

NEW JERSEY SELF-HELP GROUP CLEARINGHOUSE

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Some Ideas for Coping with Monopolizers During Group Discussions

- If you have it, refer back to the ground rule (if not consider adopting it) that "We don't monopolize the group's time in order to leave time for all members to participate" and point out how some members haven't yet had a chance to speak. But consider first mentioning a positive about the person or what they have been saying, e.g., "You raise a good issue. But we need to observe our ground rule and leave time for others to speak. Can you summarize your point in a few words, because we need to move on?"
- Highlight a point made by the person and invite others to comment. For example, "How have others here handled similar circumstances?"
- Interrupt the person (to let him or her go on and on is to disrespect all the participants). Be respectful but firm: "Excuse me Mary, but I'm concerned about the time." Or "It sounds like you have a lot to say on this topic, but it would be helpful to hear others' points of view." Then direct a question to group, "Who first wants to comment?"
- If the person takes time to describe the same problem at each group meeting, help them to set a specific goal for what they will attempt to do in order to address their problem by the next meeting, and then hold them to reporting back when they come back.
- Establish a time limit for speaking. If needed, have a timekeeper, or pass a watch with a second hand. Or consider having a timed agenda for the full meeting - where next to each item agenda or turn, you suggest a time to which the group agrees. If the group falls behind, enlist the group in taking responsibility by saying "I notice we are behind on our agreed-upon agenda. What should we do about this?" Be flexible to your group's possible desire to change the set agenda - responsibility, not inflexibility, is the goal.
- An idea for another ground rule that a few groups have is "No member can speak a second time until all members have had a chance to speak."
- Consider asking the person to take on a meeting volunteer job, asking if they would take minutes, or be willing to summarize the night's discussion at the end.
- Have an "Unfinished Business List" where people's additional questions and concerns (that cannot be addressed at meeting) can be referred back to, at a future meeting, e.g., "John, since we don't have enough time to get to all the issues you've raised, let's add the unaddressed ones to our unfinished Business List."
- Consider introducing a "talking stick" or other object, which one must be holding in order to speak. It discourages people from spontaneously (and repeatedly) sharing their thoughts out of turn. It encourages shared responsibility for the participation, since the speaker (not the

leader) must decide who gets it next. This approach is called using a "Rotating Chair" by some groups that don't use the stick, but requires each member who is speaking to recognize the next speaker.

- Assess if your group may be too large and you may need to break into smaller discussion groups to allow people more time to speak.
- Use flash cards with "minutes left" written on them. When a person's time is almost up, hold up the flash card.
- Decide at beginning of meeting who will have a longer time to speak (e.g., new members, persons in a crisis, etc).
- Before the group discussion starts, have members take numbers (the order in which they will get to talk) and let new people and those who need to leave early take the low numbers and those who are hesitant to speak and monopolizers take higher ones.
- Other ways? Please let us know of any other technique you have found helpful.