

How to Handle Challenging Participants in a PDO

Really, really quiet

- Humor/draw person out
- Call on them. Anything to add?
- Pair up with another (small group activity)
- Use feedback cards with written questions
- Open ended activity when they have to talk about something
- Start with an icebreaker and include additional activities throughout
- Use toss ball or “you have the floor” method
- Allow time to write/think before calling on them
- Use positive reinforcements to boost confidence
- Get to know them during breaks and use this knowledge to direct the discussion
- Have a returnee work with them
- Pair up with outgoing student
- “I haven’t heard from a couple of you” – a safe, nonpointed opportunity for them to speak

Doesn’t see a young PDO leader as credible

- State credentials/experience (in intro/start up)
- Pair with older volunteer when possible
- Open up to Q&A on front end to prove merit
- Prove through actions that AFS does have resources/experience/answers
- Maintain a mature and professional attitude (dress one level above)
- Answer the concerns that are expressed without reacting to the criticism
- Don’t be defensive
- Accepting of individual difference
- Don’t be too critical/judgmental

The Funny Guy

- Don’t laugh/don’t give desired response
- Pair with appropriate partner
- Use for interactions
- Use humor to address him directly
- Putting in charge of group
- Ignore, don’t engage
- Responsibilities
- Give them specific tasks to do
- Engage them to lighten interactions, but engage others
- Find out his/her nervousness source
- Redirect back to focus of discussion
- Have that person lead next question
- Ask them a serious question

Side conversations—sending notes, texting...

- Set the ground rules
- Bring them into conversation/call on them to answer a question
- Make sending notes an activity
- Give them a job – easel writer
- Answer their phones for them (send text)
- “Stop” session until they pay attention (stop talking)
- Reorder the seating or groups through an activity
- As if they would like to share
- Ask to turn off phone
- Make them a leader
- Use them as an example of how to communicate
- Make groups smaller so they can talk more
- Take the phones away, reassure them that they will get them back
- In a kind way, talk about culture and expectations around respect of people speaking—not appropriate to answer phones, text

“Know it all” – Monopolizer

- Save till last
- Does anyone else have a comment?
- Use note cards to limit volume of responses per person
- Break people into smaller groups
- Add nonverbal activities
- Find other ways to engage, assign a role
- Let them get it out quickly then put in background
- Explain philosophy of group discussion
- Leader needs to maintain control of group and keep discussion moving from participant to participant
- Leader needs to reinforce the “let’s give everyone a chance to talk”
- If still a problem, take person aside
- Pick specific people to answer questions
- Use Round Robin – each person talking in turn
- Do activity to highlight material that is unknown to them (“show them up”)

Doesn’t “buy in” – “too cool” and above it all

- Address them directly
- Do an activity that includes movement
- Call on them first
- Ask about motivations
- Relate to them by sharing stories
- Try everything!
- “Why are you here?” to group
- “What do you want from us today to have a good experience?”
- Assign role or task

- Be more inclusive so they become part of the group
- Use personal experience and tell story of student too cool and had problem because too cool to ask for help
- Pair student with another “more engaged” student
- Try a simulation to get them to reflect

Hyperactive – trouble sitting still and listening

- Give extra tasks
- Toys on the table
- Be a “helper”
- Keep student busy
- Timekeeper
- Pass out sheets
- Recorder
- Active activities, no long lectures
- Regroup people frequently
- Variety of activities
- Ask them questions to make sure they are following along
- Have them sit where less likely to disturb others
- Get them up and moving
- Let them stand
- Pay attention to room set-up, rather than rows make small groups, one big circle, U-seating

Going for all the wrong reasons – red flags everywhere

- Private blunt discussions
- Follow up with student and family after PDO
- Use probing questions to challenge them to think in a different way
- Talk to interviewer to see if he/she has additional insights
- Use returnee (trained) in 1-on-1 to delve into rationale
- Talk about possible roll-over
- Ask “why are you going?”
- Ask “what are reasons for you not to go?” Answers revealing
- Share realistic expectations
- Monitor throughout PDO to see if there is any change.