



CONQUERERS

Does Your Brain Need a Workout? How Exercise Impacts Mental Wellness

DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Conquerors! These sessions have been specifically designed to educate on mental wellness topics while at the same time fostering peer support through authentic sharing. Peer support is a Biblical concept:

2 CORINTHIANS 1: 3-4

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

God’s word has been telling us all along what has been “discovered” and shown as very effective in mental health care in the last few decades. That is that being vulnerable, reaching out, and sharing life’s burdens is a HUGE part of mental wellness.

CONQUERORS SESSIONS ARE DESIGNED FOR GROUP USE!

While educating oneself is always good, to experience the full benefits of these educational videos it is recommended they be viewed with others and the questions discussed in a group.

What size of group?

Anything from two or three people getting together in a private home to a larger session at your church will work. One note: when using the material with a group of ten or more, breaking into smaller groups of around 5-6 participants for the discussion time will enhance individual participation.

What if I can’t join or organize a group?

If you can’t get together with others in person, consider using some sort of social media platform (Google Hangouts, for example) or Zoom to view together and then discuss. If you have no other option than viewing alone, please still take the time to stop the video at the end of Parts I and II. Reflect on the discussion questions and jot down your answers. Keep in mind that learning that happens through active exploration and discovery (for example searching for an answer on Google) is often more powerful than which occurs passively (a simple reading of answers or viewing a video).

Preparation

There really isn’t a great deal of prep required. Once you have your group and an agreed upon time, download and print out enough copies of the discussion guide so each participant will have a copy. Optional: discuss if your group would like to have refreshments during the break time, and organize those details.

Overview of a session

The sessions are designed to be two hours long. Here's an example of the timing of a session starting at 7 pm.

7:00 – 7:05	Greetings, choosing group leader, prayer
7:05 – 7:35	Video PART I
7:35 – 7:55	Discussion PART I
7:55 – 8:05	BREAK TIME
8:05 – 8:30	Video PART II
8:30 – 8:50	Discussion PART II
8:50 – 9:00	Video PART III

**Please note that these times are approximate. Actual video segments may be a little shorter or a little longer than the times indicated above.*

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Small group leaders:

We recommend that one person be chosen as a small group leader. The main responsibilities of the group leader are to keep an eye on the time, make sure the discussion stays on track, and to observe that everyone has the opportunity to share.

The leader is in no way expected to do extra preparation or 'know all the answers'.

Managing time:

The materials have already been used in numerous in-person sessions. While the time allowances suggested are considered appropriate for the number of questions, there is always variability in how long people want to discuss various questions. Keep in mind that there is a balance between exploring a particular question more deeply versus covering all of them. Obtain the input of all the participants and trust the Holy Spirit to guide you in where to spend your time.

SPECIFIC TIPS FOR DISCUSSION TIME

- Share experiences that directly relate to the topic of the session, using "I" language (see Group guidelines for description and example).
- It's recommended that you take notes during the session (space has been left for this in the Discussion Guide pages). Jotting down a list of suggestions or helpful hints from others who are dealing with similar challenges can be a great resource to refer to later.
- Strive to develop openness in yourself. Various perspectives, ideas and approaches may be brought up with respect to whatever the topic is. Keep in mind that there is usually no one absolute "right" approach. The goal is share ideas and be open to trying different things. Appreciate the wisdom that is in the room.
- We're aiming for progress, not perfection! The goal is that at the end of the session everyone has a specific action step of their own in mind on how to move forward.

- Think in term of baby steps! Consistent small steps are typically much more effective in the long run than attempting a huge and sudden change in behaviour.

WRAPPING UP A SESSION

Consider this:

How will you USE what you've learned? What one action step will you start with NOW? In case you're wondering, now means today! (Okay, it could be tomorrow if you're doing Conquerors as an evening session.) But not next week, "one day", or "when I have the time".

It can be very helpful at the end of a Conquerors session to go around and have participants share what they have chosen for their action step. If you feel led to do so, you may even want to form check-in buddies within the group, or create a follow-up session, where everyone shares their progress and you can brainstorm to problem-solve challenges that come up.

Remember,

We can achieve mental wellness together!

GROUP GUIDELINES

The following points are recommended to read and agree to the first time a group meets together for a Conquerors session. Mental health issues are, for many, very difficult to talk about. The aim of having guidelines is to ensure an environment where everyone can feel safe and comfortable to share.

1. ***Respect confidentiality!*** What is said in small group stays in the small group. Do not repeat any kind of identifying information to others!
2. ***Please turn off or silence your cell phones during group time.***
Respect everyone else's efforts to focus.
3. ***While participating in discussions, aim to speak from your own experience.***
This means using 'I' language rather than 'you' language. Hearing 'you' language can bring up negative emotions and defensiveness. Here's an example:
 - **'You' language:** (to be avoided)
"If you want your anxiety to improve, you should be more consistent in your devotional time."
 - **'I' language:** (the goal)
"I've found that when I'm intentional about having regular devotional time I struggle less with anxiety."
4. ***While truth does at times need to be addressed, please do so with grace and compassion.*** When in doubt, err on the side of grace. Treat others as you would like to be treated.
5. ***The question you think you're supposed to know the answer to (but don't!) is the very question you should ask.***
6. ***Speak even if your voice shakes.***

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

DOES YOUR BRAIN NEED A WORKOUT?

PART I

1) Which specific mental wellness benefit of exercise would you like most? (For example better sleep, clearer thinking, improved motivation, feeling calmer/ less anxious etc).

2) What has prevented you from starting an exercise routine? AND/OR
What has happened to get you off track when you have exercised regularly before?

3) Do you have any fears concerning exercise?

4) Brainstorm as a group some possible solutions for the challenges identified when answering Questions 2 and 3.

PART II

5) Take a couple of minutes (in quiet – no discussion) for everyone to write down their plan for exercise in the next week.

WHAT:

WHERE:

WHEN: (Ideally, identify three separate times during the week)

6) Share with each other ways you have found that make being active more enjoyable or purposeful, as well as creating an environment that is more conducive to exercising.

7) Discuss how you can create accountability for the exercise plans you wrote down in Question 5.

CONQUERORS – RESOURCES

DOES YOUR BRAIN NEED A WORKOUT?

Comment: be aware that the professionals listed below are secular experts. Magda does find the general scientific knowledge and explanation of data in these recommended resources to be excellent. Please note, though, that recommendation of these specific resources does not indicate a general endorsement of these individuals' work or opinions.

BOOKS:

The Depression Cure: The 6-Step Program to Beat Depression Without Drugs

by Stephen Ilardi, PhD

Specifically look at Chapter 6: Antidepressant Exercise

YOUTUBE VIDEOS:

Wendy Suzuki: The brain-changing benefits of exercise | TED

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHYoFxzoKZE>

This researcher describes how she used her deep understanding of neuroscience to do an experiment on herself on the transformative power of exercise.