

Difficult Personalities

Every group will be different, but there are some common difficulties that leaders face when it comes to different personalities. Below we have a few examples of some common challenges when it comes to group members, and how to navigate them.

The Dominant Member

Don't sit opposite them; try to sit next to them. When they speak for too long, gently put a hand on their arm in order to get their attention. Work to affirm them, while at the same time "dealing with them."

E.g. "You have some great thoughts there, Josh, thanks so much for sharing. I wonder what the rest of you think..." and then look directly at or gesture towards other members.

If it is making a serious impact on the group, talk to the person afterwards. Ask them to help make space for others to share. Ask them to help take a facilitator role. Acknowledge that they often have an answer, and encourage them to help others share instead.

The Theological Debater

This is the person who has that one topic they always want to debate, e.g. Calvinism, predestination, church leadership etc.

When you first notice it, gently remind them about what the question was. They may not realize they are doing it. Divert them back to the topic. If it keeps on happening, talk to them separately. Affirm that it is a valid discussion to have, but Community Group is not always the place for it.

Suggest that if it something they want to continue discussing, they can reach out to their Lead or Associate Pastor, and they can go into depth about it with them.

The Skeptic

There may be certain topics that are brought up in the discussion that could be uncomfortable for them. There may also be skeptics who don't talk or live the way the rest of the group does.

Tips:

- Most importantly, do all things in love.
- Start the meeting by reminding all members that this is a place for honest discussion. Not everyone will have agreed with the sermon, or with each other,

but we want to live by what the Bible says.

- Remind the group that everyone is coming from different backgrounds – this is especially important for those that use a lot of ‘Christianese.’
- If there is a reference to a term or a Bible story, you as the leader may want to jump in and say, “For those of us who don’t remember that story, or know what that means, could you clarify or explain...”
- Do not point them out or focus on them when you do this.

Sometimes a skeptic may say things that could make others feel uncomfortable (e.g. swearing).

- Have grace with them; they will often not be aware that they are doing this.
- If it is excessive and continues over weeks, mention it to them on the side.

Affirm that you appreciate that they are a part of the group, and then remind them that the group is a place of respect, and it is appreciated if they are mindful of their choice of words.

The Keen Christian who shares and uses the Bible too much

Take them aside after the session (or by phone) and affirm their knowledge. Explain the Community Group philosophy, and ask them to help draw people out, and encourage others to participate.

- Question their responses. E.g. “That’s a great answer, could you clarify or explain...”
- Express the fears/reactions group members may be experiencing. E.g. “Goodness, that’s very deep! I expect some of you might have found that quite hard to understand....”

The Quiet Group

See the “Facilitating a Group” resource for additional support.

- Use an icebreaker every week.
- Include a non-threatening ‘round the table’ question each week. E.g. Have everyone answer a question in 30-60 seconds.
- Don’t be afraid of silence; wait 45 seconds before you answer the question. If you fill the silence with your talk every time, they’ll always stay quiet. Ask whether they understand the question.
- Be Proactive: Ask questions that encourage discussion, e.g. “What do you find hardest about praying?” or “What do you fear most about sharing your faith with others?”
- Avoid right/wrong or ‘threatening’ questions: Ask questions to which you do not know the answer: “What do you think/feel about....?”

The Quiet Member

Ask what they hope to get out of the curriculum, what sort of questions they have, whether their expectations are being met, etc.

- Make use of a comment or question: Ask them to repeat it, and affirm their contributions.
- Ask them directly: Work to always create an easy, open-ended, biographical question (e.g. “What were you brought up to believe, Mary?”; “Have you ever attended a church? What was the experience like for you?”).
- Encourage them privately to pray in group prayer times.

The Group/Person who focuses on personal problems

Be interested, sympathize, listen, and pray for them (then and there, or at the end), BUT... after a while, steer the conversation back to the topic. Offer to meet after group.

- Deflect attention from them to their question/issue. Rephrase/repeat their questions.
- Find ways to affirm their contributions; don't let them always get 'corrected' or 'put right.'
- Meet with them separately. Explain that the Community Group format is different from Freedom Session, and direct them to counselling or Freedom Session.

The Chaotic/Off-Topic Group

Enforce the 'one conversation' rule. Remind the group that you want to make sure that everyone can hear all the answers, and ask them to wait until whoever is talking to finish before they begin.

- Address questions raised, but don't stay off-topic for too long.

If there are questions specific to that person, affirm the off-topic question, and offer to answer the questions after. *E.g. “That’s a great question! Let’s talk about that a bit more after we get through the Community Group questions”.*

- Be aware of topics coming up later in the curriculum, and ask if they can wait till then.
- Keep the group focused, but keep it enjoyable for them.