

Life GROUPS

How to Engage Different Personality Types

Another key to a healthy, happy group is having open discussions where everyone participates equally. This can be a real challenge for the leader since every group member is unique and brings their different expectations and experiences into the group. That's why it's important to recognize and not be hindered by the different personalities. In fact, keeping the varied personalities engaged in the conversations actually enhances your Life Group.

Below are a few examples of the different personalities of group members. We hope these tips will help you keep everyone engaged and contributing not detracting or derailing group discussion.

- Chatty Cathy: Cathy loves to talk, so she's happy to give an answer or insight into every question. Much of what she says is worthwhile, but it often gets lost in her constant stream of words. With some guidance, Cathy can help draw others into the group discussion.
 - Sit next to Cathy instead of across from her since eye contact encourages conversation.
 - Help Cathy by asking a question to the group and ending with "How about someone who hasn't shared yet?"
 - Talk to Cathy privately. Thank her for her contributions but be honest about the need for others to share. Ask her to look for opportunities to include others in the conversation.
- Shy Shane: Shane is the quiet one. He's usually a good listener and just wants to hear what the others have to say. Mentally, he is actively involved because when he finally does speak, his comments are usually thoughtful and well-stated.
 - Create an atmosphere for Shane to feel accepted and comfortable.
 - Sit across from Shane to maintain good eye contact with him and encourage conversation.
 - Talk to Shane privately to ask if he would be comfortable reading a Bible verse out loud or would like to respond to a specific question next week.
- Academic April: April is an intellectual giant who loves digging into Scripture. She's the one who has looked up words in Hebrew or Greek and knows how to pronounce them. Her knowledge can be intimidating to those who have limited Bible knowledge. However, she can be a great resource when questions arise that you don't know the answer to.
 - Call on April to explain a difficult concept or doctrine introduced in the passage you are studying.
 - Solicit April's opinion when someone else's answer was incorrect or unclear by saying "April, what have you learned about these verses during your study this week?"
 - Privately applaud her but remind her that people learn best when they discover truth from God.
- Stan Stabinthedark: Stan loves to give answers but is rarely on track. He often goes off in his own direction or rabbit trail.
 - Thank Stan for sharing his thoughts, and then redirect the question by asking "Does anyone have other thoughts?" or "Did anyone understand this question differently?"
 - Guide him to stay on course by saying things like, "That's very interesting. Maybe we can study another time."

- **Argumentative Angela:** Angela challenges the discussion leader. BUT is her favorite word. She may be your devil's advocate.
 - Gently remind her that the Bible is the final authority.
 - Tell her you're very interested in her thoughts, and that you'd love to continue the discussion after the group is over.
- **Pleasing "Pat Answer" Paul:** Paul always gives the "right" answer, even though it may not be the way he truly feels.
 - Be transparent yourself, so maybe this will free him and others up to be REAL also.
- **Distressed Darlene:** Darlene uses the group as a counseling session. Each week there is a crisis and somehow every question is a segue to talk about her problems.
 - Spend one-on-one time with Darlene. Take her out to coffee or lunch or have an in-depth conversation with her on the phone. Spending this time with her will help you to better understand her needs.
 - Depending on the situation, you may need to refer Darlene to a spiritual mentor or professional Christian counselor.
 - Be careful not to abandon Darlene. The group still needs to support her.
- **Tell it all Tommy:** Tommy has a tough time knowing how much information is too much. He often shares details in his stories that leave group members feeling embarrassed or unsure of how they should respond.
 - Help Tommy find the proper context for the things he'd like to share. Respond by saying something like, "That must have been very painful for you. That's the kind of thing we should discuss one-on-one. Let's talk after group so I can pray for you."
- **Surface Sarah:** Sarah shares on a very superficial level. She's not willing to go to a deeper level.
 - When she answers, you can ask her for specifics.
 - Ensure you are modeling transparency and going deep with your answers.
- **Late Luke:** Luke continually comes in late, and his entrance disrupts the group. Once their focus is lost, it takes a few minutes to get the group's attention again.
 - Begin on time!
 - Remind the group that we all need to be respectful of everyone's time.
 - Privately talk with Luke and encourage him to make a better effort to be on time. If there's a good reason that he must consistently be late, ask him to come in quietly because it's hard to get the group refocused once everybody is distracted.
- **Political Polly:** Polly is passionate about her politics. She often shares party-affiliated comments on all the current social and cultural issues, making others uncomfortable at times.
 - Gently remind Polly that we do not discuss politics in our Bible study groups.
 - Gently remind her that we want to lead out with love and respect, no matter someone's political views. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. – 1 Peter 4:8(NLT)

- Love your people. It's more important to be loving than right.
- Look for the positive qualities in each group member.
- Model the participation skills you want them to have.
- Pray, pray, pray! Remain sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit.

pray pray
pray