

Organizing a book study

Books on mental health topics cover a wide range. The Pathways to Promise home page has a direct link to "Annotated Mental Health Resources," a page that includes brief descriptions of books on spirituality and mental health. The Congregational Resource Guide has additional book suggestions, including resources on addictions, trauma, and abuse.

Choose a book to help educate the congregation. Invite the clergy and leadership of your faith community to join in the reading project. Recommend the book to existing reading groups in the congregation or other small groups — house churches, youth and young adult groups.

If possible, pick a book that has an accompanying study guide. Then follow these simple steps:

1. Ask someone to facilitate the discussion.
2. Reserve the date or dates and a place to meet.
3. Help people get copies of the book by ordering copies through a local bookstore, over the internet, or directly from the publisher. Check to see if your local library has copies.
4. Prepare some handouts that list a few key local resources.
5. Send the author(s) a letter or email with any questions or suggestions you have.

Here are some suggestions about how to make the discussions work:

- Invite people to respond to the book as a whole as well as to various topics within it.
- Encourage participants to share their questions and their own experiences.
- Keep the conversation moving, inviting people to speak briefly and encouraging everyone to contribute to the discussion.
- Encourage participants to share the book with others in their family, the congregation, or the community.

Sample study guide questions. If the book you choose doesn't have a study guide, feel free to develop your own and distribute copies to group participants before the first meeting. Here are a few examples

1. Have you yourself ever had an experience with depression, bipolar disorder, or any other form of illness stemming from a brain disorder?
2. Has a friend or loved one ever experienced such a problem?
3. Think about your religious or moral upbringing. What did it teach you about?
 - How you should relate to those you know who are suffering?
 - What to think of a person who is different (in any sense) from you?
 - How to treat someone whose behavior seems weird or abnormal?