## Building on Experience – Handling Group Problems

**Lack of Participation**

When members do not participate in group activities, leaders need to determine why this is happening. This frequently occurs with younger members who may hesitate to participate in meetings and discussions.

**Possible Causes**

1. Members may not understand goals.

2. Members may feel insecure.

3. More aggressive members may not give others an opportunity to participate.

4. Members may not know how to participate.

5. Members may not be interested in program or activity.

6. Meeting time may not fit members’ other responsibilities.

**Suggested Solutions**

1. Make sure members have a part in setting goals.

2. Make sure members have a part in planning, programs and activities.

3. Try to let each individual serve in a role that will be a challenge and in which

she/he can succeed.

4. Be sure to teach members how to perform the role or assignment if they don’t know how.

5. Provide opportunities for younger, inexperienced members to participate – for example, serving on a committee – where they can gain experience before giving them a big assignment.

6. Promote a friendly, helpful group spirit where no one laughs at or ridicules a

person who “goofs.”

7. Keep lines of communication open.

8. Develop a group goal of “everyone participates.”

9. Change meeting time to suit needs of the group.

**Lack of Interest in Program**

When members lack interest perhaps the programs are uninteresting.

Another indication of lack of interest occurs when there is good attendance only

at social functions. It’s also possible that members joined for the wrong reason.

**Possible Causes**

1. Members do not identify their personal goals with those of the program.

2. Members may have had little part in planning the program.

3. Members may not find a satisfying role in carrying out the program.

**Suggested Solutions**

1. Involve members in setting group goals.

2. Involve members in planning programs they want.

3. Involve members in carrying out the program. They need challenging

responsibilities that they can carry out successfully.

4. Give members recognition for their contributions.

**Lack of Local Support for the Organization Leader**

Many 4-H Clubs have trouble getting and keeping enough adult volunteers to

help the club function to its potential. Sometimes the one organizational

leader finds herself/himself assuming nearly all the responsibility for the club,

though there are plenty of responsibilities that can be shared. Sometimes lack of parental support is evident.

**Possible Causes**

1. The group may not have let parents and other people know that it is

providing a worthwhile program.

2. The community may not be aware of the needs of the group or

opportunitiesfor involvement.

3. The group may not have explained fully what is expected of potential

leaders.

4. New or potential leaders may lack the training to carry out needed

responsibilities.

5. The group may be asking potential volunteers to do too much.

**Suggested Solutions**

1. Improve group public relations by carrying out programs, projects, and

activities that will be recognized as worthwhile in the community.

2. Discuss the roles of adult leaders and what is expected of them before

contacting prospects.

3. Arrange leader training if leaders need specific training or orientation to

carry out their responsibilities.

4. Encourage members to express their thanks and appreciation to

volunteers frequently.

5. Have programs for parents and others to acquaint them with the

accomplishments of the group. Coordinate with Extension 4-H staff to help

publicize activities.

6. Break up the jobs to be done into reasonable pieces. More people will agree

to help if given a relatively small, well-defined task.

**Declining or Stagnant Membership**

Membership needs attention either when members are dropping out or when

attracting new members is difficult.

**Possible Causes**

1. Some people may not know about the group, what it does, who may belong,

how to join.

2. Present members may be cliquish and fail to welcome prospective or new

members.

3. The program may not be of interest to current or prospective members.

4. Some members may not have a way to get to meetings.

**Suggested Solutions**

1. Strive to improve the group atmosphere—make it warmer, more friendly.

2. Make a list of prospective members and extend friendly, personal invitations.

3. Invite prospects to go to a meeting with you.

4. Make sure that present and prospective members understand the purpose

of the group.

5. Involve members in planning a program attractive to them.

6. Give members responsibilities so they will have a role in the organization

and feel important to the group.

7. Give members recognition for what they do.

8. Make members feel liked and wanted.

9. Publicize the program and activities.

10. Arrange car-pools if transportation is a problem.

**Disorderly Meetings**

Meetings are disrupted when members come late, don’t attend regularly or are

disorderly.

**Possible Causes**

1. Group has fallen into bad habits.

2. Some members do not feel a part of the group.

3. Some members feel insecure and strive for attention.

4. The group has cliques.

5. Members may lack interest in group or program.

6. Members may not know what is expected.

**Suggested Solutions**

1. Discuss problems with members. What standards do they want? What kind of a group do they want to be?

2. Encourage members to state their expectations.

3. Hold training for members, leaders and officers if increased knowledge or skill is needed in areas such as conducting meetings and decision-making.

4. Change meeting time if it doesn’t fit the group.

5. Involve group in planning a more interesting program if that seems to be the

issue.

6. Consider opening with the most attractive parts of the program to encourage

promptness. This might mean starting with some recreational activities as

members arrive.

**Poor Group Relationships**

When there is bickering and jealousy among members, or if the group has

cliques, poor group relationships result. This problem also arises when young

people want to run the show and feel that adult leaders are too dominating. Members may not know how to discuss these problems with leaders, and this can add to the problem.

**Possible Causes**

1. Individuals may not understand their own motivation or that of others.

2. Individuals have not learned to distinguish between differences in ideas and

differences between personalities.

3. Individuals may feel insecure and, therefore, are excessively shy, afraid or

aggressive.

**Suggested Solutions**

1. Build self-confidence and feelings of worth by focusing on each member’s

assets and strengths. “I like the way you handled that.” “I appreciate what you did.”

2. Let the members know their worth. Recognize improvement and effort, not

just accomplishment. Encourage cooperation rather than competition.

“You’re improving.” “It looks as if you worked very hard on that.”

3. Focus on member’s ability to manage her/his life and make decisions. Do not anticipate failure. “I trust you to become responsible and independent.”

4. Focus on contributions and appreciation. “Your contribution counts.” “We

appreciate what you have done.”

5. Accept members as they are. Don’t make your approval and acceptance

dependent on their behavior.

6. Work to develop mutual understanding and trust between members and leaders.

**Resources**: Most of the resources needed will be found in the imaginations of your members. Provide enough to make them comfortable. They will be off to a good start.

**Questions**: Strive to ask questions that stimulate thought. After you ask a question, pause long enough for members to think and to answer. Questions taht can be answered “yes” or “no” do not help develop group discussion.

**Presentations**: Encourage members to share their ideas with others. Skits, plays, puppet shows, posters, etc., should be encouraged. Explore many methods for sharing ideas.

**Sources**: University of Florida Cooperative Extension, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. This guide has been adapted from “Handling Group Problems,” LG778, University of Missouri-Columbia, by John A. Rutledge, Jr., Extension 4-H Youth Specialist.