

7 Specific Problems and ways to deal with them

The uncontrollable talker

- Ask questions this way: "In two or three sentences, how would you describe..."
- Ask specific people to answer your questions. This gives other people permission to contribute.
- Sit next to the talker. Eye contact is a permission-giving signal. When you sit next to someone, eye contact is very difficult.
- Interrupt. Even talkers have to breathe. Wait for a deep breath,, jump in, and redirect the question to the rest of the group. Say, "That's a good point. Sally, how do you see this passage applying to your life?"
- Talk with the person privately. Ask him or her to help you get others involved, using the talker's boldness to your advantage.
- Develop a "stop" signal. In your private conversation, come up with a signal—like pulling your ear—so that the talker will and recognize when he or she goes too far.

The rabbit-chasing group

- Interrupt someone who seems to be changing the subject from the main point of the lesson by reminding the whole group of the goal. Then redirect the question to someone else.
- Depend on your intern or apprentice. This person can support you during the meeting by bringing the group back to the main point.
- State the goal of the discussion upfront. If your group has problems with staying on track, this may be a crucial strategy.
- Pray. If someone shares a personal need during the discussion and you feel that it's inappropriate at that point in your lesson, say something like, "Thank you for sharing. May I pray for you right now?" Pray briefly and then get back on track.

A person with chronic needs

- Pray for the person after the meeting is over. This is especially important if this person shares his or her needs every week.
- Spend time together outside the group meeting.
- Ask another group member to spend some time with that person.
- Ask the help of a pastor or a coach.

A disruptive or argumentative visitor

- Explain the purpose of your group. This is especially important if the visitor is from another church and has a lot of small group experience. He or she may want to force a different agenda on the group, and you must make it clear that you won't let this happen.
- Direct questions to specific people so that the disruptive visitor doesn't have permission to take over.
- Keep the conversation going. Silence gives this person an open door to make his or her point.
- Interrupt. This is crucial when someone is giving harmful advice to other group members or saying something that's biblically unsound.

Group member conflict

- Help people understand that conflict is a natural part of relating to others. Groups that never experience conflict are failing to honestly relate to one another. If group members are growing in relationships, they're bound to have misunderstandings and hurt feelings.
- Mediate. Help people talk through their differences and misunderstandings.
- Practice forgiveness. You'll experience conflict yourself. You must model a healthy conflict by forgiving anyone who hurts you.

A stagnant group

- Invite new people. Challenge members to invite new people.
- Meet at a different time or place.
- Go on a daylong retreat and ask God for a vision for your group. If you don't have a vision, it will be almost impossible for the group to change.
- Take a break from the "usual" and do something different and fun.

An enormous group

- Identify a future leader and mentor that person. Without another leader, your group will be stuck. It will never multiply no matter how big it gets.
- Prepare the group for "multiplication." Explain to your group that multiplication is a future probability. Do this two or three months before you actually "birth" or start a new group. Break your group into smaller groups to discuss the lesson.

ROLES TO GET GROUP MEMBERS MORE INVOLVED

One way to solve problems and increase how connected people in your group feel to each other is by giving members an area of ministry that they can own. Not everyone in your group will want to take on a responsibility, but others will welcome the opportunity. As you think of ways to encourage positive involvement in the life of the group, keep these ministry positions in mind.