

NEW JERSEY SELF-HELP GROUP CLEARINGHOUSE

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DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE GROUP MEMBERS

How to Prevent or Minimize Distress in Your Group

- Have ground rules that spell out what is acceptable and unacceptable group behavior
- Make sure that the meeting place is safe (both physically and emotionally)
- Use member's strengths and resourcefulness to its potential
- Have trusted professional serve as an advisor
- At beginning of meeting, have members bring up issues that they would like to talk about
- Listen and ask questions—don't assume that you fully understand
- Question, clarify and use constructive feedback

Why Confront Disruptive Members:

- Matter of courtesy
- Shows respect for all group members
- Excellent modeling opportunity
- Crucial to group morale and purpose

Dealing With Difficult Behaviors – First Steps

- Remain calm
- Be consistent, firm and gentle
- Talk about ground rules
- Don't argue with the person
- Withdraw attention if necessary
- Make it clear that the person has a right to their feelings but specific behaviors are unacceptable
- Give the person positive feedback for appropriate expression of anger
- Give support to anyone who was a target of the person's anger
- Let the person know how their behavior makes you feel

When All Else Fails

- Calmly yet firmly ask the person to leave to talk in a quiet, separate room
- Tell the person that they can return once he/she is in better control of their emotions
- Encourage the person to talk about their feelings
- Keep a safe distance
- Don't physically restrain the person
- Another group facilitator should stay with the group to discuss other's feelings and fears. Many group members have experienced the same behaviors themselves.
- A person may feel humiliated so the group should be supportive when they return to the group