



# Leadership Handouts

## Group Development Series

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### Group Dynamics

In order to be the most effective leader, you must be aware of what is happening in your group. Note everyone in your group has the same expectations, does the same thing or has the same commitment level. Knowledge about how your group members interact, share common goals and work with one another can help you to integrate newcomers and prepare them for the roles, norms, and cohesiveness of the group.

#### ROLES

Depending on the task, group members will occupy formal and informal roles. With formal roles, a title is helpful in establishing the member's specific duties to the group. Formal roles include:

President	Treasurer	Secretary
Vice President	Parliamentarian	Director

However, there are informal roles such as:

Worker	Social leader	Expert in certain area
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It is in these informal roles where a newcomer will need special help in understanding their tasks.

#### NORMS

Norms are the rules of the group. They may be explicit (outwardly stated) or implicit (known only by observation). They tell the group members how to behave or how not to behave in different situations. Newcomers who do not follow these rules may be excluded from the group. Examples of norms may include:

- How much socializing occurs at meetings.
- How members dress at meetings.
- Whether group members go out together and when.
- Whether meetings start on time or are always 15 minutes late.

Norms may be positive by exerting a sense of order, but they can be negative or cause uncomfortable exclusion from the group. It is your job as a leader to try and change some of the negative group norms and to help newcomers understand positive ones.

#### COHESIVENESS

This refers to all of the forces that cause individuals to remain in groups. High cohesiveness, such as strong liking and close match between individual needs and goals may help the group. It can interfere, however, if the group spends so much time in social interaction that they cannot get any work done.

Generally, a sense of esprit de corps helps group performance. A newcomer may have more difficulty fitting in a group that has a very high cohesion level. As leader of the group, you can provide the extra help the newcomer may need in adjusting to the group as well as help established members welcome their newest member.

#### DYSFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORS IN GROUPS

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|-------------------------|--|
| Cutting off others      | Attacking people rather than issues              |
| Topic jumping           | Withholding reactions, feelings or information   |
| Dominating              | Attending to side issues - nitpicking            |
| Not Listening           | Side grouping – side conversations               |
| Avoiding responsibility | Operating on assumptions – “not checking it out” |



### **HELPFUL BEHAVIORS IN GROUPS**

Seek to make each person welcome	Ask for comments from those reacting nonverbally
Encourage each to listen to others	Request that all state their feelings
Give positive feedback for support	Involve everyone – ask for everyone’s reactions
Keep relationships honest and supportive	Maintain a sense of freedom and mutual responsibility
Listen to those who speak	Encourage group members to state their opinions
Avoid direct argument with a group member	Ask individuals to try something – never insist
Use inclusive language (i.e. “we”)	Exhibit “Sharing Behavior” (offer rides, bring snacks)

### **DUTIES OF A LEADER WITHIN A GROUP**

As a student leader, it is your job to stimulate and promote goal-oriented thinking and behavior. Make people feel strong (help them feel that have the ability to influence their future and their environment). Structure cooperative relationships rather than competitive. Build members’ trust in the leader (lack of mutual trust means lack of faith in the system). Resolve conflicts by mutual confrontation of issues rather than avoidance or forcing a particular solution.

### **WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN GROUPS**

Who are the high participators?  
Who are the low participators?  
What are the greeting behaviors? Do they serve to bond the group?  
Who talks to whom?  
Early arrival and late departure phenomenon – do people want to spend time together?  
Who keeps the ball rolling? And why?  
How are the silent people treated? And how is their silence interpreted?