

WORKBOOK 4.5: MANAGING CHALLENGING PARTICIPANTS ACTIVITY

Purpose:	The purpose of this activity is to identify strategies for managing challenging participants.
Duration:	15 minutes (5-preparation; 10-discussion)
Group composition:	Individual
Debrief:	Large-Group Discussion
Equipment:	None

Directions:

1. Consider the following scenario: One participant is very informed about the topic you are presenting. As a result, this individual is overly aggressive in sharing information and is not allowing others to participate.
2. Review the suggestions on the following page on how to manage with challenging participants.
3. Determine how you would handle the situation described in the scenario.

Remember: Having to deal with difficult course participants is not common. The best way to prevent problems is to establish a connection with each participant before the training begins. When resolving problems:

- Do not compromise the individual's self-esteem.
- Take action before others get frustrated but not so soon that you discourage debate and interaction.
- Understand the potential reasons for the behaviors.
- Make sure others will view your actions as fair and reasoned.
- Use your paraphrasing skills to help preserve a positive learning climate.

Dealing With . . .	Possible Reasons for Behavior	How To Deal With Behavior
Silent Course Participants	▪ May be paying attention but thinking before speaking ▪ May be shy and unsure ▪ May be distracted by outside problems ▪ May not understand the content ▪ May feel superior — may “know it all” already ▪ May be bored ▪ May be resistant	▪ If you see a sign that they know an answer or agree with a comment, ask them to respond ▪ Be supportive ▪ Talk to them on a break about anything unrelated to the training — get to know them ▪ Don’t embarrass them or put them on the spot ▪ Observe nonverbal behaviors for interest, boredom, etc. ▪ Do small-group activities or discussions ▪ Include activities that initially allow course participants to work individually
Overbearing Course Participants	▪ May be well informed and anxious to share information ▪ May be talkative ▪ May feel defensive	▪ Do not embarrass anyone or be sarcastic — you may need their expertise later. ▪ Redirect attention to the rest of the group by saying, “I appreciate your enthusiasm and your comments. Let’s see what others think.” ▪ Be receptive while also letting them know you’re in charge.
Cynical Course Participants	▪ May have “seen it all” and feel nothing will change the system. ▪ May not believe the cynicism is a problem.	▪ Engage individual during discussions. ▪ Ask them for suggestions. ▪ Do not reinforce cynical behavior. ▪ Ask them what factors they have control over.
Combative Course Participants	▪ May have different ideas, values, or perceptions ▪ May have personality differences	▪ Emphasize points of agreement ▪ Refocus on the objective. ▪ Ask a direct, closed question about the topic. ▪ Ask that personalities or perceptions be omitted. ▪ Ask each person to state the other’s concern or point of view.