

Handling “Extra Grace Required” Personalities in the Life Group

Most often, you won't have any Extra Grace Required people in your Group. But if you do, Matthew 10:16 tells us to be as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves. This verse certainly applies to the Life Group Leader handling “extra grace required” personalities that can be in your Life Group. To avoid damaging the integrity of the meeting, individuals who tend to disrupt should be quickly identified, and ministered to wisely with love.

The goal in dealing with these EGR situations is to protect the other members of the group, maintain the control and integrity of the meeting, and to minister to the underlying needs of the individual.

Here's a number of possible “extra grace required” group members you may encounter and what to do about them...

The Expert...feels spiritually superior and dominates discussion.

The Boss...tries to take over the group because they are “more experienced” than you.

The Converter...tries to make your group like his/her group back home.

The Fixer...has quick snap advice; dismisses people's problems.

The Critic...has frequent negative opinions and “ain't-it-awful” rants.

The Boxer...is quick to argue; dead-set on just about everything.

The Story Teller...has endless stories that ramble and takes over.

The Drainer...tries to make the group about them & their problems.

The Lagger...is always late and disrupts the flow.

The Left Fielder...is way, way out there in their own world or views.

How to Handle Specific EGR Personalities

We've grouped these EGR personalities into similar categories based on their underlying issues and the solution for dealing with them.

The Expert, Boss, and Converter are all vying for control and have strong personalities. They may be used to being in charge, or retired from being the boss somewhere. It can cause disunity, confusion, and get your Group off its purpose or out of balance.

Solution: Do not encourage their sharing. If they attempt to take control of the meeting, lovingly but firmly reassume control. Meet with them privately if need be, to explain the leadership structure (you are the leader the church has appointed) and the set purpose and goals of Woodland's Life Groups.

The Fixer, Critic, and Boxer are expressive but lack empathy and are poor at reading people's feelings, and rarely back down. So people get hurt and may drop out. The Spirit is grieved and ministry stops.

Solution: Be patient but not sympathetic toward critical statements or attitudes. Gently challenge this attitude with positive statements. Or remind the group that we're not here to give “quick fixes” or put others down by a “yes, but” style of discussion, but to encourage each other. Model what you want. The person who just wants to rant will probably move on if they can't rant in your group. Remind people that we're not here to debate doctrines but discuss how we can live out biblical principles. Stand up to someone if they become critical toward

another group member. Remind the group of the covenant and “respect” as a principle of group life—even if we disagree on points.

The Story Teller and the Drainer both suffer from “attention deficit” disorder—so to speak. They want to be the center of attention, and feel affirmed only when they are. But it’s like a black hole. The more you feed their need the worse it gets. After a while it begins to rip your Group apart as it sucks the life and energy out. The Story Teller or Drainer may be either witty or boring, but he/she takes over discussion and others remain silent who should be sharing. The Story Teller wants your group to be their audience. The Drainer wants your group to be their personal support group.

Solution: Don’t encourage the story teller to share. Direct them, and the group, with statements like, “You have a lot of experiences. But what we want to know is what is happening *now* in your life?” The Drainer you should talk to outside of group. They may need a support group if there are specific issues (co-dependency, etc.). If it is random “poor me” issues, just don’t encourage dwelling on the complaints. Affirm them briefly but then *move on* to the next person or question. This will model a healthy response to the group, and be better for the Drainer too.

The Lagger and the Left Fielder are both in their own world and their own agenda. Left Fielders come in two types: spacey and hostile. A spacey Left Fielder (“the UFO’s embedded secret numerical messages in the Bible,” etc.) may be an occasional hitch. But a hostile Left Fielder (spouts wild, or controversial opinions that off topic) will torpedo your group if you let him/her continue. We’re not talking about a seeker who might ask, “You mean you believe Jesus is *God*?” That’s an honest question and you should affirm and answer it. We’re talking about someone stirring up controversy.

Solution: Reaffirm the agenda of the group. For the Lagger, reaffirm the start time. Always begin promptly. Discuss with group if it’s too early.

For the spacey Left Fielder re-direct: “Interesting, but let’s get back on our topic.” For the hostile Left Fielder reaffirm the group covenant and purpose (not controversial topics but ones that unify and focus on our living out Christianity not theory). Re-direct: “Let’s get back on our topic.” If a hostile Left Fielder persists you need to firmly handle them outside of Group time or you will lose your group!

As we said, you may have a group with none of these “extra grace required” people in it. That’s most often the case. But when you do, don’t wait to handle a disruptive group member. People are looking to you to lead and maintain the Group culture of love, unity, and spiritual growth.

Seekers and New Believers in Your Group

Our Life Groups are always “open” and we want them to be a place where a seeker or new believer are welcomed, and can be loved on by solid believers. In fact, that’s the best way for people to discover the truth and grow in grace. It’s “normal” just like a family with older brothers and sisters. Occasionally someone will say, “Well, can’t we have an *advanced* Life Group of just mature believers?” But anyone truly spiritually mature longs to help people discover Christ and then grow in their faith.