

Challenges of Group Dynamics

The health of a discussion group may be hindered by many kinds of self-centered and disruptive actions and attitudes that you may find in yourself as well as in other group members. When you recognize these challenges, you can be ready with a response so that ongoing patterns won't destroy the group.

CHART OF GROUP CHALLENGES

The following chart lists common actions or attitudes that could challenge your group, responses that you may find to be effective, and a reference to related guidelines or discussion tips from the Q Place Guidelines Card, which is explained on page 3 of this resource.

CHALLENGE	RESPONSE & GUIDELINES
<p>ARGUING is challenging others in the group, holding a position with an attitude of superiority, and becoming combative if others are not in agreement.</p>	<p>The group should remind the person who is arguing that all are in the process of discovery. No one has to believe any statement or the Bible, but everyone should be honest with it. It may help to state the difference of opinion before you agree to leave it unresolved.</p> <p>Guidelines: 7, 8</p>
<p>BLOCKING is going off on tangents, belaboring points that the group has resolved, and hindering the flow of discussion by fuzzy thinking due to lack of preparation.</p>	<p>To refocus on the topic, ask someone to restate the main point under discussion.</p> <p>Guidelines: 5, 8 Discussion Tips: 2</p>
<p>DOMINATING is interrupting the contributions of others, making speeches at the group, answering a question at great length and sharing long, often irrelevant illustrations.</p>	<p>Talk personally to any who tend to dominate about the importance of equal sharing in the group; agree to remind each other not to do too much talking and to encourage active participation by all in the group.</p> <p>Guidelines: 1, 3, 4, 7</p>
<p>BEING THE EXPERT is promoting oneself as a Bible authority by lecturing the group instead of participating in discussion. It includes making cross-references that haven't been studied by the group, slowing the group down by sharing at great length bits of minutiae from books or sermons, and robbing others of the joy of discovery by speaking too quickly and not giving others a chance.</p>	<p>Mention that you are probably getting away from what the group had agreed to do. Meet privately with a person who tends to be the expert and explain the purpose and format of the group and the importance of letting people share their own discoveries. Remind the person that the best way for people to grow is to share in the group discussion and that equal sharing of participation time is a courtesy. Ask him or her to pray with you for the group.</p> <p>Guidelines: 1, 3, 4, 6, 7 Discussion Tips: 1, 3</p>

CHALLENGE	RESPONSE & GUIDELINES
<p>GRIPING is finding fault with everything, complaining about others in the group, and generally being unhappy. Griping can include arguing with the study guide to avoid focusing on the Scripture.</p>	<p>Ask the group whether the thing complained about is an issue for others. If it isn't, move on. Ask anyone who has a pattern of griping to take on a responsibility, such as bringing snacks or providing a ride for someone. Also, look for underlying reasons that he or she might have a negative attitude.</p> <p>Guidelines: 8</p>
<p>PEOPLE PLEASING is being overeager to please the group or the leader and giving "right" answers but not necessarily honest answers.</p>	<p>Be honest in your own responses about things you don't understand or find difficult. Express appreciation when group members speak frankly in the discussion.</p> <p>Guidelines: 5</p>
<p>THERAPY SEEKING is using the group for cheap counseling, sharing at length the next development in personal issues.</p>	<p>Use tact but interrupt talking about the problem. Encourage those who are going through difficult things to focus on the discussion at hand while you're in the group together. Remind them that you aren't equipped as therapists, but that you'll pray that something in your discussion of the Bible or the topic at hand will encourage and help them. See also "Handling Small Group Crises" at QPlace.com. Meet separately to listen, pray with the person, and perhaps recommend seeing a counselor.</p> <p>Guidelines: 1 Discussion Tips: 2</p>
<p>HAVING TUNNEL VISION is seeing everything through the prism of a particular doctrine or experience and letting pet concerns dominate each response.</p>	<p>Ask someone else to state the main point of the paragraph. Review the purpose and nature of the group.</p> <p>Discussion Tips: 2, 3</p>
<p>WITHDRAWING can range from not participating in the group discussion, to being increasingly passive and indifferent, to sitting at the edge of the group and being likely to drop out.</p>	<p>Build a one-on-one relationship with those who tend to be silent, finding their interests and getting to know them better. Look for underlying reasons that they might not be opening up in the discussion. Gently bring these individuals into the discussion by asking a question that you know they can answer. Encourage them to take a turn asking the questions for the discussion.</p> <p>Guidelines: 6</p> <p>(1 and 5 fit as well, but cultivate a culture that encourages participation rather than pressing the person to participate.)</p>

Q PLACE GUIDELINES CARD

The Q Place Guidelines Card can be a powerful tool for maintaining healthy dynamics in a group.

If you used these guidelines and discussion tips to start your group and if you have reviewed the card each time a new person has come in, you have set the stage well. It could be that a brief, casual reminder about a specific guideline on the card will be sufficient to get back on track. Your example may encourage others in the group to refer to it as well.

After your group has met several times, you could also consider sharing one of the three evaluations offered through QPlace.com: Participant Checklist, Group Effectiveness Checklist, or Question Asker's Checklist. You may go through one of them together as a group or simply pass it out and ask everyone to go through it on their own.

If you started the group without the Q Place Guidelines Card, you can establish a fresh start in the group at any time. To do this, it might help to talk with each group member outside of the group time, ask how they think interactions are going in the group, and see if they would be open to agreeing to some guidelines as you go forward. Then in the group, give everyone a copy of the Q Place Guidelines Card, read through the guidelines and discussion tips together, and ask the group if they would be willing to help each other follow them.

The Q Place Guidelines Card is available through the Q Place website.

GROUP GUIDELINES

GUIDELINES

1. The purpose of this group is to discuss questions about God.
2. The role of initiators is to facilitate a healthy small group process.
3. This group is not for experts. It's for new discoveries. If you think you are an expert, resist the urge to let the rest of us know. Instead, try to listen and ask questions so that everyone can discover answers for themselves.
4. The format is informal discussion, not lecture.
5. If at all possible, read and think through the content and questions ahead of time. Share your ideas honestly and openly.
6. In each session a different person may ask the questions in order to encourage group ownership and dynamic discussions.
7. Maintain confidentiality, courtesy, and respect toward others, even if they don't agree with your position. Do not judge others and avoid side conversations.
8. Do not attempt to resolve all differences or conflicts of opinion. Keep moving when there seems to be an impasse.
9. Begin and end on time.
10. Review the discussion guidelines whenever there's a new person in the group.

DISCUSSION TIPS

1. **Stick to the topic or passage under discussion** in order to build a common frame of reference.
2. **Avoid tangents.** Many ideas will surface during the discussion. If the subject is not dealt with in any detail in the material, do not let it occupy too much time. Discuss peripheral topics later.
3. **When discussing the Bible, let it speak for itself.** Instead of quoting other books, religious leaders, or notes in the Bible, try to discover the facts, meaning, and application of the passage together while avoiding religious jargon.

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