

Training #2: How Moderators Can Understand and Handle Disruptive Behavior **by Suzanne G.**

People Speaking Off Recovery:

1. I appreciate your sharing; however, (Name), at this meeting we ask you to share on the readings (For Today, Voices of Recovery) or you may share your experience, strength and hope. We would love to hear that.
2. I appreciate your sharing. At this meeting, however, we share on any of the readings and your experience, strength and hope working the program.

This behavior falls under the umbrella of crosstalk

Definition: People speaking off topic at a recovery meeting are sharing personal issues, struggles or events that do not relate to what the group agreed to discuss for that session. (i.e. gratitude, 12 steps, resentments, etc.)

Example: A member begins rambling about a bad day at work, a dispute with a neighbor, a traffic ticket, medical concerns, etc. They never bring it back to their recovery. What makes this problematic is people spend their entire share complaining about unrelated life events, rather than focusing on recovery or how they are staying abstinent.

People speaking over one another: can cause a chaotic environment and we don't want that either. Address it warmly but directly.

1. Excuse me. Please, let (Name) finish their thought.
2. (Name), we need to be sure that everyone gets a chance to share without being cut off. Thank you, I appreciate your understanding.

This behavior falls under the umbrella of crosstalk

Definition: Speaking over one another happens when two people talk simultaneously. Often to show enthusiasm or active listening, rather than to hijack the conversation. It occurs when someone begins talking before the other person has finished. Usually at the end of a thought or to enthusiastically agree. Neither party is trying to silence the other, they are simply participating with high energy.

Example: Member says hello to everyone and says: "It was a tough week. My sponsor told me to go to a meeting. I was so tired I ended up skipping my regular meeting." Another member comes in and says: "You should not do that...that is how people go into relapse." Another member comes in and says: "You should try meditating." Another member says: "You should call your sponsor." They are all enthusiastically trying to help the member who had a tough week. Lots of high energy! No one is hijacking the conversation. They are not making it about them.

People who are interrupters: Be firm and speak with compassion. People who are interrupters can create an unsafe environment and we don't want that. Say what you mean. Don't say it mean.

1. At this meeting we are always respectful toward one another so please allow (Name) a moment to finish their share.
2. Pardon me, (Name of interrupter). (The Other Speaker's Name) is speaking. We don't cross talk at this meeting. Thank you.
3. Just a reminder, one of our principles is to not crosstalk at this meeting.
4. Please allow the moderator a moment to finish speaking so everyone, especially new or returning members, can get the benefit.
5. Please pause to allow the moderator a moment to thank the member who just shared before anyone offers to share next.

This behavior falls under the umbrella of crosstalk

Definition: Interrupting is when someone actively cuts off or overrides the speaker; effectively hijacking the meeting. The interrupter breaks into the other person's sentence to take over the conversation to make it about what they want to say. They may even want to change the subject. The original speaker feels cut off, unheard and disrespected.

Example: A newcomer is tearfully sharing about a recent relapse, detailing how hard it has been to stay abstinent. Before the newcomer can finish their story, a member interrupts and says, "You just need to get to 90 meetings in 90 days and find a sponsor right now. Also try calling some members of the meeting and they will help you." The newcomer freezes up, visibly flustered. The member continues to talk saying, "I did that and it worked for me." He is hijacking the conversation.

People who share too explicitly or off topic: Be humble and be polite so they do not feel offended.

1. Thank you, (Name), for coming in to do service. Wanted you to be sure that you knew that at this meeting we will share on the readings, (For Today and Voices of Recovery), or you may share your experience, strength and hope. That would be great.

(Note: My experience is that they appreciate the guidance that you give them and do follow the instructions very nicely.)

2. Thank you for sharing. Would you be willing to return to a recovery topic?

Definition: Too explicit sharing is when it focuses on graphic details, specific grievances, a series of medical conditions and medications. The member is using limited time to talk about politics, medical histories, and unrelated personal philosophies (religion, self-help books, programs, etc.) Explicit details put both the speaker and listeners in vulnerable positions.

The AA program suggests that the facilitator or leader gently step in to redirect the person sharing to the solution-based aspects of the 12 steps.

Example: A member starts sharing about the amounts of sugar she ate yesterday and describes the event in full graphic style to the group. She also begins sharing personal vendettas toward family members, spouse or group members. Proceeds to tell you about her history in extent in the program and just goes on and on and it has nothing to do with her experience, strength and hope in the OA program.

These types of conversations are best kept for a sponsor, best friend, or a professional counselor as there is no legal confidentiality at the group level.

People, who share too explicitly in a meeting, usually do not understand group boundaries. Explicit oversharing can create discomfort and take up valuable time that belongs to the whole group.