

Leader's Guide

One Widow to Another: The Connection That Counts

Thank you for deciding to lead a group helping widows. Whether you are one, as am I, or someone who cares about us and wants to do something about it, you've made an important decision. We are a growing demographic with many needs and vulnerabilities. We have great potential. Moving through this time of loss in a positive way is important in determining our future, and in determining the ways we can give back and have a positive impact on those around us. By leading widows through this time, you can make a difference.

One Widow to Another: The Connection That Counts offers helpful information. Whether its about those puzzling, intense emotions--grief, fear, even depression, or basics of budgeting, this is a practical series. Most widows need encouragement. They feel alone, sometimes they feel like their losses are so great they'll never have another happy carefree day. We'll talk about changing families, friendships and the myriad of things that change. I hope, after watching each video that each participant takes time for discussion and reflection. Connecting to other widows can be a powerful force of encouragement, wisdom, and moving forward.

Throughout these 5 sessions of learning and encouragement, your group can develop important relationships. This journal is designed so that you can invite a small group of friends to your kitchen table, or a larger group to a room in your local library, church, or community center. Some widows may choose to view the series alone in their homes. Since individuals are different, we just want to encourage widows in whatever setting is good for them.

As a leader, we want to offer you the support you need. This is one resource provided by Widow Connection. We have others we'll refer to that will help both you as a leader, and be an added resource for your group. Our website, Widowconnection.com offers many tools, stories, and suggestions. I would encourage you, as a leader, to glean from the website

and the resources available. For a concise overview to get acquainted with the life of a widow, read the article, A Widows Might. It can be found under 'Resources.'

Our book From One Widow to Another: Conversations About the New You provides more in depth information on each topic of this DVD series. While this DVD series stands alone, that book can be a valuable resource for you as you prepare to lead this series.

Surveying the needs of the widows you hope to include is always helpful. You may choose to survey their needs before starting the group, or during the course of the sessions. That information will let you know specifically what is important to them. The survey can be downloaded from Widowconnection.com, under 'Resources,' then 'Church Resources,' right side. (FOWTA p. 205)

Are you ready to plan? Let's get started.

1. Review the video series.
2. Select a time and location that suits your group.
3. Enlist a friend to help you. For discussion time after the video, we recommend no more than 6 people to a discussion table.
4. Plan the time and keep your schedule. A suggestion is 15 minutes meet and greet, 40- 55 minutes, view video, 30-40 minutes, table talk time. Dismiss the group on time.
People can stay on if the space is available.

Starting small is a good plan. You can always follow with another group. If a widow prefers to attend with a friend, or neighbor, that's great. She may need the support and courage to show up. And her friend will learn much as well.

Don't be surprised if the women want to stay connected. Some groups plan socials, community service projects, teas, hike times and more.

If only one hour is available, the time can still be quite valuable. Show half the video and the remainder for discussion, personal application and prayer.

Given the fast pace and demands on widows (employment, children, and needed transitions) weekly consecutive sessions may be too much though that is preferable. Divide the study to meet the calendar that works for your group. Remember, for some, your group is their lifeline.

Involving Your Church

As you, as a leader, plan to move forward with offering this video series, it may be helpful for you to know how this video series can benefit your church. Whether you meet in your church, in a home, or the local library, the support of your church can be beneficial. Here are some suggestions.

Meet with those in leadership helping them recognize, know, and address the need. Utilizing the Leaders Guide DVD, ask them to view Dr. Bruce's interview. Seeing a church leader and hearing him describe the benefits of widows ministry in the church is an effective voice for the value of what you are doing. Bringing this DVD to that meeting with Dr. Bruce's interview ready will be effective and helpful as well.

Important points

The James 1 : 27 mandate is clear. It's the right thing to do.

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Pastor and ministry leader recommendations:

Scot McKnight

Karl A. Olsson Professor in Religious Studies

North Park University, Chicago, Illinois

Every pastor needs to read *From One Widow To Another: Conversations About the New You*. And every church needs this DVD series *One Widow to Another: The Connection That Counts*, as well as copies of this book available. Written and produced by a widow, for widows, it's a shared, intimate experience of sitting at a coffee table watching one widow minister to another widow. It's that personal. And because there are so many widows, it's that important.

Herb Reese, President
New Commandment Men's Ministries
Arvada, Colorado

Miriam Neff's *One Widow to Another: The Connection that Counts* is a must have resource for any pastor and church that seriously wants to minister to the needs of widows but are at a loss to know how to do so. This material offers biblical, practical and sensitive advice from actual widows who have been--and are--bravely navigating through the trauma of losing the love of their life. After the funeral and family meal are over and the sympathy cards have been sent, every church needs to reach for *One Widow to Another* and reach out to these dear women who are hurting so deeply.

I'm including here some fast facts about widows. Often these are eye opening numbers. As you get the word out about the series you will be offering, these facts help others understand the importance of what you are doing.

Fast Facts About Widows

800,000 women become widows every year in the United States.

Our friendship network shrinks by 75%

Financially, most widows experience decline and many experience surprises.

Our financial need declines by 20% However, our income declines by 33%.

Our average age is 52

Emotions of grief, anger, and loneliness intensify.

60% of widows experience significant illness in the first year.

Clinical depression is the most common illness.

After one year 50% no longer attend the church they attended with their husbands.

Our family tree rearranges itself often with surprises.

You are offering churches a valuable help and resource.

Many ministry and church leaders are overwhelmed with responsibilities. Rather than ADDING to their load, you are here to help. You may simply be requesting a room at a convenient time for the group and a coffee connection. If they can help in getting the information out via bulletins and the website, that's quite helpful.

A pot of coffee or tea, the DVD series and this journal are all you need.

A few thoughts for you.

It's important when you start a group to know what this series can provide and what it cannot.

Your group using this video series can provide an opportunity for sharing information and community resources, ideas on how to get through things, and simply feedback from someone else who has experienced something similar. We've found that we can check each other on faulty thinking, and avoiding making hasty decisions that don't help.

The group is not a therapy session or a time to share intimate details like specific numbers related to finances. As a group leader, you'll be responsible for guiding conversations acknowledging the good of the group, and boundaries between individuals.

If a conversation begins to focus on a problem that is intensely personal or inappropriate in the group, you might interject with this statement:

"Mary, that's an important issue, but let's talk about that after group time."

Remember too, that you are not in the role of psychologist, psychiatrist, or doctor.
Phrases that help in those situations might be:

“I see that is overwhelming to you. While I wish I could help, I think you need to connect with a professional about that.”

Rarely do those situations arise. But its good to be prepared in case the unexpected happens.

Here’s one very important guideline: **DON’T COMPARE**

We go through the days after our loss in very different ways.

Factors that determine our grief.

- Quality of marriage

- Length of marriage

- Circumstance of death (sudden, anticipatory grief)

- Legal proceedings

- Children: ages and relationship to dad and others

- Support network: friendships, church, other involvement

- Individual differences

All of these influence our moving into our new life.

I want to say a big “Thank You” for your heart to help widows. If you’d like to contact me, with either more questions or suggestions, I can be reached through Widowconnection.com.

Miriam Neff