

## Tips for Handling Challenging Participants

In any group situation you will come across a variety of individual participation styles. Some of these styles may be challenging in a class. The following suggestions can be helpful in handling the different challenges you may encounter. If you don't feel comfortable handling a situation, please contact another local facilitator or the local lead facilitator to discuss the situation.

This information is adapted from the University of Wisconsin's Office of Quality Improvement *Facilitator Tool Kit*.

Participant style	Description	Suggested tips to handle various challenges
Attacker	Verbally abuses or judges other class member(s).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remind participants that the purpose of the class is to support and not judge.</li> <li>Establish rules stating that personal opinions are acceptable, but personal attacks are not acceptable.</li> <li>If the person continues to be abusive, ask the participant to leave.</li> </ul>
Argumentative	Undermines the group by being negative and disagreeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Squelch the urge to argue back; stay calm.</li> <li>Clarify class content if it is questioned.</li> <li>Ask other participants to contribute to discussions.</li> </ul>
Angry or Hostile	Comes to class angry; most likely has nothing to do with the class. May make other group members feel angry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay calm-use a low quiet voice.</li> <li>Validate the participant's feelings and perceptions.</li> <li>Stop behavior that is hostile towards others. State that there's no place for hostile behavior in the group.</li> <li>If hostility continues, suggest the class isn't right for the person and give other resources.</li> </ul>
The Crying Person	Cries to show feelings of sadness, loss, depression or frustration. These emotions may have been suppressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate that crying is allowed, it's okay.</li> <li>Have tissues available in the classroom.</li> <li>Check in during a break or after the class to make sure the person is alright and to see if they need assistance with anything.</li> </ul>
Person in Crisis	Needs to talk about their problems or may see themselves as helping.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Show empathy, use reflective listening, and open-ended questions.</li> <li>If the person needs more time or resources, offer to talk during the break or after class.</li> </ul>
The Commitment-Free Person	Unwilling to commit to making plans or attending.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remember that you can't force someone to do something they don't want to do.</li> <li>This may not be the right time for the person; ask if they want to be contacted for an upcoming class.</li> </ul>
The Non-Participant	Doesn't participate in class activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize that each participant does not need to participate in activities because they may only be ready to listen and/or may be overwhelmed by life circumstances.</li> <li>Don't expend time trying to get the person to partake in activities.</li> <li>Recognize not every activity will appeal to all.</li> </ul>

<b>Participant style</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Suggested tips to handle various challenges</b>
The Silent Participant	Doesn't speak up in class-may feel insecure or uncomfortable in a group, or may not be talkative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the non-talker; ascertain if they are benefitting from the class during a break or after class.</li> <li>• Recognize cues, such as nodding of the head or raising their hand that they may want to talk. Invite them to do so.</li> <li>• Encourage participation in activities</li> </ul>
Conversationalist and More	Carries on side conversations, talks about personal topics, argues points.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stand beside the person while you continue on with the class.</li> <li>• Stop and wait until the talking stops.</li> <li>• Bring the person back by restating the activity.</li> </ul>
Know-It-All	Interrupts to add comments, opinions, or answers. Uses class time to share unrelated personal stories or theories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize expertise if the person is knowledgeable.</li> <li>• In order to get back on track, utilize a class agenda and recognize time constraints.</li> <li>• Call on other participants by name.</li> </ul>
The Monopolizing Talker	Monopolizes discussions; talks all the time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank for comments; say you won't call on someone again until all participants have a chance to share.</li> <li>• Change discussion by summarizing important points, and then move forward.</li> <li>• Listen to this person outside of class.</li> <li>• Don't look at the person when you are asking a question.</li> </ul>
Rambler	Talks on and on or gives lengthy explanations; tells stories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask them to answer with one sentence.</li> <li>• Say that you need to move on in order to cover all the material.</li> <li>• Suggest the person talk with you after class or during a break.</li> </ul>
Yes...but...	Points out repetitively what ideas won't work. Says, "Yes, but" to ideas or suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up discussion to group for ideas.</li> <li>• After three remarks, say "We need to move on. It is your choice to not do an activity."</li> <li>• If the person interrupts discussion, say that you are generating ideas.</li> <li>• Don't seek solutions-it will waste time.</li> </ul>
The Questioner	Asks questions either justifiably or to perplex leader.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you don't know an answer, tell the participant you will find out and talk to them next week.</li> <li>• Redirect the question to the entire group and ask for their response.</li> <li>• If questions are beyond the scope of the class, refer to other community resource.</li> </ul>