

Screen-Free Philosophy Clubs Are Filling a Social Gap

Article (approx. 247 words)

In a back room above a bookshop in Manchester, an after-work philosophy circle is quietly drawing a crowd. The idea was sparked off by a tired project manager who wanted conversation that went beyond small talk. Now, once a week, strangers show up, drop their phones into a box, and take a seat with tea and cheap biscuits. The organisers say they are not chasing gurus or self-help slogans; they are trying to make thinking social again, one low-pressure meeting at a time.

Each session starts with a provocative question printed on a single sheet: What counts as a good life? Can you be happy and ambitious? Groups of five bounce ideas around in three timed rounds. The rules are simple: listen, ask, and don't perform. People often open up about work, ageing parents, or money worries, then pause to sit with someone else's view. When the conversation gets tangled, the facilitator helps the table tune out the urge to win and focus on clarity.

Members say the appeal is partly practical. In a city where calendars fill up fast, a fixed ritual makes it easier to meet new people without awkward networking. Some attendees first turn up out of curiosity and keep coming because the tone is candid yet rigorous. Others like that they can walk away with a fresh angle rather than a forced conclusion. For many, the club has begun to strike a chord: a small weekly antidote to feeling drained by endless scrolling.

True/False

Write T (true) or F (false).

1. The group meets in a back room above a bookshop in Manchester.
2. The club was designed as a guru-led self-help programme.
3. Participants are asked to put their phones away during the session.
4. The discussions are mainly lecture-style, with one speaker doing most of the talking.
5. Members talk in small groups through several timed rounds.
6. The facilitator encourages people to 'win' arguments rather than listen carefully.
7. A regular meeting time helps busy people socialise without formal networking.
8. Many people return because the atmosphere is honest and intellectually demanding.

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. sparked off	A. stop paying attention or listening
2. show up	B. become completely full
3. fill up	C. leave a situation to avoid further involvement
4. open up	D. arrive or be found, often unexpectedly
5. turn up	E. share and develop ideas together in conversation
6. tune out	F. cause something to start suddenly
7. sit with	G. feel familiar or emotionally meaningful
8. bounce ideas around	H. start speaking more honestly about feelings
9. walk away	I. think about an idea without rushing to judge it
10. strike a chord	J. arrive or appear

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. resurgence	A. hesitant
2. antidote	B. unity
3. tentative	C. routine
4. rigorous	D. revival
5. cohesion	E. frank
6. ambiguity	F. stimulating
7. candid	G. remedy
8. ritual	H. exhausted
9. drained	I. thorough
10. provocative	J. uncertainty

Discussion Questions

Student A (personal experience)

1. Would you show up to a screen-free event like this after work? Why or why not?
2. Which topics help you open up most easily: work, family, money, or something else?
3. When you feel drained, what routine helps you recover fastest?
4. Do you ever tune out in conversations? What usually causes it?
5. Have you ever joined a club that filled up your social calendar quickly?
6. What kind of question would make you sit with an idea for a few days?
7. Do you prefer small-group chats, or big group discussions where people turn up and move around?
8. After a deep talk, do you usually walk away feeling lighter or more tired?

Student B (opinions and deeper discussion)

1. Why do you think philosophy clubs are seeing a resurgence in some cities?
2. Is a fixed ritual (same day, same format) essential for community, or does it become limiting?
3. When people bounce ideas around, does it reduce conflict or simply hide disagreement?
4. Should a facilitator push for rigorous thinking, or protect a low-pressure atmosphere?
5. Is it realistic to expect strangers to open up without trust built over time?
6. Does social media make us more comfortable sharing, or more anxious in face-to-face talk?
7. What is the best antidote to loneliness: structured groups, close friendships, or something else?
8. Has any idea ever struck a chord with you and changed how you live day-to-day?

Answer Key

True/False: 1-T, 2-F, 3-T, 4-F, 5-T, 6-F, 7-T, 8-T

Phrase Match: 1-F, 2-J, 3-B, 4-H, 5-D, 6-A, 7-I, 8-E, 9-C, 10-G

Synonym Match: 1-D, 2-G, 3-A, 4-I, 5-B, 6-J, 7-E, 8-C, 9-H, 10-F