

THE SANCTUARY COURSE

LEADER'S GUIDE

Thank you for serving as a leader. *The Sanctuary Course* is designed for community learning, which means that you do not need to be an expert or a mental health professional in order to guide others through the material. You only need to create a safe learning environment and encourage gentle, honest conversations.

This Leader's Guide will walk you through the steps you can take to plan, promote, prepare, and run *The Sanctuary Course*. Instructions are provided for facilitating both in-person and online meetings. It is recommended that you read this guide thoroughly before running the course. Additional information is available on our [FAQ page](#), and in our [Facilitating Online Meetings FAQ film](#).

PLAN

Consult your leadership: If you decide that you would like to run the course in your local church, make sure that you speak to the appropriate leaders in advance and secure their support. (If you plan to run the course privately, within your own organization, or informally with a group of friends, this step is not necessary.)

Determine your dates: You will need to schedule eight meetings. If your group plans on meeting weekly, it may be helpful to choose the same day and time each week. We recommend setting aside sixty to ninety minutes in order to ensure that your group has sufficient time to view the film and engage with the discussion questions.

Decide on a location or platform: **If your group is meeting in-person**, you will need to find a space with sufficient seating and facilities. Depending on the size of the group, you may have additional technical requirements to consider (such as microphones, sound systems, and projectors). **If your group is meeting online**, you will need to choose a platform. There are many options available. To learn about how to set up an online meeting, you can visit: Google Meet, Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, or Facebook Messenger.

Register your course:

<https://www.sanctuarymentalhealth.org/register-your-course/>.

(If your group is meeting online, enter the name of the platform you will be using under "course location.")

Contact us:

If you have any questions, contact support@sanctuarymentalhealth.org.

PROMOTE

Use the trailer and promotional graphics provided on the [All Media](#) page to advertise your course. A link to the trailer, along with sample promotional text, is provided below. Think about sharing via announcements and bulletins, social media, e-newsletters, and websites.

Link to trailer:

Sample text: Would you like to learn more about mental health? Would you value connecting with others during this time of physical distancing? Sign up for *The Sanctuary Course* with (Name of Church), and explore a topic that is more relevant than ever.

About the course: *The Sanctuary Course* is an eight-part course for small groups designed to raise awareness and start conversations in local churches regarding mental health. It offers communities a base of shared knowledge and the opportunity to discover a common language for talking about mental health. Topics covered include: mental health and mental illness, stigma, the recovery journey, companionship, self-care, and the role of community. Each theme is covered from a psychological, social, and theological angle, and each session includes a short film that tells the story of a person of faith with mental health challenges. The course includes a downloadable coursebook and an audiobook if you'd prefer to listen rather than read. There is no homework, but it's recommended that you read/listen to the short sessions before each group gathering.

Please contact (name) if you'd like to participate.

Contact Info:

Dates:

Time:

PREPARE TO MEET IN-PERSON

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

Read the session and watch the accompanying film before your group meets. Familiarizing yourself with the content in advance will help with facilitation and time management during the meeting. Many leaders utilize the following checklist in their preparations.

1. Select an opening question or icebreaker. (You may want to ask participants to take turns leading this portion of the meeting.)
2. Read the session and highlight key points. You may find it helpful to either select excerpts to read aloud during the meeting, or write a short summary to present to your participants. (If your group decides to read the entire session aloud together, then preparing excerpts or summaries is not necessary.)
3. Select the discussion questions your group will engage ahead of time. (This is optional. Some groups prefer to select discussion questions together as

- they move through the session.)
4. Review the Psalm 42 reading, along with the concluding exercise/reflection. Decide how you will lead the group through these components of the session.
 5. Set up and test any equipment needed to play the film. If there are other technical pieces involved in your meeting, make sure those are ready as well.

COMMUNICATE

Send weekly email reminders with the meeting date, time, and location. Consider including the following information.

1. List the title of the session that will be covered that week, and assign coursebook reading (or audiobook listening) in advance. (If your group decides to read the entire session aloud together, it is not necessary to assign reading.)
2. Ensure that participants have access to the coursebook. You may choose to download and email the coursebook PDF (located on the [Course Content](#) and [All Media](#) pages), or encourage participants to create a free account at sanctuarymentalhealth.org to view the materials themselves.
3. If a participant has volunteered to lead a portion of the meeting (such as the icebreaker or closing prayer), include a reminder in the email.
4. Encourage all participants to bring a copy of the coursebook for reference during the meeting. (Participants may choose to print out individual sessions, or download the coursebook onto their phones, tablets, or other devices.)

PRAY

Pray for the members of your group, asking the Holy Spirit to meet their needs, heal their wounds, answer their questions, and prepare their hearts for growth. Pray for the discussions you will have during your meetings, and for grace and peace as you journey through the material together.

PREPARE TO MEET ONLINE

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

Read each session and watch the accompanying film before your group meets. Familiarizing yourself with the content in advance will help with facilitation and time management during the meeting. Many leaders utilize the following checklist in their preparations.

1. Select an opening question or icebreaker. (You may want to ask participants to take turns leading this portion of the meeting.)
2. Read the session and highlight key points. You may find it helpful to either select excerpts to read aloud during the meeting, or write a short summary to present to your participants. (We do not recommend reading the entire

- session aloud together during online meetings.)
3. Select the discussion questions your group will engage ahead of time. (This is optional. Some groups prefer to select discussion questions together as they move through the session.)
 4. Review the Psalm 42 reading, along with the concluding exercise/reflection. Decide how you will lead the group through these components of the session.
 5. Familiarize yourself with the tools and features of the online platform you have selected. For example, if you are meeting via Zoom, you may want to explore the share screen, chat, and poll features.
 6. Consider asking someone to be your co-leader. In an online environment, a co-leader can run the technical aspects of the meeting, lead a breakout discussion, or be available to check in with someone privately if they are distressed.

COMMUNICATE

Email a meeting invitation link to all of your participants before each session. Consider including the following information.

1. List the title of the session that will be covered that week, and assign coursebook reading (or audiobook listening) in advance. (We do not recommend reading the entire session aloud together during online meetings.)
2. Ensure that participants have access to the coursebook. You may choose to download and email the coursebook PDF (located on the [Course Content](#) and [All Media](#) pages), or encourage participants to create a free account at sanctuarymentalhealth.org to view the materials themselves.
3. If a participant has volunteered to lead a portion of the meeting (such as the icebreaker or closing prayer), include a reminder in the email.
4. Encourage all participants to have a copy of the coursebook available for reference during the meeting. (Participants may choose to print out individual sessions, open the course PDF in a separate browser window, or download the coursebook onto their phones, tablets, or other devices.)

PRAY

Pray for the members of your group, asking the Holy Spirit to meet their needs, heal their wounds, answer their questions, and prepare their hearts for growth. Pray for the discussions you will have during your meetings, and for grace and peace as you journey through the material together.

RUN AN IN-PERSON MEETING

START ON TIME

This isn't always possible, but it is helpful. Your group may want to address the following questions during the first meeting: What is a reasonable amount of time to wait for late participants? How should late participants be welcomed into a session?

OFFER HOSPITALITY

Greet each participant by name and let them know you are glad they are part of your group. Consider providing snacks and beverages in order to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

BE FLEXIBLE

Work through the sessions in the way that best suits your participants. Some groups may decide to complete the session reading in advance and reserve group time for the discussion questions, film, and exercise/reflection. Other groups may decide to read through the entire session aloud together and limit the time spent on discussion, exercises, and reflections. Here is an example of a typical in-person meeting structure:

1. Start the meeting with a quick check-in or icebreaker to see how everyone is doing. Ensure each participant has a copy of the coursebook available.
2. Review the suggested group guidelines in [Appendix A](#), and encourage participants to give the gift of attention and eye contact to those who are speaking.
3. Read the verses and accompanying reflection from Psalm 42.
4. If your group has decided to complete the session reading in advance, summarize the content in the section titled “The Psychological Perspective” and engage with any discussion questions contained in this section. (You may wish to read excerpts from the section that seem significant.) If your group has decided to read the entire session aloud together, read the content in the section titled “The Psychological Perspective.”
5. Watch the film together, and engage the accompanying discussion question.
6. Summarize or read aloud the remaining session content in the sections titled “The Social Perspective” and “The Theological Perspective.” Engage with any discussion questions contained in these sections.
7. Lead the group through the concluding exercise or reflection questions.
8. Close with prayer.

RUN AN ONLINE MEETING

START ON TIME

This isn’t always possible, but it is helpful. Your group may want to address the following questions during the first meeting: What is a reasonable amount of time to wait for late participants? How should late participants be welcomed into an online session?

BE FLEXIBLE

Work through the sessions in the way that best suits your participants. Here is an example of a typical online meeting structure:

1. Start the meeting with a quick check-in or icebreaker to see how everyone is doing, and to make sure all the technical pieces are in place. Ensure each participant has their coursebook open.
2. Review the suggested group guidelines in [Appendix A](#), and encourage participants to give the gift of attention and eye contact to those who are speaking. This minimizes distractions and supports relational connections when webcams are being used.
3. Read the verses and accompanying reflection from Psalm 42.
4. Summarize the content in the section titled “The Psychological Perspective” and engage with any discussion questions contained in this section. (You may wish to read excerpts that seem significant, but we do not recommend reading the entire session aloud together.)
5. Watch the film together, and engage the accompanying discussion question. If possible, share your screen with participants for viewing. Otherwise, direct participants to mute their microphones, click the film link, and view it on their individual devices before rejoining the group.
6. Summarize the remaining session content in the sections titled “The Social Perspective” and “The Theological Perspective.” Engage with any discussion questions contained in these sections. (You may wish to read excerpts that seem significant, but we do not recommend reading the entire session aloud together.)
7. Lead the group through the concluding exercise or reflection questions. If necessary, adapt exercises for an online environment. Suggest embodied responses to the prayers and spiritual practices found at the end of each session (such as closing eyes and placing hands on hearts during prayers, or practicing deep breathing while listening to scriptures read aloud). Embodied responses offer a visual reminder to all participants that they are “in this together.”
8. Close with prayer.

FACILITATION BEST PRACTICES

Encourage voluntary participation: Some of the course content deals with sensitive and painful subjects, and participants may not feel comfortable or able to answer particular questions. Please present all discussion questions as *invitations*, and respect individuals who choose not to share. Participants should also be given the option to leave the room or minimize their screens before the film is viewed in order to avoid triggering content. Please read the description for each film out loud and give participants a moment to decide if they will join in the viewing.

Acknowledge reality

It can be helpful to acknowledge particular dynamics or circumstances during a session. For example, if there is a distracting noise outside, a technical difficulty, or a misunderstanding during a discussion, stop and name it before attempting to address the concern.

Practice grounding

It may be appropriate to use a grounding or container exercise in order to help participants place emotional boundaries around particular discussions, stories, or films that have been heavy or difficult. You can also use breathing exercises

and prayer to help participants process emotional sessions. The following text can be used or adapted as a grounding exercise:

Imagine a container that is strong and sturdy enough to hold any heaviness or burden you are feeling in this moment.

What size is your container? What shape is it? What color is it? You might imagine a mason jar, a gift box, a suitcase, a vault, or any other container that comes to mind.

Imagine that you are placing any distressing thoughts or feelings or burdens into the container. Take your time. (Pause.)

When you are ready, imagine closing the container tightly. Lock it if you would like. Imagine placing your container into God's hands and leaving it there for now.

Maintain confidentiality

Confidentiality is essential for establishing trust and a sense of safety in your group. Participants' stories should never be shared outside of the group without their permission. However, it is important to communicate that if you believe participants are a danger to themselves or others, you will contact the appropriate emergency services. Please direct participants in need of professional or medical services to a health care provider, counselor, or mental health service agency.

Create a safe space and respect differences

The following tips can help create an atmosphere of safety and respect.

- Give undivided attention to each person speaking
- Briefly share your own experiences
- Thank participants for sharing
- Encourage participation from everyone
- Respect that participants may not want to share at any given time
- Be patient when presenting the group with a question, and make time for silence and reflection
- Refer participants to the group guidelines as needed
- Encourage the group to consider and explore different opinions
- Gently alert participants who may be speaking longer than the time can accommodate
- If side chats occur, remind participants to allow each person to finish speaking without interruption or distraction
- If the person speaking goes off topic, acknowledge their contribution and then guide the group back to the main point of the session by asking for additional thoughts

Observe best practices for online meetings

The following tips can help virtual group gatherings run smoothly.

- Ask everyone to mute their microphones when the film is played.
- Remind everyone to unmute their microphones after the film to enable discussion.
- Depending on your chosen platform and group size, it may be helpful to ask participants to mute their microphones when they are not speaking to reduce background noise.
- Use breakout groups if your group is too large to enable discussions where everyone can participate.

- Remember that attention span and focus require more energy in an online environment. Limit discussion times to ten-fifteen minutes.

SPECIFIC SESSION TIPS

Session 1 includes a discussion of group guidelines. You may want to review the suggested guidelines provided in **Appendix A** before your group meets. You may also want to reserve time during the meeting for the group to discuss how they want to work through the material and how they want to manage lateness.

Session 3 concludes with an exercise that requires paper, pens or pencils, and a jar. If you decide to engage in this exercise, make sure that you have these supplies ready in advance.

PLEASE NOTE

This course deals with sensitive subjects, including depression, psychosis, and suicide. Participants should use their discretion about whether interacting with this course feels safe for them. **We ask that no one watches the films alone.** Ideally, the films will be watched during your group meetings, but if you can't arrange this, please have your participants connect with at least one other group member when they watch the films. Each film description in the coursebook includes notes about what content may be sensitive for viewing.

We recommend that you familiarize yourself with the valuable mental health resource recommendations in **Appendix C** of the coursebook. We also recommend that you put together a list of mental health resources for your area.

For your quick reference, here are nationwide emergency numbers and crisis lines.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS:

Canada:	911
United States:	911
United Kingdom:	999
European Union:	112
New Zealand:	111
Australia:	000

Crisis Lines:

Canada:	1-800-784-2433/1-800-SUICIDE (British Columbia) 1-833-456-4566 (Crisis Services Canada)
United States:	1-800-273-8255 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)
United Kingdom:	116 123 (Samaritans)

New Zealand: 1737
(National Mental Health and Addictions Helpline)
0800-543-354 (Lifeline Aotearoa)

Australia: 13 11 14 (Lifeline)