

Using Zoom for online Healing Groups

Tip sheet

Zoom (zoom.us) is a fairly inexpensive online video conferencing application. The free version only allows you to schedule 40-minute meetings; but for around \$15 USD a month you have more features, including longer meetings, breakout rooms for participants, a virtual whiteboard, and more. A few suggestions on how to break down the digital barrier and feel more connected are listed below.

Tech tips:

Inform participants of what technology will be required. Prior to allowing people to sign up or register for an online healing group, explain clearly that it requires dependable audio, video, and internet connections. While this may seem obvious, it is important to only include participants with these technological capabilities. Headphones with a working microphone are highly recommended.

Create either a [WhatsApp](#) group or [Slack](#) workspace that includes everyone in your group. A designated, secure space for communication during the week can make participants feel safer and more connected with each other. It can also be a place for ongoing healing to be processed with the whole group instead of participants walking alone through their healing journey.

Send participants an FAQ sheet ahead of time. This should answer frequently asked questions (FAQs) about what to expect from the healing group experience, about trauma, and what will be expected of them. See the end of this tip sheet for an example.

Make a connection with participants before you begin. Because this is a less naturally connected format for healing to take place, it is important to connect individually with each participant over the phone or on zoom before you start your healing group. It may be good to ask questions like, “What drew you to participate in this group?” and “Is there anything you would like me and the other facilitator to know about you or your story?” In addition to connecting well, this may give you a better idea of the level of trauma people have experienced and what they may need.

Get all the necessary materials to participants in time. You may need to alter the healing group supplies list for this format. Recommending each participant has at least a pen, a notebook/journal, some kind of art supplies, a story set sent in PDF format or an HWT book for each group meeting is a good list of baseline requirements. It can be helpful to remind participants the day or even the hour before the group starts what they need to bring with them.

Provide a list of local resources and counselors for participants. Healing groups can bring up a lot of suppressed pain. The group may be enough support for some, but it is normal for some to need additional support. Providing this list can help people find what they need.

Choose a quiet, private location for sessions. Whenever possible, there should be no interruptions or distracting background noise during Healing Group meetings for either facilitators or participants. Just like you would not want anyone entering the room during an in-person healing group, you do not want it to happen during an online healing group either.

Have everyone use *gallery view* during sessions. Zoom meetings allow for either *gallery view* or *speaker view*. *Speaker view* only shows an enlarged view of the person speaking, whereas *gallery view* enables you to see every participants' video at the same time. With every face in front of you at once, it can make facilitators and participants feel more connected to each other.

Always have time budgeted to solve tech problems. The initial download and installation of the zoom application on any digital device can take anywhere between 10-30 minutes. Some related tips include:

- having a tech practice meeting for all participants prior to the meeting itself, even if it is optional, helps people become more comfortable and ready for the meeting itself
- having facilitators sign on 15-20 minutes before the start time of each meeting to help participants troubleshoot if they are having tech difficulties
- suggest participants use a wired connection to their device if available
- if anyone has a slow connection, recommend they use their computer for video, and use the dial-in feature for audio on their phone.

Set online-format-specific ground rules. Request that your group to create ground rules specific to the online setting. Examples may be things like no taking screen shots, no recording the meeting, making sure you mute your microphone when there's background noise where you are, and things like this.

Use the breakout rooms function for small group discussions and pairs. This feature can be turned on in the meeting settings under the "In Meeting (Advanced)" section.

- One facilitator will need to be responsible for assigning all participants to a breakout room while the other facilitator is leading a section. This is best to do during the opening story.
- For *small group discussions*, the entire healing group can be split in half using two breakout rooms.
- For *discussion in pairs*, two participants should be assigned to their own breakout room, either manually or at random (these options will appear when you go to create the rooms).
- Since in the online setting pairs cannot be chosen by the participants as in a live healing group, facilitators will need to decide ahead in planning meetings whether to assign participants or split them randomly.

Facilitation tips:

Be prepared to facilitate in a participatory way. People get the most benefit from the HWT lessons when they experience them in a participatory way. This can sometimes be more challenging in an online setting. Certain exercises (e.g., art exercise, listening exercise, grief journey, pain to the cross, skits) and uses of visuals will require creative adaptation. Carefully plan ahead with co-facilitators and, when possible, other facilitators who have led in an online format about how to face these challenges in the ways that honor the participatory model.

If someone needs to speak privately during a group, be prepared to meet that need. Whether you create a breakout room just for one facilitator and that participant to speak for a moment or mute your microphones and step away for a private phone call together, make sure participants know support is available.

Be familiar with grounding exercises and notice when they are needed. Review and be ready to lead participants in the container exercise, the tree exercise, and the breathing exercise. It can be challenging to know if someone needs a break, so checking in and asking how everyone is feeling occasionally is necessary.

Small acts of kindness go a long way. Sending private messages to participants reminding them that you see and care about them can make a difference in someone's healing journey. Taking a few minutes every day to check in with one or two participants will have a great impact.

[SAMPLE FAQ SHEET]

Online Healing Group Frequently Asked Questions



1. What is a healing group?

A healing group is designed to be a safe place where participants are able to share the pain of their hearts, listen to others' pain, as well as journey alongside one another in their healing process. The overall goal is to help people with heart wounds find healing and become more resilient. This approach to trauma healing has been used effectively worldwide, but this group is not a substitute for professional care.

2. How are you defining "trauma"?

Trauma happens when a person is overwhelmed with intense fear, helplessness, and horror. Trauma affects a person's psychological, physical, emotional, mental, relational, and spiritual well-being. Trauma can come as a direct experience, by witnessing someone else's suffering, and even by hearing of someone's trauma. In this healing group we will be referring to trauma as "heart wounds".

3. When will we meet and what will we need?

We will meet every Monday from 2/24 through 3/30, 7-9pm EST. Our group will take place using the Zoom platform. All group communication outside of the Monday night meetings will be on an application called Slack, a single place for communication, files, and group support. More information on these applications and their use in the group will be sent via email prior to the group meeting.

At least 24 hours before each meeting the list of materials you will need for that week's group will be posted to our Slack group. The materials you will definitely need every week will be your group journal, a pen, your story set, and whatever technology you'll be using to join the group.

4. What topics will be covered in the healing group?

The material is a combination of biblical principles and mental health practices. In this healing group, we will be covering five lessons from the Trauma Healing Institute's curriculum, *Healing the Wounds of Trauma*. The five lessons are:

Week 1: If God loves us, why do we suffer?

Week 2: What is a wound of the heart?

Week 3: What can help our heart wounds heal?

Week 4: Bringing our pain to the cross

Week 5: How can we forgive others?

5. *What is expected of me in this healing group?*

We ask that you show up and be yourself! This group is meant to be participatory and engaging and we invite you to participate and engage. However, you will not be forced to share any part of your story nor will you be forced to participate or engage.

6. *What can I expect from participating in this healing group?*

Each lesson that we will cover includes a story, large group discussion, and small group discussion. Some of the lessons include an expressive activity, whether that be a journaling exercise, an art exercise, or a relaxation technique. When it is time to break up into small groups, each group will be supported by facilitators as they are able.

7. *What is your policy on confidentiality?*

The process of healing from trauma continuously requires a safe place for people to process and work through their experience. Members of healing groups are asked not to share information about others in the group to anyone outside of the group or to take screenshots at any time.

Whatever is heard in the healing group stays in the healing group. You can tell your own story to whomever you wish, but you cannot share someone else's story with anyone—even with others in the group—unless you have the person's permission to do so. Your facilitators will maintain confidentiality. The only circumstances in which facilitators must break confidentiality are in the cases of suspected child abuse, elder abuse, or in the case of immediate danger to a person (e.g., threats of suicide or homicide).

This healing group will take place in an online setting using video streaming applications such as Zoom. The online portions will not be recorded and the link for the video conference and Slack channels will be private and protected. While we cannot promise complete security due to the nature of an online forum, we have done everything we can to ensure your safety and the safety of the group.

8. *What happens if I find myself reacting/responding to a topic that we are talking about?*

This healing group is intended to be a space for those seeking healing. This group will be led by trained facilitators who will utilize materials that combine Scripture engagement and mental health best practices. While members of this group may find healing, healing is not a guaranteed outcome. This group should not be considered a replacement for professional counseling, group therapy, or any other clinical form of healing.

We recognize that heart wounds aren't easy to talk about. Sometimes, when we start talking about or thinking about our pain, our bodies, heart, and mind react. This could look like experiencing sudden anxiety, grief, or a flood of unwanted memories. If you find yourself needing more support than the group offers you, please communicate your needs to the facilitators as soon as possible. Facilitators may recommend you seek further support outside of the group, which may include care from a person with trauma expertise in your own community.