Group Dynamics

Here are some of the most commonly asked questions regarding the group dynamics found in a Step Study Group.

**What if a participant does not complete their questions from the Participant’s Guide?**

There are two kinds of people—those who love to journal and those who don’t. I often encourage those who do not like to write out their answers, to write words that describe feelings and character issues. This will allow them to stay focused as they elaborate during their time of sharing. And, of course, there will be those who enjoy journaling and writing out their answers.

Do not allow participants to write in their Participant’s Guide during the meeting. This tends to make others feel uncomfortable and ignored while they are sharing. Jotting down a word or two is fine.

The bottom line is that a participant will get out of recovery what they put in to it. It will not be our job to discipline them; that’s God’s job. They are adults.

**What do you do if someone does not want to share on the question; instead they share about what’s going on in their lives that week (i.e., court case, argument with spouse, etc.)?**

Encourage the participant to focus on the question. Let them know they may refer to their current situation as an illustration. Assure them that focusing on the questions ultimately will bring more clarity and healing to their current situations.

In addition, remind the participant to attend the Open Share Groups after the Large Group Meeting. They are designed for that type of sharing.

**How do I address someone when a Guideline is broken during the meeting?**

Refer to the Small Group Guidelines “Helpful Phrases” page xxx. If one particular area or guideline starts to be a problem, address it during the next meeting by reemphasizing that particular guideline. This might be all it will take to refocus the group. If it continues to be a problem with one particular person, address it with them individually outside of meeting time. It might be best to set up a time to meet before the meeting begins.

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Would it be a good idea to have an open-discussion time before working on the questions?

We do not recommend this. This will take valuable time away from the Participant’s Guide and it will prolong the time it takes to complete the Step Study. For instance, even though each person works at his/her own pace, you certainly want to avoid someone taking two years to make needed amends to family members, spouses, etc. It’s really doing the participant an injustice.

What do you do if someone has missed several meetings in a row and then comes back?

You will need to discern where this person is in their recovery. It may be obvious that the group is much farther along than they are. If that is the case, you will need to redirect this person to go back to Step 1.

In the case you decide that this person may continue with your group, ensure they make up the previous lessons. Their willingness to make up the lessons will be a good indication of their true commitment to the group.

To help avoid someone from missing too many meetings, ask a group member to give them a call. Let the absent member know they are missed and that you hope they come back.

If there is no response, the Leader should call and personally check in with them. Find out if there is something specific that has kept them away.

Statistically, 50% of your original participants will continue the Step Study Group through to the end.

If someone is inconsistent in meeting attendance, how do you determine if they should be able to continue in the group?

If someone misses every other week due to childcare issues, for example, but does the work, keeps up, is focused, committed; their sharing is productive, and they seem to be moving forward with their recovery, they should be able to continue with the group.

But, if someone continues to miss for no reason or shows a lack of commitment to the group and their recovery, it may be an indication that they shouldn’t continue with your group. If they don’t do the work, are lackadaisical in their sharing, are still blaming others rather than focusing on themselves, or if they continue to have relapses, you should ask them to start over with Step 1.
If someone has previously worked through Steps 1–3 but has had to miss due to school, is it okay to allow the person into another group starting Step 4?

In most cases, no. Even given these circumstances, a group already in progress and into Step 4 is vulnerable to a new person at this point.

An exception may be a member who has previously worked the Steps. If you can discern that this person is in a place to come into the meeting at Step 4 (has thoroughly worked Steps 1–3 and other group members already know this person), then you can allow the person to participate. I do not recommend asking for a group consensus, but merely present a clear and short explanation to your group as to why this person is now joining the group. This is a very rare exception. Please use discernment.

What if a group member has experienced a number of relapses during Steps 1–3, should they be allowed to continue in the group?

If you have a group member who has been participating in the meeting for quite some time, and you have discerned that this person is not ready for Step 4, spend a few minutes alone with this person and lovingly encourage them back to Step 1.

What do you do if someone still does not have a Sponsor to share his or her 5th Step with?

This may occur. If so, offer your time. Although you are not sponsoring this person, you may make yourself available to step in and help take them through the 5th Step.

A group member may consider an Accountability Partner to share their 5th Step with, especially if you are a new Celebrate Recovery with limited Sponsors available.

What do you do if someone still has not completed their 5th Step and the group is ready to move on to Step 6?

Again, offer to meet with this person for their 5th Step, BUT you will need to move on. We want to honor those who have completed Step 5 and not hold up the progress of the entire group.

If you discern that as a result of this person not completing their 5th Step, it is bringing the group down; you may need to redirect the person back to Step 1.
When making these tough decisions, always take into consideration the overall progress and morale of the entire group.

Feel free to get counsel from your Ministry Leader/Training Coach/Encourager Coach, etc. You do not have to share the person’s name, simply share the circumstances.

**Additional Group Dynamics Typical of Both Step Study Group and Open Share Groups**

**What do I do, when I learn that someone’s anonymity has been broken? Or that a conflict has arisen between two group participants?**

Please refer to Appendix A based on Matthew 18.

**What do you do when a group member talks about suicide?**

Please refer to Appendix B.

**What about participants who are late?**

Mention to your group just before you pray, “We may have a few latecomers, please stay focused on the person sharing as they enter the room.”

If someone is always late, find out about their personal situation. (It may be possible this person has a long commute.) If applicable, have the person let the group know that typically they will be coming in late due to a long commute. This will help other participants to understand the person’s situation.

**How do I handle a last-minute room change?**

Typically, announcements of any room changes are made from the podium during the Large Group Meeting, so please arrive in time to hear important announcements. In addition, always check the bulletin. In the case of a room change, assign a group member to wait for a few minutes at the previous room to direct the Newcomers and late arrivals to the new location.

**What do you do if two family members are a part of the same group?**

Listen to their sharing. Are they focusing on themselves? After the meeting, pull them aside together and welcome them. Confirm that they are there to gain for themselves and are not there as just a support for each other. In the case they both want to work on recovery issues, explain the potential challenge of participating in the same group. It is best to guide them to different groups.
What do I do when I observe someone is under the influence?

In the meetings, if a person comes in under the influence they are allowed to attend, but not to share. If they are being a distraction, excuse them from the meeting; bearing in mind the overall safety of the group when making these tough decisions.

If they have driven themselves to the meeting, ask to drive them home, taking another leader with you. If they refuse to give you their keys, let the person know that you will have to call the police.

What do I do when a nonparticipant enters the meeting room?

If it is a physical threat, call 911.

Send your Co-Leader to get the Ministry Leader. You stay and manage the situation. Do NOT engage in dialogue with an irrational person. Less is best. Remain calm and wait for someone to help.

ADDITIONALLY: Do not allow friends or family members in to your meeting room after the meeting has ended. We always want to honor anonymity and confidentiality. Ask guests to wait outside.

What if someone brings his or her child to the meeting?

Please redirect them to childcare. If money is the issue, possibly help them out for that evening and offer to pay for their childcare. This is optional. Otherwise, the participant must be excused from the meeting. Having a child in the meeting is too distracting even when the child is sleeping.

Please do not allow children in the room, even after the meeting is over, due to adult conversation regarding recovery issues.

Do not allow friends or family members in to the room after the meeting has ended. We always want to honor anonymity and confidentiality. Ask guests to wait outside.

How do I handle a visitor that is there to support a friend, and not for themselves?

Our Open Share Groups are specifically designed for recovery specific areas, as well as, to provide anonymity and confidentially. As you excuse someone who does not identify, encourage them to visit another group they do identify with or invite them to attend Newcomers 101.

These are just a few questions that may come up. As you gain experience facilitating Step Study Groups, and Open Share Groups, feel free to list additional dynamics you encounter in your Leader’s Guide.