

Encounter



An effective, easy to run, do-able resource for Christians who want to encourage genuine encounters with God for small groups of up to 6.

This resource is especially suitable for schools with children Key Stage 2 and upwards.

Background theology

- ◆ The Good Shepherd is constantly searching for lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7)
- ◆ There are many people not in our churches who may long to meet God but don't know how
- ◆ There are many unchurched people especially aged perhaps 45 or younger who live in a world of constant activity and noise

Encounter tries to facilitate encounter with God by providing:

- ◆ A quiet environment where it is safe and comfortable to hear God and to focus on His presence.
- ◆ A simple Scripture focus with a facilitator who says very few words and always gives the opportunity to respond.

Facilitating an Encounter Session

Please bear in mind safeguarding issues all the time during Encounter. If you are with children, always have another appropriate adult with you and please refer carefully to your safeguarding procedure.

Please see the photograph opposite for items you will need for each Encounter session.

As well as the equipment in the pictures, you will also need the following each time for Encounter:

- ◆ Some peaceful instrumental Christian music and something to play it on. The better the quality the more helpful this will be.
- ◆ A lighter or matches to light the Encounter candle.
- ◆ A lighter spill to light the tea lights.
- ◆ Another assistant.

1. Preparing to encounter God in quiet and relaxation



1. Preparing to encounter God in quiet and relaxation

The atmosphere for Encounter is extremely important.

The aim is to create a safe, quiet, uninterrupted and relaxing space where people come for a short time to consciously and expectantly meet with God.

Facilitators should have the space completely ready and be lying down and relaxing themselves as the participants enter to ensure the best possible ambience. As the facilitator, you will be very influential in setting the atmosphere. It is helpful for you to be praying during this time that you and the participants will indeed encounter God during this session of Encounter.

During the first five to twenty minutes people enter into a quiet, darkened room where there is a lit candle and gentle, instrumental Christian music playing.

Participants quietly take off their shoes and find a space on the blanket on the floor with a soft cushion. They simply relax, eyes closed and enjoy the softness and peace around them.

First time Encounter

It is amazing how quickly people get the hang of Encounter, and they will soon come into the space quietly and peacefully, take off their shoes and relax on the blanket.

However, the first time a group does Encounter, they will need some guidance.

- ◆ In a soft voice, welcome participants as they arrive and inform them to take off their shoes, find a cushion and a space on the blanket and enjoy the quiet and relaxed atmosphere where we are preparing to encounter God. Keep an eye first time to coach them to relax on their own with eyes shut not disturbing others. Lying face down often works best.
- ◆ Use the introductory Encounter based on John 8:12, 'I am the Light of the World.'

2. Hearing God's Voice through Scripture. The Scripture Reflections.

There is a short verse of Scripture for every Encounter session.

Each Scripture has a short 'comment' suggesting how the scripture may relate to the participants.

Props for the reflection

Sometimes, props will help or even be necessary for the reflection. This may be a commonly found item e.g. an empty perfume bottle, or a photograph. When possible, some of these have been included in this pack.

There are often responsive activities linked to the Scripture focus.

It is very important that participants are given a choice to respond and never feel they are expected to respond during any part of Encounter.

Facilitating the Scripture reflections

When you have come to the end of the relaxation time, turn the music down to a level where you will be heard when speaking in a soft voice.

- ◆ Tell participants the time has come for you to share something from God with them. Ask them to move to a comfortable position so they can see and hear what you have to tell them. Encourage them to move slowly and silently so everyone keeps the sense of peace. Make sure everyone is ready and can see and hear what they need to.
- ◆ Proceed with the reflection, retaining the sense of peace and awe.
- ◆ Discourage discussion at this point and ask if they would mind if they wait until the end of the session if they want to talk about something.
- ◆ When the reflection has finished, move onto 3.

3. An opportunity to acknowledge an encounter with God



When you have completed the reflection and everyone who wants to make any suggested response has done so, move to the candle which has been burning throughout. (Leave the music quietly playing in the background).

- ◆ Take the lighter spill and say these or similar words:
‘You may have felt during Encounter today, for a moment or perhaps the whole time, that you have known that God was here with us. It may have been during the relaxing time. Or perhaps during the reflection. If you would like to show you have had an encounter with God today, I invite you to take a light from our candle that represents Jesus, the Light of the World, and light one of our other candles.’
- ◆ Light the first candle yourself, then hand it over to another adult who is helping and who will wait and assist anyone who chooses to light their own candle. Tell people they do not have to queue up. There is plenty of time and we want to keep the peaceful atmosphere.
- ◆ When everyone who wants to light a candle has done so, move on to part 4. Pebble prayers.

4. Pebble Prayers



When everyone who wants to has lit their candle, take the container of pebbles in your hand.

- ◆ Tell participants you have come to the time when we can talk to God about someone we know if we like.
- ◆ If appropriate, you could suggest they think about them in context with the reflection (e.g. 'You might know someone who is in quite a dark place in life at the moment who would love to know that Jesus, Light of the World, is shining for them').
- ◆ Invite them to take a pebble in their hand. Tell them to think about that person and imagine your hand is God's love wrapped around them.
- ◆ After a short time, pass another container around and invite participants to place in their stone, which represents the person (or people) they were praying for. Let them choose whether to say the name of the person or people aloud as they put the pebble in or just to think the names silently.
- ◆ When all the pebbles are returned, place the container with their stones close to the Encounter candle and say, 'We will leave these people close to our candle which represents Jesus, the Light of the World, knowing that he will be close to them as we pray for them.'
- ◆ Once the pebbles are placed next to the Encounter candle, have a few moments of quiet and stillness before the quiet dismissal.

5. Quiet Dismissal

When the planned programme for the session is completed, tell everyone in a soft voice that is the end of Encounter for today.

Just as it is important to enter Encounter in a quiet manner, participants should be encouraged to put on their shoes and go out quietly.

Encourage them to take the sense of peace and calm they found at Encounter with them, and remember to bring this time back to mind during the week when they need it and when they can.

Don't turn off the music or blow out the candles until everyone has left.

It may be that people want to discuss something which came up from Encounter or just something on their heart. Don't ask for this, but if it comes up, encourage others to leave quickly and quietly and ask anyone who wants to talk for a short time to stay for a moment. Keep the voices quiet.

Please bear in mind safeguarding issues all the time during Encounter, but especially at this time when a young person may disclose something.

Always have another appropriate adult with you and please refer carefully to your safeguarding procedure.

This resource was devised by The Revd Sue Forrest-Redfern as a result of her work as Schools / Church Missioner in East Bolton

