

SOOTHE

CARE MODULE #5

COMPETENCY: Dealing with difficult situations/people in a way that honors the individual and the group.

Opening Question: Think of a time when you witnessed someone defuse a difficult situation/person. What did they say or do to handle the situation/person?

Scripture: Colossians 4:5-6

Question: What is your current process for dealing with difficult people/situations?

Question: What steps does this passage point out regarding dealing with difficult people/situations? What area do you need to improve in?

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1: Read, *Handling Difficult Conversations with Participants*, and answer questions.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Handling difficult conversations with participants

By Kathy Fallon & Meredith Geldmeier

It's inevitable: at some point while serving as a DivorceCare group leader, you'll encounter something—a sensitive situation, a troublesome personality trait in a group member, etc.—that requires you to have a difficult conversation with a group member. These talks can be daunting; you want to be gentle, yet effective. And, of course, you don't want to alienate anyone.

We've put together some general guidelines for preparing for difficult conversations as well as talking points for some specific scenarios you may encounter.

Step 1: Group guidelines

Remember to establish Group Guidelines as a baseline for behavior within your group, and always review them before a session starts. Continue to review them periodically during your thirteen weeks together as a reminder for participants of what is expected during the group time.

Step 2: Prepare ahead of time

Keep the following tips in mind as you prepare to talk with a group member:

- **Remember to be gentle.** View the conversation, not the participant, as difficult. Remind yourself that the participant simply needs some gentle redirection.
- **Pray.** Think about the specific challenge you're facing with the group member, and pray about it.
- **Seek advice.** Sometimes those who need help may choose to stop attending group due to one person's behavior. Don't hesitate to get advice from your pastor about the situation and the discussion.
- **Meet in person.** Plan to meet with the participant in person, one-on-one, if at all possible, either before or after the session (unless there is an urgent reason the person should not return to the group).
- **Pray again!** Remember to end all conversations with a participant with prayer.

Step 3: The conversation

Here are three situations DivorceCare group leaders commonly encounter, and talking points to help you navigate discussions with group members:

Situation: A participant dominates the group conversation.

What you can do:

- Add the Permission Rule to your Group Guidelines. Ask your group members to give you permission to bring them back to the topic if they digress or talk too long. This sets expectations, and you can gently redirect a participant by saying, "Thank you, Kim. Remember you gave me permission to bring you back to the topic. Good comments. And as the weeks go on you'll have other opportunities to discuss more. Now, Janice, what are your thoughts on that question?" Then move the discussion along to the next person.
- Affirm the participant's sharing his thoughts. It takes courage! (Example: "Thank you for sharing your heart so openly in our group time. I hope that will encourage others to share, too. How has it helped you?")

- Enlist the participant's help in allowing other group members time to share. You might ask him to wait to answer a question until two or three other members have shared.
- Remind this group member about the Group Guidelines and the fact that other people need time to think and respond.
- Collaborate on a plan of action for group time. Here's an example of what you could decide on: "How can we communicate with each other? If I hold up two fingers, that means you need to wrap up in two sentences or less. Let's share this plan for everyone to use in the group as a reminder to give each other time to share."

Situation: A participant seeks to date or is dating another member of the group.

What you can do:

- Ask another group leader of the same gender to speak with the participant.
- Remind the participant that the group is intended to function as a safe place, not a dating pool. Refer again to your Group Guidelines.
- Explain to the group member that dating within the group interferes with the focus on healing and will affect his ability to heal, as well as others'.
- If the participant isn't willing to set dating aside for the duration of the group, review with him the reasons he is attending.

Situation: A participant attempts to take on the role of counselor.

What you can do:

- Explain to the participant that he should not try to compare his situation to anyone else's within the group.
- Remind the participant that he is there to share his experiences, not to give advice. Refer to your Group Guidelines.
- Discuss the importance of speaking for himself and allowing others to do the same. Participants should apply the truths they've learned during the session to their own lives and allow others to do so as well.

These are only a few of the situations you may encounter in your role as group leader. Make sure to refer to your LeaderZone resources for additional help dealing with challenging group members. Also, reach out to your pastor and other leaders on the Leaders' Forum for advice.

1. What stood out to you the most and why?
2. What challenged you the most?
3. What questions did this article raise for you?
4. What opportunities for growth did this article highlight for you?
5. What accountability questions would you like for me to ask you next time we meet?