

## HANDLING PROBLEM PERSONALITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP

We are admonished in the scriptures (Matthew 10:16) to be as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves. This word applies to the Community Group Leader mishandling potential problem situations that can arise without warning during a group meeting. To avoid damaging the integrity of the meeting, individuals who tend to disrupt should be quickly identified, controlled and ministered to wisely with love.

The goals in dealing with these situations are 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.

In any case, if you feel as though the problem personality is more than you can handle or more than you want to try to handle on your own, please communicate with the church staff immediately. They will partner with you to devise a plan.

### POSSIBLE PROBLEM GROUP MEMBERS

#### "SUPERIOR SAM" - THE PERSON WHO FEELS SPIRITUALLY SUPERIOR

##### \*How to Identify

- This person may seek to dominate the group or build up their ego by constantly quoting scripture and wanting to read a multitude of scriptures often from secluded portions of the Word.
- The individual may try to impress the group by mentioning often how he has been used by the Lord.
- The person, if allowed to talk very long may begin to direct criticism toward the Group Leader, the Group, or the church leadership.

##### \*Dangers to the Group

- May cause division. May be a stumbling block to the less mature Christian. May disrupt the flow of the meeting and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

##### \*Tips for Handling

- Do not encourage their sharing. Re-direct the person to the sharing purpose by interrupting with questions such as: "How does this relate to what we are presently discussing?"
- If the person continues, the Small Group Leader should state with love, but firmly, that because of time constraints he must ask the person to finish in 30 seconds.
- Minister to the person after the meeting by explaining and clarifying the purpose of the Group meetings and ask for the person's future cooperation.

#### "DISCIPLE DAVE" - THE PERSON WHO IS SOMEONE ELSE'S DISCIPLE

##### \*How to Identify

- This person will often refer to information or knowledge obtained from some person or group outside the local fellowship.
- They may portray a corrective and sometimes critical attitude and attempt to exhort the Community Group leader or group members with how-to's, ought-to's, should's and don't's.

\*Dangers to the Group.

- Tends to cause confusion possibly leading to disunity and division and may even endanger the future of the group.
- May disrupt the flow of the meeting and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

\*Tips for Handling.

- Do not encourage their sharing.
- If they persist stop them by stating that time constraints require you to move on.
- Minister to them personally after the meeting to clarify the purpose of the Small Group. Explain in love.

"PASTOR PETE" - THE PERSON WHO IS A "SELF-APPOINTED" PASTOR.

\*How to Identify

- They usually roam from group to group and resist the spiritual authority of the Community Group Leader. Attempts to "takeover" the group from time to time.
- Tries to establish their own authority or rule by control. Their purpose within the group is usually to recruit followers for their own purposes and this will soon become evident.

\*Dangers to the Group

- Generally disruptive to the flow of the meeting and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- If allowed to move in full force they will lead the group away from the desired goals and purpose of the meeting. May cause disunity and division.

\*Tips for Handling

- Do not encourage their sharing.
- If they attempt to take control of the meeting, lovingly, but firmly reassume control.
- Meet with them privately and explain that, as the Small Group leader you are the spiritual authority. Ask them to be submissive to your spiritual authority and that by so doing they are actually being submissive to God's spiritual authority. ""
- Suggest they consider attending the next Leader Training in preparation to potentially be a Group Leader themselves.

"RAMBLING RITA" - THE OVERTALKER/RAMBLER

\*How to Identify

- The "talker" is quickly identified by their tendency to take over the sharing time and ramble from one subject to another.
- The "story teller" attempts to tell stories with little or no relevance to the sharing subject.

### \*Dangers to the Group

- The stories may include personal experiences or inside information about others which should not be shared.
- This generally causes "dead space" in the group with loss of flow of the meeting.
- This is not a life producing experience and causes boredom and loss of energy by the group members particularly if the stories are long or frequent

### \*Tips for Handling

- Do not encourage this person to share.
- Direct the person's sharing with statements such as: "It sounds as though you have had many experiences, but what we want to know is what is happening in your life now?"
- After the person has taken a short time to tell a story you may say "In order to allow others to share, please limit your conclusion to 30 seconds."
- If he/she persists you may wish to meet with him privately to discuss how his sharing affects the group and the need to limit the time each has to share.

### "SENIORITY STAN" - TRIES TO USE THEIR SENIORITY

#### \*How to Identify

- This person has been a part of the church and/or the Community Group ministry for a long time, possibly even longer than the Group Leader.
- They refer often to "the good old days" and to previous church members, leadership and events.
- This person lets others know they believe that their relationship and position in the Community Group is established based on their seniority.

### \*Dangers to the Group

- By comparing the group with numerous references as to how things were done in the past he sows seeds of discontent and questioning.
- They may perceive themselves in a superior, parental role or as having arrived (at least as one step ahead of everyone else in the group).
- This frustrates other group members and stifles their growth.

### \*Tips for Handling

- Treat this person as any other group member.
- Play down the importance of seniority as either a Christian or a church member.
- During sharing times ask them what God is presently doing in their life.
- Ask them to be specific.
- Encourage this person to share their prayer needs for group prayer.

### "COMPLAINING CARL" - THE CHRONIC COMPLAINER

#### \*How to Identify

- During initial visits to the Community Group this person will seek attention and sympathy.
- He/she will have a "poor me" and "What did I do to deserve this" attitude.
- As long as they can maintain the focus on themselves they will probably return again and try to play the same game.
- When others attempt to minister to them they resist with a "yes, but" response and usually reject good counsel.

#### \*Dangers to the Group

- They exercise some control over the group by constantly focusing on themselves and their problems.
- This person's constant negative/complaining attitude and game can cause confusion and destroy faith among Group members.

#### \*Tips for Handling

- Be patiently loving and supportive, but not sympathetic.
- Gently, but persistently challenge this attitude and consistently respond with positive confessions.
- Do not get hooked into the "yes, but" game.
- They will either respond and be healed or go somewhere else to continue the game of getting attention and sympathy.

### "CHURCH CRITIC CHRIS"- THE CHURCH CRITIC

#### \*How to Identify

- They will reveal themselves by an underlying critical attitude.
- During the sharing times and in fellowship conversation this person will continuously express personal opinions about everything in the church, including leadership and/or members.
- When certain ministries or pastors within the church are mentioned, this person is quick to get on their "soap box" and criticize or rehearse their "pet peeve". They seem to always have a "concern".

#### \*Dangers to the Group

- The Holy Spirit will be grieved and His ministry stopped.
- This person may cause a spirit of division and disunity to creep into the group.
- This person may become a stumbling block to less mature Christians.

#### \*Tips for Handling

- This person must be stopped immediately if they start criticizing their spiritual authority.
- The Community Group Leader should graciously, but firmly interrupt the person by stating that the Group meeting is not the proper forum to make complaints, air grievances or criticize.

- Let him know you respect his right to his own opinions and would welcome any constructive criticism or suggestions which they might have in a private meeting later.
- Immediately explain to the entire group that your intent as spiritual leader of the group is not to suppress and each one is to feel free to express to you in a private conversation their constructive criticism and ideas that will possibly be passed up the spiritual authority chain.
- Follow-up with the person later and give him an opportunity to express himself.
- Assure them that anything constructive will be passed on to the Discipleship Pastor and Staff.
- Explain to the person how potentially damaging it can be to the Community Group and how important it is to handle all situations biblically.

## "LATE LESTER" - THE PEOPLE WHO ARE ALWAYS LATE.

### \*How to Identify

- Obviously, always late!

### \*Dangers to the Group

- May not want to start on time until everyone is there.
- Disruptive to flow of the meeting.
- Draws attention to themselves all the time.
- Can cause a pattern of starting late for the whole group.

### \*Tip for Handling

- Set a definite start time and end time.
- Always begin promptly.
- Discuss with the group, "Seems we're having trouble getting started each week. Is our meeting too early? Are there conflicts?"
- Ask the problem person to lead the ice breaker at the first of the meeting for a couple of weeks emphasizing their need to be early, and, not just on time.

## "NON - PREPARED NORMAN" - THE PERSON WHO NEVER PREPARES THE LESSON.

### \*How to Identify

- Doesn't participate in the discussion.
- Lots of white blanks on the lesson page!
- May complain that they're not getting anything from the meetings.

### \*Dangers to the Group

- Can stifle discussion.
- Can get the discussion off track.
- Can come across as negative or non-interested.

### \*Tips for Handling

- Be realistic and clear with expectations.
- Include the person by allowing them to read passages.
- Ask for added input or discussion from them after someone else has responded.

### "NON -PARTICIPATING NORMA" - THE QUIET MEMBER WHO DOESN'T PARTICIPATE.

#### \*How to Identify

- Spouse possibly is a dominant talker. May have a fallen countenance.

#### \*Dangers to the Group

- Can make people feel they've been offensive.
- Can use the silence as a way of getting attention.
- Will become a spectator and not a participator.
- May drop out of the group if not involved or drawn into the discussion.

#### \*Tips in Handling

- Ask them observation type questions.
- Ask them to read.
- Positively reinforce them when they do respond.
- Devote extra time to them outside the regular meeting or during the fellowship time.
- Don't call on them to pray out loud unless they volunteer.
- Use an activity where everyone takes a turn.
- Don't let them go last because it may make them more nervous.

### "ARGUMENTATIVE ALBERT" - THE PERSON WHO LOVES CONTROVERSY

#### \*How to Identify

- "But" is a favorite word. "That may be true, but... "
- Knows only one interpretation of a passage.
- Many times emphasizes tangent issues.
- Knows the right way for everything.

#### \*Dangers to the Group

- May hold a group back from action or conclusions.
- May push "non-essentials" as "essential".
- May cause factions within the group by doctrinal hair splitting.
- Group can get loud and verbally angry, tense or hostile.

### \*Tips in Handling

- Remind people that doctrinal issues are not to be debated.
- Try to stick to the passage or subject at hand.
- Suggest that they discuss the problem passage after the meeting.
- Acknowledge that there are varying opinions on the subject.
- Keep your temper and don't let group get tense or excited.
- Privately explain to him that his view is important, but that he must not destroy the group's effectiveness by his insistence.

### "SHERMAN TANK SHERRY" - THE PERSON WHO IS INSENSITIVE TO OTHERS

#### \*How to Identify

- Seems to run over anything and anyone in his/her way.
- Has a tendency to intimidate others. Maintains an "I'm right - you're wrong" attitude.
- Like "Argumentative Albert", seems to want to battle.

#### \*Dangers to the Group

- May tend to dominate the group through intimidation.
- Can divide the group over issues by drawing battle lines.
- Can damage and quench shy or quieter personalities with his/her sharp corrective responses.

#### \*Tips in Handling

- Must be direct and "stand up" to this person.
- Consider the value of the issue being fought for.
- Personal face to face confrontation outside of the group meeting is best.
- Discern their greatest points of need and minister to those.

### "OZONE OZZIE" - THE PERSON ALWAYS COMING UP WITH THOSE "OUT THERE" REMARKS AND INTERPRETATIONS.

#### \*How to Identify

- This person lives in their own world.
- Has a new "unique" insight or interpretation.
- Doesn't seem to relate or work with the rest of the group.
- Possibly has the label "weird".

### \*Dangers to the Group

- Can bring a feeling of frustration to those in the group. (Trying to figure out where they're coming from, etc.)
- Usually aren't team players so they want to "do their own thing."
- Bring wrong doctrine to the group and confusion.
- Can be contentious about tangent issues

### \*Tips in Handling

- Find a responsibility they can fulfill and encourage them in their area.
- Don't encourage their usually long interpretations and input.

## "PERPETUAL PROBLEM PATRICIA" - THE PERSON WHO'S LIFE IS ALWAYS FALLING APART

### \*How to Identify

- This person is always down.
- Continually has a "poor me" attitude.
- Prayer request always for themselves and their "situations".

### \*Dangers to the Group

- Problems dominate group life.
- Member monopolizes group with personal crisis.
- New members get wrong impressions of the group life.
- Other's needs may not be met.

### \*Tips in Handling

- Encourage the person to seek counseling until the crisis is resolved.
- Talk individually to the person.
- Help the group see its purpose and identity (Community Groups are not therapy groups.)
- Continue in prayer and loving support.