

Facilitating Group Dynamics

Every group will have a combination of personalities. Knowing how to create an ideal environment by responding appropriately to different personalities will help create a healthy atmosphere for everyone in the group.

How do I handle the talkative person?

Engage with what the person is saying, but then immediately ask specific people in the group to respond or share their insights. Say, “Thanks (person’s name), I appreciate you sharing that. Does anyone else have something to say? Or what do you think about what (person’s name), shared?”

Avoid maintaining eye contact as they are talking, as this communicates that you want them to keep talking.

If needed, talk to them one-on-one after or before the next group time. Explain how while you appreciate their sharing, it is important to create space for the others in the group to share. For example, in a private conversation, you could say, “Our goal is to get everyone to participate. Have you noticed that we have a few really quiet people? I’ve noticed that you are very outgoing and eager to share. That’s good! I’m like that, too. Can I ask you to help me draw out the quieter group members? When I ask a question, will you wait a few moments before you speak? That may encourage others to speak up...”

How do I handle the shy person?

Do not call them out for not speaking. Instead, encourage them with questions, affirmations, and listening intently to their comments.

Bring them into the conversation by saying something like, “So (person’s name), what do you think?” Or, “I’d love to hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet...”

How do I handle the emotionally needy person?

Show healthy concern so that you do not minimize what they are experiencing.

Offer to meet with them outside the group instead of spending a significant amount of group time talking through things with them. For example, you could say, “Thank you for opening up to us. Since our time is so limited right now, may I set up a time to talk with you more? Let’s talk at the end of our small group time and make an appointment to talk.”

If more care is needed than the group can offer, recommend additional support (if you need ideas of resources, contact a pastor for help).

How do I handle the “advice giver”?

It is best to talk at the beginning of a new group or a new curriculum to establish guidelines about advice giving. People should not be allowed to give advice unless it is requested. Encourage people to ask more questions rather than giving solutions.

If this continues to be a problem, talk with the person in private outside of the group setting.

How do I handle tangents?

Acknowledge the tangent, but gently bring the group back to the topic. You could say, “That’s a great topic, but let’s table that for the time being...I’d really like to hear what everyone else thinks about our discussion topic.” Then bring the group back to the topic by reviewing and summarizing where the discussion got lost.

Use a key word (e.g. let’s not go down a rabbit trail) to remind the group they’re on a tangent and gently pull the group back on topic.

How do I handle difficult questions?

Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know.”

Offer to find an answer and report on it next time, or open the question up to the group if you believe it can be talked through in that timing and setting.

Assign members the task to research the question, give guidance for references to use.

Email a Pastor for help or insight.

How do I handle an argumentative or negative individual?

Keep your composure and don’t take things personally.

Examine what is being said and try to find the good in it (bring them alongside you).

Visit them one on one to see if this is a personal problem, communicate that their ideas are important, but that the behavior can’t continue. Encourage them with the positive behavioral traits our life groups value—like respecting the opinions of others, pausing to let everyone share and discuss together, and not offering personal advice.