharing, etc.
6. **Get TCA curriculum.** Either purchase the TCA support group curriculum or download it from the TCA website at www.TeenChallengeAlumni.org
7. **Establish a meeting format.** The sheet "Leading a TCA Group: Steps & Tips" provides a general structure, and the website has a more specific sample format that may help.
8. **Prepare your study.** Select the lesson for the first session early and get ready in advance.

Tips:

1. Determine the time for each session — we recommend a minimum of 90 minutes and a maximum of 120 minutes.
2. Decide on rules and guidelines for sharing that are read regularly, emphasizing that what is said here stays here. (Sample rules are included in this book and on the website).
3. Due to the nature of the sharing in each group session, it is best to keep the group no larger than eight. If you have more than eight people sign up, you may want to split the group into two groups.

Leading a TCA Group

Steps:

1. **Come prepared.** Bring the materials you want to use in the group: blank sheets of paper for prayer requests, snacks, the lesson and daily exercise sheets, and any additional materials to enhance the lessons (songs, etc.). It is good to delegate some of this to others.
2. **Arrive early.** Try to get there 15-20 minutes early to set up the room — put out chairs and snacks, post the sharing rules, etc.
3. **Bookend with prayer.** Beginning and ending each group session with talking to God is good to both keep Him at the center of the study and remind graduates to keep Him central in their own lives.
4. **Read your group's rules.** Structure helps foster a stable environment, and the emphasis on a safe place to share helps set the tone of the meeting.
5. **Teach the lesson.** We recommend keeping the lesson no more than 15-20 minutes long.
6. **Move on to sharing.** Open, honest self-examination which is centered on areas of temptation or struggle during the week and how they got through it is the key part of each TCA group meeting.
7. **Be mindful of time.** Let everyone know how much time they have to share based on the group size and honor the starting and ending time of each session. Emphasize that more in-depth sharing should be saved for accountability partners.

Tips:

1. Set the tone for sharing by being the first to share, and share openly. Demonstrate vulnerability and honesty in sharing; talk about experiences and temptations. And don't tell people what they should do, tell them what has worked for you or others.
2. Ask them specific questions if their sharing is too general and vague.
3. You may need to occasionally reel in and redirect someone who becomes overly enthusiastic about sharing and gets off on a tangent.
4. When a person finishes sharing, ask if there is anything else they want to be held accountable to.

Additional Tips for Effective Leadership

1. **Repeatedly emphasize that actions speak louder than words.** How seriously a TC graduate takes his recovery shows in what he does, not how seriously he says he takes it. You don't want to harp or nag, but take advantage of every authentic opportunity to steadily encourage grads to demonstrate their commitment to staying clean through action. Keeping the meetings a priority by doing the homework, making the meetings as frequently as possible and sharing openly is one obvious way to do this.
2. **Stress that accountability is key.** Encourage those who do not have a weekly accountability partner to get one.
3. **Lead by example.** Speak openly about your own struggles with temptations and what has been difficult for you.
4. **Suggest writing a motivator list.** Encourage those who are struggling to create a list of motivators of why they want to stay clean, both positive (ex. I want to keep the relationships I have restored with my family) and negative (ex. I don't want to live in fear and shame anymore).
5. **Recommend writing an addiction pro and con list.** Encourage those who are struggling with motivation to write out the pros and cons of living in addiction. What are the good things that keep bringing them back to their addiction? What are the things that make them want to stop? Suggest they write out everything and then spend some time looking it over and deciding what they really want to do.
6. **Suggest a look into the future.** Have them write out where they see themselves in five years if they continue going down the path of addiction versus where they want to be.
7. **Be patient with them.** Addiction sidetracks a person's normal rate of maturity. Remember even an alumni with years of recovery can still be behind the curve.
8. **Resist the urge to tell them what they should do.** Knowing what you should do rarely helps someone who is struggling with whether or not they want to do it.
9. **Help guide sharing.** Don't allow them to habitually ramble on about nothing; this can be a defense mechanism against being vulnerable.
10. **Let intimacy come naturally.** Be willing to wait if they tell you they are not ready to share personal things with you, and continue to love them.

Sample Teen Challenge Alumni Support Group Meeting Schedule

The schedule below is for a 90 minute session. If you have a 2 hour session, you may want to expand the times of the parts with numbers in parenthesis.

- 10 min. Fellowship and snacks
- 1 min. Welcome – **Leader/Co-leader**
- 4 min. Prayer – **Anyone**
- 1 min. Rules Reading – **Anyone**
- 5 (10) min. Worship Training – Explanation of worship, song, and time of individual worship. - **Leader/Co-leader**
- 5 min. Review of last week's memory verse and assignment
- 10 (15) min. Teaching and challenge for this week
Lesson Plan/Memory Verses
- 45 (65) min. Sharing time – **Leader/Co-leader**
 - 1. Pass out pieces of paper for them to write prayer requests.
After the TCA group prayer time, distribute them to the group members to pray for them throughout the week.
 - 2. Does anyone want to go first to let us know how your week went? (Allow as many to share as are willing.)
 - Sins that need confession
 - Temptations gone through
 - Areas of struggle
 - Devotions update
 - Goals update
 - Were you honest in your responses?
 - 3. Personal goals for the next week
(Hand out *Daily Exercises Sheet* for follow up on this session.)
- 5 min. Prayer requests - **Anyone**
- 5 min. Prayer – **Anyone**

Fellowship Afterward - optional

TCA Meeting Rules

1. What is said in here stays here. Nothing said in a TCA meeting should be talked about outside the group. The purpose of this ministry is to support and encourage each other in Christ. There are only forgiven sinners here.
2. Refrain from using offensive or explicit language. If the leaders feel you are being too explicit, they will address you on that. Let's speak in a way that honors Christ.
3. Be honest and personal in sharing. Do not attempt to "fix" anyone. If you have something to share, share what God has done in your life, not what someone else should do.
4. Be respectful. No interrupting (except for the leader). Also, be mindful of the time constraints when sharing so others have an opportunity to share. Let's love and encourage one another.

Introduction to TCA Group Lessons

For the past 10 years at the Detroit center, I've had the unique privilege of getting to know hundreds of Teen Challenge students and staff. Over conversations during Friday night dinners and random opportunities for prayer and counseling, I've been able to observe what happens when graduates relapse. There's a relatively short list of things that tend to pop up repeatedly.

In my observations of others, as well as in examining my own spiritual battles, I've also noticed trends related to sustained victory, particularly living by principles that can make success significantly less of a struggle.

So I started jotting down notes, then developed lessons based on Bible verses that complement the experiences of successful graduates by explaining those principles they live by that make the difference. In Detroit, the lessons are reviewed briefly during TCA meetings. Accompanying the lesson is a sheet of exercises to encourage further development, from questions for personal reflection to Bible verses for study and memorization.

On the next page you will find descriptions of the seven categories of lessons, as well as the names of some of each category's lessons. On following pages, you'll find one sample lesson for each category. Eventually, all 52 lessons the TCA program offers will be available on the TCA website.

This truly is a work in progress and I'd really appreciate your input. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or suggestions for improvement at TBatty@TeenChallengeAlumni.org or (313) 574-5847.

— Pastor Tim Batty, TCA support group founder

Category Descriptions & Lesson Examples

BATTLING TEMPTATION (BT): Strategies, tactics, and tips to understand and effectively battle the devil's schemes, particularly the ambush type of attacks.

→ “Battling Desires of the Flesh” is the enclosed lesson. (Other **BT** studies coming to the TCA website include “Mind Hijackers” and “Resisting Condemnation”)

DANGERS & OBSTACLES (DO): Identifying and preparing to counter typical worldly traps that await graduates.

→ “Building Sexual Integrity” is the enclosed lesson. (Other **DO** studies coming to the TCA website include “Buddies in Sin” and “Overworking”)

EMOTIONS & THOUGHT LIFE (ETL): Important areas to grow in to become more stable and effective in dealing with life’s emotional and mental ups and downs.

→ “The Dangers of Secrets” is the enclosed lesson. (Other **ETL** studies coming to the TCA website include “Handling Rejection” and “Emotional Starvation”)

LIFE STRUCTURE: Guidance on establishing regular habits that promote maintaining recovery and help build a stable life that can withstand the storms that will come.

→ “Be a 100 Percenter” is the enclosed lesson. (Other **LS** studies coming to the TCA website include “Stability vs. Rigidity” and “Living Free”)

RELATING TO OTHERS (RO): Building relationship skills and establishing your own local support network.

→ “Accountability” is the enclosed lesson. (Other **RO** studies coming to the TCA website include “Healthy Relationships with the Opposite Sex” and “Dealing with Confrontation”)

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (RG): Building what must remain your most important relationship to sustain recovery.

→ “Doing Our Part, Not God's Part” is the enclosed lesson. (Other **RG** studies coming to the TCA website include “Earthly Rewards” and “Wanting vs. Obligation”)

WORSHIP (W): Developing your intimacy with God through genuine worship and authentic spiritual experience.

→ “The Presence of God” is the enclosed lesson. (Other **W** studies coming to the TCA website include “Battling through in Worship” and “Worshipping in Truth”)