



RAPHA GROUP GROUND RULES

Welcome to your Rapha Group. We are pleased that you have decided to join. We know this is a big step to make- both a commitment and a risk. We want to describe what is expected and how the group will work.

Prerequisites of a Rapha Group

1. **Personal Change:** The primary purpose of the group is to help equip your journey of personal change, making use of the principles from the Rapha Journey. Group members make a commitment to explore the root issues of damage in their own life, and to grow more of the person they are created to be.
2. **A Safe Place for Everyone:** The intention is that the group should become a safe place for every member. All members of the group agree to contribute to this goal.
3. **Confidentiality:** Nothing that is shared will be discussed with anyone else, not even partners, and not even in a prayer context. There must be a loyalty built between group members. The only exception should be that the group must feel free to contact Rapha directly, or the Rapha Team at Journey, if they have any concerns about any member or about the group.
4. **Consistent Attendance:** As much as possible, each member will seek to make the group a priority. Trust can only be built as there is a consistency in the group dynamic. If attendance changes regularly, especially in the first few meetings, this trust is very hard to establish. If it turns out that you miss meetings regularly we will suggest that you step out of the group and join another when you have more time.

What Happens in a Meeting?

5. **Warming Up:** The first 3-4 meetings prioritize a building of trust. Each person will share a little about themselves, their background and their thoughts about the workshop they have attended or listened to. Each person will contribute personally at each meeting. To aid relationship-building some groups may decide to listen to part of a CD from the Fireside Series and then talk about how it applies to their personal life.
6. **Ongoing Meetings:** Once trust is established members will share each week about the personal homework and baggage issues that they are working on. The priority is to listen, deeply and supportively, to each other, without interruption. Most weeks it is expected that members will contribute equally.
7. **Starting the Meeting:** Some groups like to start with a few minutes of quiet, while each person prepares themselves for the authenticity and significance of the meeting. This is the time when Christ is welcomed to the meeting, either explicitly or implicitly.
8. **Fireside CD Series:** Some groups listen to an excerpt from the Fireside messages recorded by Susan Williams, and then discuss its application. It is also helpful to use one of the meditations from the CDs as part of the meeting.
9. **Discussion:** Sometimes the group may want to agree in advance what they want to talk about the following week, so that each can prepare a contribution. Some groups prefer to be more spontaneous.

10. **Duration:** Each meeting is approximately 2 hours. The group should agree a time to finish and then stick to it, so that anyone who has to leave can and partners/ babysitters can be honored. Some groups have chosen to set an alarm on their phone or watch to notify everyone when 15 minutes is remaining. Others can stay on to continue more informally if they wish.
11. **Authenticity:** The group will only become effective if members agree together to be deeply authentic. The courage to do this will grow as trust grows. It is often a type of relationship that people have never experienced before. This will involve times of straight-talking, even confrontation, when it is invited mutually in the group. An effective Rapha group is a group where each member learns how to contribute to the transformative change in others, and how to receive support in their own journey of transformative change.

The Mutuality of the Group

12. **No Leader:** The groups will usually have someone who facilitates it, hosts it, co-ordinates it, but is not a leader. This is because everyone is equally responsible for the success of the group and our experience is that the Lord gives the greatest wisdom to those who know the least!! The facilitator is a full member of the group, sharing personally and being supported mutually by other members.
13. **All Participate:** The group is made up of people who are all on a journey. There are no observers. Everyone talks about their own issues, even though all those issues will be different. Each person makes a commitment to contribute personally, so everyone agrees to come to the group ready to participate, rather than just to listen.
14. **Nobody Dominates:** Fundamental to the safety of the group is that no one or two people will dominate the group, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Such a situation can be extremely harmful to the group's cohesiveness and progress. If everyone agrees, it is okay occasionally for one person in the midst of their homework to receive more support at a certain meeting. But this should not be the norm. It would make the group unsafe for others and will begin to feel abusive. Part of the benefit of being in a group is to learn to value making a contribution and to equally learn to value others' contributions. All members need to be mindful to honor the others. If more support is needed to work through a painful issue, it must be sought outside the weekly group meeting.
15. **No 'Experts' and No 'Advice':** A foundation of the group is to recognize that everyone's journey is unique. The way God deals with an issue in one person's life will not be the same as another group member. No member of the group will tell any other what they should be doing in their journey – this is between each person and the Lord directly. IF someone asks for a comment, members of the group can share a short personal testimony of what they have found most helpful. They can also make a gentle suggestion or reflect back what they have heard the person say. But generally it is recognized that the group is a safe place for someone to share where they are at, without needing answers.
16. **Post-Homework Rest:** There are times when a member goes through a period of "rest" after intense homework or a crisis. Alternately perhaps they find themselves stuck and unable to move forward for a week or two. When this happens the group member still commits to being fully present and engaged in the group meetings, sharing where they are at in their journey and helping to support the others. If something is happening so that a group member is unable to engage in personal homework for an extended period, it is expected that they will leave the group. They may rejoin or join another group later. The best interests of the group are served by all members participating mutually.

17. **Language:** As much as possible the group will avoid 'religious' language. Authenticity is important. The group must encourage each other to 'be real', rather than slip into phraseology that might be familiar but may also have become superficial. Scripture is not used as a 'simple' answer to a situation. Each person's experience and feelings are honored fully. They are encouraged to meet the Lord in their own way and in their own time.
18. **Silences:** Silences are not a problem! Learn to enjoy them.
19. **Relationship with God:** All group members recognize that Christ is at the center of their meeting. They endeavor to make sure that everything that happens is honoring to God. However, for some group members this will mean being free to admit that they do not want a relationship with God at the moment. In Rapha, this level of honesty is welcomed. There will be no pressure put on any group member to welcome Christ, although all group members commit to honoring those who do want to move more deeply into their relationship with God. Group members are asked to be very honest with each other about this.
20. **Local Church Commitment:** These Rapha groups are intended to supplement local church involvement and are not intended to be a replacement for local church commitment. It is our desire to equip local churches in their ministries. The group should never take on an 'exclusive' feel or be resented by others.

Homework Issues

21. **Taking Responsibility:** We recognize that there are times when group members will want to talk honestly and deeply about a breakdown in relationship. The group is not the place to focus on current relationship difficulties. These may often be a trigger to help connect with damage from the past... but the group must focus together on helping the person take responsibility for the personal change they are looking for, rather than placing the emphasis on another person or group.
22. **Honoring Others:** If there is a need to talk about another person or group, present or past, this should be done in an honoring way. The hurt can be acknowledged deeply and personally, but this is for the purpose of letting go of the pain and anger and finding God's solution. Dishonoring a family member or former church, etc., by perpetually blaming them and ranting about them is not appropriate. Admitting hurt and focusing on what the group member can address in their own spirit that will allow change and greater healing is the only way to bring honor.
23. **Emotion:** At any point in the group meeting, members are free to express emotion, but only in a way that the rest of the group are comfortable with. If that emotion is too disruptive or dominating, then the person will wait until a more private time to engage the emotion. The primary purpose of the Rapha group is not to 'do' homework, so it should be recognized that there may be people present who are uncomfortable with this. If someone is crying, there is no need to 'comfort' them, which is often a surreptitious message to them to stop. As long as the rest of the group is not disturbed by the weeping, let it continue.
24. **Prayer:** In Rapha we do not encourage praying 'for' someone. If a group member wishes the group to stand with them in prayer, and if everyone in the group authentically feels the timing is wise, the group will pray 'with' that person. The difference is that the individual is entirely responsible themselves for their choices, for repenting of sin, for letting go of pain and for hearing from the Lord. The group will witness their declarations and support them. Usually, especially as a group is beginning, it would be expected that this does not happen at a group meeting, but in a smaller gathering for any who would want to. Some members of the group may not feel ready to participate in this way.

This type of supportive prayer will rarely be offered – it will be at the initiative of the group member to ask. It will usually be after the group have first agreed that the person has found the 'diagnosis', the root issue of the damage and is now ready to let it go.

25. **Knowledge:** If one group member feels they may have knowledge for someone else, or the answer to a question, they will wait until the group is asked. If the group is asked, the knowledge is offered merely as a suggestion and the person is given the responsibility of testing themselves after the group meeting to see whether they find the suggestion helpful.

Changes, Endings and Problems!

26. **Free to Leave:** If someone decides to leave a Rapha group, they need offer no explanation to the group. But each member agrees that if they do leave, they will tell the group they are leaving, and not just be absent.
27. **Changing the Guidelines:** If these guidelines are to be changed, it will be with the careful agreement of everyone in the group, at a time when all group members are participating mutually.
28. **When a Member is Not Participating Mutually:** There are times in most groups where a group member is not able to participate mutually.

If a member finds it difficult to contribute: Other group members should gently encourage the group member to participate, creating the silences they need, listening without interruption. If necessary the group must explain that by persistently not contributing, the person is hurting the group, by refusing to make themselves vulnerable and refusing to trust.

If a member contributes too much: Other group members must tell the person that they are dominating the group and that they need to be as keen to listen and support others as they are to talk. Group members must openly help the person learn how to listen and support others. This will be part of helping them discover more of the damage in their life and become more of the person they are created to be.

If a member contributes inappropriately: A group member may persistently focus on blaming others, or raising issues that are unrelated to their personal change. The group must carefully remind the person that the group is specifically to support the homework journey, undoing damage and creating personal transformation. They will be expected to show the group member each time they raise something inappropriately and require they focus on their own homework.

29. **If a problem persists:** In the unlikely event that a group member fails to respond to the clear request of a group, they can be asked to leave the group. The group will notify the Rapha Coordinator (rapha@journeyweb.net) that the person is being asked to leave and give them the reasons. The person will usually not be given the opportunity of joining a new group until after the Rapha Coordinator is confident that the problem has been resolved. Anyone can contact Rapha directly if they are concerned about their own or another's position in a group.

More details of how these groups work can be found in the book: Meeting Jesus Together.

If you have suggestions for improving these guidelines, do let us know at EnquiriesUSA@RaphaJourney.com