

Handout # 5: Common Challenging Behaviors of Training Participants

1. Quiet/Shy Participant - a group member is not participating as the facilitator thinks they should. This may be because the participant is:

- shy, timid or insecure
- indifferent to the topics being discussed
- bored
- feeling superior
- distracted by pressing issues outside the meeting
- having trouble understanding the topic under discussion in conflict with other group members

Possible Solutions:

- make eye contact with the participant and ask a simple question
- involve the participant in a small subgroup discussion and ask them for an oral summary of their discussion
- recognize his/her contribution immediately, sincerely and encourage more
- ask during a break or in private about why the participant is so quiet
- suggest that everyone takes a turn in sharing their opinion

2. Overly Talkative Participant - a group member talks too much, rambles on repeatedly and is generally dominant. This may be caused by:

- a natural need for attention
- being overly prepared/unprepared for the meeting
- wanting to flaunt a large vocabulary or extensive knowledge
- having the most authority

Possible Solutions:

- glance at your watch whilst the participant is speaking
- during a pause for breath, thank the participant for their comments, and restate the agenda
- emphasizing relevant points and time limits
- ask the participant to explain how their comments adds value to the topic in hand
- reflect their comments back to the group
- remind everyone of the time limit

3. Side Conversation - a group member is disrupting the meeting by being involved in too many side conversations. This may be because the participant:

- feels the need to introduce an item not on the agenda
- is bored with the meeting
- has a point to raise that they feel other items on the agenda less important
- is discussing a related topic but not being heard
- wants to be the centre of attention

Possible Solutions:

- ask the participant to share their idea with the group
- get up and casually walk around near the participants having the side conversation
- call the participant by name and ask if they want to add the topic of their discussion to the agenda
- restate a recently made point and ask for the participants opinion

4. Overly Disagreeable Participant - a group member is highly argumentative or generally antagonistic. This may be because they:

- have a combative personality
- are upset by others opinions or a specific meeting issue
- are a show-off by nature
- are unable to make suggestions constructively
- feel that they are being ignored

Possible Solutions:

- paraphrase the participant's comments, and after their response, recap his/her position in objective terms
- find merit in the participant's suggestions, express agreement, then move on
- respond to the participant's comments, not the attack
- open the discussion of the participant's comments to the group
- mention that, due to time constraints, the comments can be put on the agenda for the next meeting