

Troubleshooting in Small Groups

The following chart was taken from *Good Things Come In Small Groups* by a small group (Intervarsity Press, 1985), pages 106-107.

SYMPTOM	PROBLEM	APPROACHES
Members come late	Group pattern to start late. Exact time not clear	Set definite time. Begin promptly. Discuss with group: "We're having trouble getting going. Is it too early? Are there conflicts?" Let members respond.
Agreed-on preparation not complete	Too much expected. Not clear how it relates to what group will do. Lack of commitment (may relate to being too busy and other priorities).	Be realistic. May need to change expectations. Check to make sure group understands and agrees to preparation.
Quiet members	Questions asked are too hard or too easy; not enough observation questions asked. Not prepared. Lack of openness. Leader and others not handling silence, jumping in too quickly.	Follow sequence of observation before interpretation. Have quiet member read passage out loud. Remind member: "Verbal people need to hold back at times; quiet members need to force themselves to speak up." Direct questions (not one no one else can answer) to quiet person. On an application question, do a round where each person in the circle responds. Allow time after question for people to think.
Overly talkative members	Outgoing. Doesn't like silence. Sees things quickly.	Talk privately. Mention that we need silence after some questions to look and reflect. Ask help in drawing out others. Suggest he ask, "What do some of the rest of you think?"
Issue causing disagreement	Verbal people "win out." Tangents. Not accepting differences.	State ground rules. Try to stick to passage or subject at hand. Suggest they discuss problem after the meeting. Agree that there are differences of opinion on this; on what can we agree?
Always-right members	Knows right way for everything. Knows only right interpretation of passage.	Avoid arguing right and wrong with person. Put focus back on passage, to collect more data and summarize. Let facts clarify. Help group look for alternatives and see "right" person's frame of reference. "In what circumstances might John's interpretation hold true?"
Disagrees	"But" is a favorite word: "That's true, but..." May hold group back from action or conclusions, causing group to stagnate.	Give feedback to disagreeer: "What exactly causes your hesitation?" Confront group with choice of holding back (no risk) or going ahead (with risk but also growth): "How can we get around this objection?"
Pacing slow or fact	Too much time on some parts. Little interaction. Questions too simplistic (or too general). Full answers not sought. Application too general.	Plan time for each component. Move parts along with good transitions. Test study questions with a co-leader; are they clear, open, but not overly general? Ask for specifics in sharing. Push for all of answer: "What else?"
Conversational prayer stifled	Lack of trust. New to members. Not aware of specifics for prayer.	Spend more time building community and praying for needs. Pray in direct and specific statements or requests. Discuss conversational prayer; pray on one topic before moving to another. Respond to study in prayer.

SYMPTOM

Group ingrown; no growth or mission

PROBLEM

Purpose not clear. Study not motivating. Limited sense of growth of God's Kingdom. Fear.

APPROACHES

Plan non-threatening activities to which you can invite others; have active outreach where new members are added to and cared for by Small Group. Center Bible study and worship on character of God, purposes of God, aspects of group life, or life of the church.

Superficial sharing

Leader not setting example. Application not specific. Community building not challenging growth as a group.

Plan community exercises carefully for state of development. Ask for specifics in sharing. Be open and specific in own sharing. Meet in one-to-ones outside group for sharing and prayer.

Members with ongoing problems

Problems dominate group life. Member monopolizes group with personal crises.

Talk individually to the person, suggesting resources for help (counseling). Help group see its purpose, identity. (Church groups are not therapy groups.) Continue in prayer and loving support.