

Practical Solutions to Common Small Group Problems

The Quiet Ones

Two things could be going on:

- They are naturally quiet and need time to ponder an idea. They do not want to say anything that is silly or unimportant.
- The rest of the group is dominating.

Solutions:

- Establish ground rules in an agreed upon group covenant (see "resources/SERVICE group" for one suggestion-- ***Small Group Agreement and Arrangements***)
- Subdivide your group of seven or more into smaller groups of 3 or 4. That maximizes participation and minimizes domination.
- Involve them in a non- "spotlight's-on-you" manner.
- Give them time to put their thoughts together. For example, after you ask a question say: "I would like to hear from everyone on this one." or "Let's go around the circle and tell what impacted you in this passage." This gives them time to think as well as gives fair warning that they will have to give an answer.
- Start the discussion with someone other than the quiet person, unless their body language cues tell you they are ready to answer.
- Ask direct, open-ended questions after one or two people have already answered. For example, "How do you feel this Scripture applies to you, Kara?"
- Be attentive to their body language. Catching your eye, raising an eyebrow or leaning forward may be signals that a person has something to say.
- Ask them privately if calling on them makes them uncomfortable.
- Affirm: Be lavish in your praise (but not fake). For example, "I totally agree." or "That's a good point." You could also privately encourage their participation by making statements such as, "I thought what you said about God's faithfulness was so wise. Tell me how you came to that thought."
- Spend time with them outside of the group in one-on-one situations or single them out at events. The more comfortable, safe, and valued the quiet person feels with individuals from the group, the easier it will be for them to interact in the group as a whole.
- Remember to allow people the privilege of being silent

The Monopolizers

Monopolizers are often natural leaders. Appreciate their enthusiasm and involvement. At least the entire group is not consistently staring at you with blank looks and answering questions with the dreaded "I don't know."

Solutions:

- Establish ground rules in an agreed upon group covenant (see "resources/SERVICE group" for one suggestion-- ***Small Group Agreement and Arrangements***)
- Give them a job. Often the talkative ones are those who love to jump in, help when needed, or lead when given a chance. Ask them to open in prayer, lead worship, or bring a story or quote about the topic you're going to discuss.
- Subdivide your group of seven or more into smaller groups of 3 or 4. That maximizes participation and minimizes domination.

In the larger group:

- Put a time limit on responses by stating, "In one minute or less share a highlight of Christmas break." Stick to it, if necessary, by assigning someone stopwatch duty.
- Politely interrupt, affirm, and move on when they take a breath. "That is so true, Joe. What's your opinion, Shawn?" "Good point, now what do the rest of you think about worship?"

Individually:

- Talk privately if it is a consistent problem. "Sandwich" the area you are addressing with sincere affirmation. For example, "Will, I so appreciate your wise contribution to our discussion. I love your enthusiasm! I do feel like not everyone in the group has the same confidence in their ability to articulate as you have. I was wondering if you could help me draw them out by holding off answering on some of the questions until one or two people speak? I want you to know that your input is much needed and it encourages others to participate in the discussion." Be sure to make your affirmation sincere and contextual.
- Stronger correction may be needed, but be sure to always speak in love keeping fully aware of your own weaknesses. Come to them in love for the good of the group. Come to them as well for their godly character development and successful people skills at work and socially.

Don't:

- Don't ignore the problem and let them rule the group. You are the leader for a reason.

- Don't "put them in their place" or otherwise embarrass them by correcting strongly in public. You are a facilitator not a dictator.
- Don't avoid confronting. You are a discipler, teaching and training them to do God's work better. Love them enough to help them change.

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The Argumentative Group Members

There may be deeper issues or simple unawareness taking place with an argumentative member.

Solutions:

- Always remember: *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1*
- Validate, disagree kindly if necessary, and move on. For example, "I can see why you would feel that way." Or, "I never have thought of it that way. What do the rest of you think?"
- Offer a place or opportunity where they can be heard by asking, "Can we talk more about this in our one-on-one on Monday?" This approach keeps the group safe for all members and validates the person with the issue.
- Follow up in one-on-ones. Sometimes expressed anger or frustration is a sign that God is pressing His thumb on an issue in need of character development or healing.
- Using specific examples, talk to them in private about the effect their actions have on you or on the group. For example, "I do appreciate your zeal for truth, Dave. When you spoke to Fred about the baptism with the Holy Spirit, your tone seemed antagonistic to me. Sound doctrine is very important, but we don't want to sacrifice relationship to get there."
- It may be necessary to kindly and firmly "move on" in the group in order to keep the atmosphere safe and open.