How to Start Running an

Alpha for Prisons Course

Training

**Speaker Notes**

*This session helps the delegates think about what they will do to start planning their Alpha course after the training event is over. This session is designed to ensure the delegates leave knowing exactly what needs to happen to get the course started and running effectively. Therefore, be prepared to take it slowly and answer any questions as you go along. Ensure there’s no confusion and use this session to clear up any misunderstandings or misconceptions (eg, ‘We can’t run Alpha because we don’t have any money/a laptop’ etc).*

*Format – if possible, give each group a flipchart and markers, or make sure each group writes down their ideas so they can feedback at the end.*

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| **Talk Element** | **Considerations** | **Suggested Solution** |
| Introducing the local team | Are the local team well known to the delegates? | Check with the local coordinator if they think is a good idea to bring the local team on stage introduce them, explain what they do and how they can be contacted |
| Alpha for Prisons action plan | Do you have a copy?  Have the delegates been given a copy? | Check before you go on stage that the delegates have been given the booklet already. If they haven’t ensure the rest of the team are available to distribute the action plans |
| Prepare and Plan | Which month do you suggest the delegates start running their course? | Say the month 2 months after your training event, but check with the Local Coordinator that there are no major obstacles to starting then |
| Local contact | Introduce local person/people who can help guests with questions about their course | Try to give as much profile as possible to the Local Coordinator / National Alpha Office, as they will be doing the follow up questions |
| Alpha Course Administrator | How to run the Alpha for Prisons course handbook are mentioned in the talk | Ensure you have a sample available to show otherwise give a link to the information- <https://run.alpha.org/en_US/preview/training> |
| Registering your course | Go to the Alpha website to register/build your prison course | Links: [alphausa.org](https://run.alpha.org/en_US) |
| Where is the course being held? | What potential places are there in the prison to run the course eg are there chapels, classrooms, an outdoor patio? | Check with the Local Coordinator/Chaplain where in the prison the course can be run. |
| Deciding how to deliver the talks | Which talks will work best with your timeframe | Download talks or order DVD copy  <https://run.alphausa.org/>  Order: <http://www.churchsource.com/alpha> |
| Alpha Day | Would the prison service allow a whole day for this? | Please check with the Local Coordinator/Chaplain. |
| Local Alpha invitation | Does a local Alpha for Prisons invitation exist | Have an example ready to show, order online at the Alpha store. contact Alpha Prison office mgr. <mailto:louronna.richardson@alphausa.org> |
| Follow up training | Is there any follow up training planned? | Check with the Local Coordinator and add in dates are there is follow up training planned |
| Introductory event | Insert a story about an introductory event if you have one | Check out the many intro stories available from Alpha for Prison or request the Paul Cowley DVD from <mailto:louronna.richardson@alphausa.org> |
| Feedback & Questions and Answers | Ask each group to feedback one idea they have that they are excited about that no one else has shared yet | Allow approximately 15 minutes for feedback.  Ensure all outstanding questions have been answered, so no one leaves without their question being answered |

**Transcript**

**Slide 1 – Title slide**

Now we want to give you the chance to think about how you are going to run Alpha in your area. You have heard a huge amount of information and you have probably been thinking about how you can translate what you have learnt into actually running a course in the jail or prison. So, this is your chance!

In this session we’re going to help you to start thinking practically by getting you to think about the practical steps you will need to think about to run a course. We’re going to spend some time taking you through the key decisions you need to make, to point you in the right direction. We want to make this session as useful as possible, so it will make sense to break you into groups. There are two ways to break down:

If you came with someone from the church or town, then you should all sit together so you can make a plan together about how to start Alpha in your local prison.

Hopefully you have made friends over these few days and you now should know who is who. I’m going to give you a few minutes to arrange yourselves in groups of no more than four people.

*Wait while the delegates arrange themselves into groups.*

If you have any questions during this session, the team are here to help you, and give guidance about running your course – so please call any of us over to help you if you would like some help.

In your pack you have each been given an Action Plan. If you don’t have one, please put up your hand and someone will bring one to you. You can take this Action Plan away with you and refer to it, but we are going to work through this now. As you will see, it takes you through the steps you need to PREPARE for your Alpha course, PLAN your course, and PROMOTE your course.

**1 Preparation for your Alpha course**

Following this training there is some preparation you will need to do for your Alpha course. This will take some time, so perhaps if you want to start a course as soon as possible, you could use the next months preparing and planning for your course, with a view to starting a course in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. These are the things you will need to do in the next month:

**(a) Pray**

Prayer is vital to the planning, preparation and effectiveness of any Alpha course. We recommend finding a group of people who will pray for every aspect of the course, from the beginning of your planning, throughout the course to the last session and follow-up. We know that prayer is very powerful. One of the big mistakes is to start a course without prayer. The enemy Satan is not happy that we want to start an Alpha course in prison. So we need to make sure that we have people praying for us.

**(b) Contact your [National Alpha Office/Alpha for Prisons Coordinator/Alpha for Prisons Adviser]**

The most helpful person to help you run an excellent Alpha course, is [name of applicable local person]. There are so many ways in which they can help you. [He/She] can help you find people to speak at events, help introduce the Alpha course to your church leadership and give practical advice to you. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have during the discussion times.

**(c) Choose the prison where you will run the Alpha course**

If you live close to a prison, it would make sense to run your course there rather than another prison. Try and work together with other churches and volunteers to run the course. This will give you more volunteers and resources.

**(d) Inform your church leadership team**

The next thing you need to do is talk to your church leadership and prison chaplaincy about running the Alpha course. Some of you here may be church leaders and prison chaplains, and some of you may not be. If you are not the church leader, you will need to ensure you have the support and blessing of the church leadership in your own church and in the prison before you begin. Having this support will make a great difference to the success of your course. You might like to meet with your church leadership team and prison chaplain to explain what the Alpha course is and share some of what you have learned at this training event.

Please take a moment now to write down the names of any people or groups of people that you will need to speak to about running the course in your local prison.

[You will come back to envisioning church members later when you discuss ‘Promoting Your Course’]

**(e) Meet with the prison director/ prison Chaplain to gain approval for the Alpha course**

You need to seek permission to run the Alpha course in the prison. The reason for doing all the preparation and planning that I’m outlining is so that we can go in prepared. Then the prison director will see that we are prepared. Consequently the course is more likely to run smoothly with no problems and they will be happy.

**(f) Appoint a course leadership team**

The next question that you need to ask yourself is who will be your course leadership team? In many prisons there are very strict rules. If the wrong team comes in and they break the rules, the director/warden will stop them visiting the prison.

While often people do more than one of the roles, generally we split the course leadership in the following three roles: the course leader, the course administrator and a Worship leader.

For the role of Alpha Course Leader, you will need to appoint someone to head up the course in your prison. The course leader should have attended an Alpha Training Event and be a mature Christian in the leadership of the church who has a heart for evangelism. The course leader hosts each Alpha session by welcoming the guests at the start of each session. The course leader will also host the team training sessions, has overall pastoral responsibility for the course and may also deliver some of the Alpha teaching.

Next, you need to consider who will be your Alpha Course Administrator – in other words who will organise all the practical details? This person is responsible for all the work behind the scenes, making the course happen, so this person needs to be somebody who has great organisational and communication skills. It should be somebody with a passion for the Alpha course - although probably says they aren’t a natural evangelist - but has lots of energy and enthusiasm. This person will also need to have a certain amount of authority, as they will head up two teams - one team being the small group hosts and helpers, the other team is the task force team, which helps with the practical aspects of the Alpha course.

[*How to Run the Alpha for Prisons Course Handbook* is a valuable tool for the Alpha Administrator and offers advice on the practical aspects of what to do before and during the course.]

The final role you will need to find someone to fill is that of worship leader. At the start of each session, the worship leader leads the guests in one or two worship songs. The worship leader needs to understand leading people who aren’t yet Christians, using a simple style and songs, ushering them into the presence of God even though they don’t yet know him.

I’m now going to give you a few minutes to think about who you would like to approach to be the Alpha Course Leader, the course administrator and the Worship Leader, and write the names of the people you are going to invite beside the roles in your booklet.

Feedback! [Hear from about three people on both who they need to inform, and who they are going to invite and why]

**(g) Register your course**

Once you have the church leadership on board and the course leadership is in place, please register your Alpha course. You can now find everything you need, including registration, in [Run](http://alphausa.org/run). Sign up to Alpha Builder and promote your Alpha on [https://run.alphausa.org/](https://run.alphausa.org/%20) in order for families and friends of potential guests to find out about your course. This also helps Alpha know how many courses are running in different places around the world, so they are able to send more training teams like us and other resources to places where they are needed.

**2 Plan your Alpha course**

Now that you have a course leadership team, there are several things you need to decide and plan together, starting about **months prior** to the start of the course:

1. **Who is your course aimed at?**

Is there are particular group of people that you would like to aim your course at? When you understand who the people are that you hope to have come on your course, focusing on that particular group will help you make the rest of your planning decisions. For example, you might decide to run a course for young offenders, for prisoners serving life sentences, for prisoners on remand or for a mixture of these groups. The type of group that you have might determine the length of time for the course.

Take a couple of minutes now to think about and discuss who you would like to have attend your course. It may be that you decide to run it with your course volunteers the first time, so they know what the course is.

1. **When to hold your course**

Now you know who you want to aim your course at, you need think about when you will hold your Alpha course, so you are able to promote it, and the hosts (prison) and taskforce know when it is starting so they keep the dates free. The types of questions you need to ask yourself when deciding when to hold your course are:

* How frequently will you run the course? Will the course be weekly?
* Which day would be best? Available?
* When will the course start? If you plan out the dates, will that mean your course hits any major holidays that the volunteers can’t make? Is this an appropriate time for the prison and does it fit in with other activities that the prisoners are engaged with?
* How long will the course last?

If you run the course for young offenders, you might decide to run a Youth Alpha course. If you run the course just for prisoners who have been sentenced for life, you might decide to run a 15 week course. But if you run the course for prisoners who are on remand and are not in prison for very long, another option would be to run a 7 week course and fit all the teaching sessions into that time. This could be done by running 2 sessions a week or combining 2 talks into one and running 1 session a week. We call this Fast Track Alpha. By running Alpha in this way, it enables more prisoners to have the opportunity of completing the course. Or maybe you will run the course for prisoners who are of different ages and are serving differing lengths of sentence. In the small groups you may also want to think about people who speak different languages – one group who speak English and one group who speaks maybe Spanish..

The Alpha course works best as a continuous programme which means that guests from one course can invite their friends to the next one, so it is important to think ahead and plan when each course will happen during the year. In many places this is done by running the course two or three times a year. Once planned, you can fit the dates into the prison calendar so everyone knows when the Alpha course and is able to plan and promote accordingly.

Please take time now to discuss where and when you are going to hold your course, taking into consideration all the elements which will affect your guests. On the action plan, there is a list of the sessions you will need to plan to help you. Please remember to ask the team if you have any questions during your discussion.

1. **Plan how the teaching will be delivered**

The next thing to decide is about the teaching sessions. It is a good idea to think now about these questions:

* *What age is the group of people that you are reaching out to?*

- *How much time do you have for the Talks?*

*- Is there someone to open the session with a song, joke or statement?*

When you practice ask others to come and listen to you and offer feedback. Or is there somebody in your church who is not a prison pastor but who would be able to do the talk well.

1. **Where are you going to hold your course?**

The next thing to plan is where would be the best place to hold your course to ensure those people attend. Does your prison have a suitable place? If your room is this size then how many small groups can it fit? You may not fit 20 groups in this room. You will probably not have much choice about where to hold the course in the prison so try to make it as inviting and welcoming as possible with the space that you have.

1. **Select a venue for your Alpha Day**

The next thing to think about before you start promoting your course is where to hold your Alpha Day. As the Alpha Day teaching is looks at the person and work of the Holy Spirit, it is important that the guests are able to completely concentrate on the teaching. It is also normally the time when friendships really grow in the groups, so it is great to think is there is somewhere different in the prison where you could take your groups. If there isn’t, it’s good to think of ways to make the day special, for example, by having food that they wouldn’t normally have or putting up some decoration.

Is there another venue in the prison where you can run the Alpha Day?

If there isn’t how can you make the Day a bit more special?

1. **Prepare Alpha course invitations and posters**

It is important to think about how you are going to invite people to come on your Alpha course. You can make your own invitations/poster setting out:

* information about the course
* dates of the course/ Time and location room
* maybe some testimonies of people who have attended the course in the past and enjoyed it.

Ask the Chaplain to post in offices or bulletin boards

You will be able to use these when you go onto the next stage of promoting your course.

1. **Select Alpha Group Hosts and Helpers**

One of the most critical decisions that you need to make is who will you ask to be your small group hosts and helpers. The ideal group size is no more than 12 people in total, for which you will need two hosts and two helpers, and 8 guests – so you need to think about how many hosts and helpers you need to invite to match the number of guests you think may attend your course. **Sometimes in prison, guests need more time to speak and be listened to so smaller groups might work better, for example, 6 guests, 1 helper, 1 host.**

As you now know, selecting the correct hosts and helpers is critical to the success of your course. Can you remember the key things about selecting small group hosts?

* hand pick your team, rather than ask for volunteers
* when selecting your team, look for people who are able to relate to people outside the church, outgoing, patient and confident
* Ideal qualities for a group host are: friendly, confident, humble, mature and committed
* Ideal qualities for a group helper are: friendly, outgoing, a good listener, interested in others, committed
* ask the question, ‘Would I want my best friend, who does not have a living relationship with Jesus, to talk to this person about Christianity?’
* can they commit to coming to the course every week, including the training before and the Alpha Day?
* Remember that you can always ask people to help behind the scenes by praying

The hosts and helpers can also do all the practical work behind the scenes during an Alpha session, including:

* Welcoming the guests as they arrive
* Setting up the chairs for each small group
* Giving guests and Alpha course manual/handouts
* Preparing and serving any food and drink
* Clearing the venue at the end of the session

1. **Train your Team**

The final thing you need to do before the course starts is train your hosts and helpers. As you know, two of the three main training sessions take place before the course, and another just before the Alpha Day. Hopefully you have remembered to plan those into your dates for the course. The training ensures everyone who will be hosting or helping in a group has heard this training. If you prefer, there will also be follow-up training events similar to this one is over for you to bring your team to. [Check the local situation and details so you can tell the delegates the dates and venues] Please sign up to bring your team to one of the events by [let them know how]

1. **Consider security issues**

As mentioned above, it is important to consider all personal security implications while planning your course. For example, it could be that an Alpha session is cut short because an order is given for all the prisoners in the prison to return immediately to their cells. It is important that those running an Alpha course obey these orders. If they don’t, the governor might stop them from continuing to run the Alpha course in that prison.

As well as the security clearance requirements for anything brought in from outside of the prison, some other security considerations include:

* The maximum number of guests (ie prisoners) that you will be allowed
* The security procedure for volunteers coming in from the outside (both ahead of time and on the day)
* Permission regarding where and how you can advertise your course

1. **Consider the costs**

* What costs will there be and how much will they be?
* - drinks and snacks if allowed (may have to be purchase within the facility)
* - guest manuals or copied pages
* - transport for volunteers
* How will you fund these?

**3 Promote your Alpha course**

The final major stage in preparing for your course is in the **promotion** of the course. You need to consider:

* When and how will you introduce Alpha for Prisons to your church/prison?
* How will you get the support of your church to pray for Alpha while it’s still running?
* How will you promote your course?
* Who will invite people the course? And how?

1. **Envision the Christian prisoners who already go to church**

Most people attend an Alpha course because they have been invited by a friend, so the Christian prisoners are the best advertisement for the course. They are the ones who will be inviting friends to attend the course. To envision them and encourage them to invite their friends to the course, you can:

* share what you have learned and experienced here at this training event
* ask the church to pray for the effectiveness of the course, or find a special group who will pray every time you go into the prisons or jail.

1. **Hold an Alpha church service**

Another thing you can do is hold an Alpha church service a week before your course starts, when the prison congregation brings their friends to church to hear an evangelistic talk, information about the Alpha course and receive an invitation to attend the course.

1. **Hold an Alpha introductory event**

Another way to promote the course is to hold an Alpha Introductory event, for example with special snacks or gathering, where you explain what the Alpha course is, and inspire people to attend the course, by hearing a testimony from someone whose life has been changed by Jesus.

(Alpha Prison has a dvd: The God who Changes Lives (order it free from [Louronnarichardson@alphausa.org](file:///C:\Users\Lou%20Ronna%20Richardson\Documents\Alpha\Alpha%20training\1-%20Start%20Alpha\Leaders%20Info\Louronnarichardson@alphausa.org))

1. **Hold an Alpha Celebration**

At the end of your course, we recommend holding an Alpha Celebration, which again can be a special meal or gathering where guests who have just completed the course can invite their friends to find out what they have been doing on the Alpha course.

It's very special to handout certificates to those who completed the course.

The final thing there is for us to look at is the running program of a typical Alpha session. You have experienced a few of these by now, so this should seem familiar – and of course you may need to change this to fit your context – but this is a fairly typical timetable for an Alpha session.

You need to think about whether it’s important that you arrive when you say you’re going to arrive or if the prison authorities are flexible about this.

Example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **5pm**  **5.15pm**  **(30 minutes)** | **Meet at the prison gate**  **Preparation Meeting**  Course Leader, Speakers, Hosts and Helpers meet to worship, pray for the session, deal with any administration and set up for session |
| **5.45pm**  **(15 minutes)**  **6.00pm**  **(10 minutes)** | **Part of team collects prisoners**  **Coffee and biscuits**  Guests are allocated to small groups as they arrive for the first time. The group eats and enjoys fellowship together to get to know each other – discussing work, home lives, family – but not religion! |
| **6.10pm**  **(10 minutes)** | **Welcome and joke** |
| **6.20pm**  **(10 minutes)** | **Worship**  If your course is large enough, introduce one or two worship songs |
| **6.30pm**  **(20-30 minutes)** | **Talks/Teaching**  Use the Alpha DVD course (Alpha Live, Youth Film Series, Alpha Film Series) |
| **7:00pm**  **(10 minutes)** | **Coffee, snack or refreshments/ get into small group discussion area** |
| **7:10pm**  **(45 minutes)** | **Small Group Discussions**  Guests have the chance to respond to the teaching, share their opinions and discuss issues relevant to them |
| **8:00pm** | **Finish**  Formal part of the session finishes |

I hope that has given you an idea of what you need to do to plan and get started with your course.

Has anyone had any particularly good ideas? Would anyone like to share what plans they have made?

Please contact the Alpha Prison Team for any questions or share some of your ideas!

[Alphaprisons@alphausa.org](file:///C:\Users\Lou%20Ronna%20Richardson\Documents\Alpha\Alpha%20training\1-%20Start%20Alpha\Leaders%20Info\Alphaprisons@alphausa.org)

We are very excited about your Alpha courses, and we will pray for them.