

Monopolizers and Onlookers

Groups typically have some participants who talk more than others. Try these ideas to spark healthy interactions that involve all of the members of your group.

MONOPOLIZERS

When someone tends to monopolize the conversation, others who aren't given a chance to talk can become discouraged or silently irritated.

These steps may help:

1. At your first group meeting **discourage anyone from dominating** the group. Ask each person to feel free to share, but be sensitive to the danger of monopolizing.
2. Don't be afraid to **break in**. Praise one of the monopolizer's statements and then raise a new question and ask for others to respond.
3. **Do not sit directly across** from a monopolizer. Monopolizers are encouraged by eye contact. Limiting eye contact diffuses power.
4. **Don't respond to these participants' comments** when they carry on too long. Response encourages more talk.
5. If the problem persists, **talk to the monopolizer alone after the meeting or before the next meeting**. Ask for help in getting wider participation. You might say, "I've noticed that you and I do most of the talking. Would you help me encourage others to participate more and keep me accountable to talk less next time?"
6. **Remind the group that silence is O.K.** Say, "Many people need time to look at the question, the Scripture, or what they have written before they talk." Then ask for responses from those who haven't spoken yet during the lesson.
7. After a few meetings, **pass out the Participant Checklist** (available in Group Tools on the Q Place website). Read through the checklist with the group.

ONLOOKERS

Quiet people are not typically destructive to your group but may need some encouragement to participate in the discussion.

Try these ideas:

1. Remember, **it is fine for participants to be silent**. Their presence is a gift. They may need more time or help in self-disclosure, but the facilitator's role is to encourage, not to manipulate or coerce a person into talking.
2. At an appropriate moment, **ask what these participants think** or what their experience has been. Sometimes a direct question will help onlookers feel affirmed and noticed.
3. When quieter participants speak, **affirm the contribution**. Thank them.
4. **Divide the group into pairs** or groups of three at times (for example, to share prayer requests). Some may find it easier to open up in a smaller group.
5. **Watch for topics or interests that onlookers feel more at ease about**. If they are knowledgeable or experienced in specific areas, find ways for them to talk about these. Onlookers often take ownership of behind the scenes tasks; it could be encouraging for them to be asked to help with refreshments or another group need.
6. **Spend a few moments with the reserved person** before or after the meeting. Ask how he or she feels about the group and if it is comfortable to participate. Be sure to express how much his or her contribution is appreciated.
7. **Help all participants to feel loved** and accepted for who they are, and they will be more likely to join in the conversation.