

Open When ✉ Discussion Guide

Getting Started Guide for Leaders

For additional support or discussion group ideas, please contact Elva Resa Publishing: pr@elvaresa.com, 651-357-8770

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION GROUPS

Book clubs and discussion groups are a valuable way to foster friendships, share ideas, and create a sense of community. Whether you are in an existing group or creating a new one, here are a few suggestions for reading and discussing *Open When: Letters of Encouragement* by Lizann Lightfoot in a group setting.

Leader preparation: Read *Open When* and the discussion guide before beginning, so you can answer questions from potential members about the subject matter. Knowing the content will also allow you to make informed decisions about group size, meeting locations, and discussion format.

Location: Choose a relaxing, comfortable place that will encourage discussion with few distractions. Be sensitive to the private nature of some personal stories when choosing your location. Match your group size with the space available. Keep in mind accessibility and any health, safety, or other requirements of the location.

Frequency: Decide if you'll meet weekly, monthly, or at other intervals. Select a time period that allows members to read the material and reflect between meetings, while maintaining the continuity of discussion.

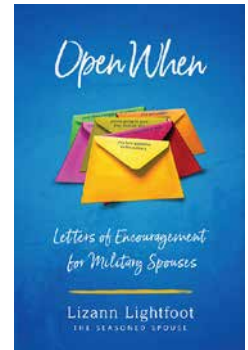
Moderator: The discussion leader can be one person, or group members may want to share leadership responsibilities. Having more than one discussion leader ensures the group will hear different perspectives. It also helps keep the responsibilities manageable. Don't pressure everyone to take a turn. Not everyone will be ready to lead these discussions. Consider asking a gentle time keeper to help your group stick to the time you've allotted for the discussion. Create an environment where everyone has a chance to contribute and feels comfortable sharing insights.

Refreshments: Take turns hosting and providing snacks. Engage your members and enhance the discussion by matching munchies to the ideas presented in the book.

Discussion format: Based on how often your group plans to meet and how much reading the participants can accomplish between meetings, decide ahead of time how many sessions you can devote to this book. Options to consider:

- » Assign one section of the book/group of letters for each meeting. Meet as many times as it takes to finish the book.
- » Discuss the entire book in one gathering. Ask participants to review some or all of the questions from each section before the meeting.
- » Select letters or topics that appeal to your group, and meet once for each set of letters or topics selected. Reading the entire book is recommended, even if the discussion only covers select portions.

Personal introductions: Before you begin discussing the book, take a few minutes for each person to share a bit about their family life, hobbies, and interests.



This **Open When Discussion Guide** will help you:

- » Reflect on your military life experience.
- » Share your experience with other military spouses.
- » Feel part of a community of other military loved ones who understand the challenges and rewards of military life.

Find the book at:

[MilitaryFamilyBooks.com/
OpenWhen](https://MilitaryFamilyBooks.com/OpenWhen)

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Privacy/trusted circle: Some discussions may involve experiences that are emotionally difficult to share or that may be very private. Encourage participants to honor the privacy of others by keeping all discussions within the group unless express consent to be shared outside the group is given by everyone involved in the story.

Traumatic experiences: Some participants may have experienced traumatic events. Be aware of situations that may require professional help or intervention. Do not pressure anyone to talk about their trauma. Be sensitive to others who may not be prepared to listen to discussions about traumatic experiences.

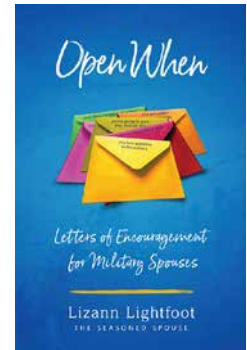
OPSEC: Please honor and remind participants to follow any Operations Security guidelines that may apply to their situation or your discussion or group activities.

Journaling: This discussion guide lists questions for participants to consider prior to the group discussion. Lines are provided to encourage participants to write out thoughts they want to share with the group. You may also suggest keeping a separate journal to write out longer answers, explore feelings about the topic discussed, and write notes about perspectives gained within the discussion group.

Community building: Individual letters or sets of letters in the book may be useful for various types of milspouse gatherings beyond a book club. For example:

- » When welcoming new spouses to a unit, host a discussion of the letters in the “New to Military Life” section of the book.
- » Before a busy moving season, host an installation-wide discussion of the PCS section, “Changes of Address.”
- » Before or during deployment, plan multiple meetings with families from the unit to discuss letters from the deployment section, “Sealed With a Kiss.”
- » As part of support and leadership training for experienced spouses, read aloud some of the letters from the section for “Seasoned Spouses.”

Write your own letters: Keep the discussion going by asking everyone in your group to write their own “open when” letters—to a spouse, child, friend, coworker, neighbor, or anyone who could use a little extra support! This is a great way for readers to spread the encouragement they discover in the book. They can keep in touch with group members by sharing the reactions of their friends who received letters. Or they can write letters to inspire other members of the group. This book is all about encouragement, so readers should leave your discussion feeling encouraged and supported on their military life journey!



Supplemental Resources:

SeasonedSpouse.com

» Blog by Lizann with articles and resources about many aspects of military life.

[Handle Deployment Like a Boss](https://www.facebook.com/HandleDeploymentLikeaBoss/)

» Facebook group managed by Lizann, for military spouses going through their service member's deployment.

MilitaryFamilyLife.com

» Articles and resources about many aspects of military family life.

MilitaryFamilyBooks.com

» Books for all ages on many aspects of military family life.