

# **MODULE 6**

## **Managing Challenging Behaviors**



## MODULE 6: MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

One of the greatest fears of many facilitators relates to managing challenging behaviors. Most participants are generally positive and contribute to the group process. However, there are times when some participants will either over- or under-participate or behave in a manner that is hostile or aggressive.

### Learning Goal

The learning goal for Module 6 is to increase your understanding of and ability to deal with challenging behaviors in a facilitation environment.



### MODULE 6 OBJECTIVES

- Identify examples of challenging behaviors
- Develop and practice strategies for managing challenging behaviors



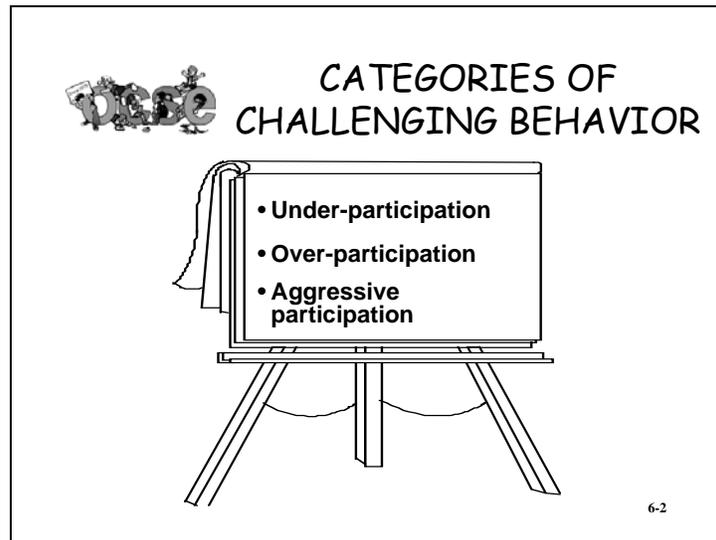
6-1

### Learning Objectives

- Through a participative discussion and a team activity, you will identify examples of challenging behaviors.
- After a small group activity and a brief lecture, you will develop and practice strategies for managing challenging behaviors.

## IDENTIFYING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

Most participants are generally positive and interested in contributing to the group process. However, there may be some participants who demonstrate behaviors that are disruptive and have a negative impact on the group.



The slide above lists the three categories into which challenging behaviors can fall. Effective facilitators have learned how to identify and manage the behaviors related to these categories. They also know how to encourage and reinforce positive behaviors.

Some of the challenging behaviors are more likely to occur early in the group's time together as participants adjust to their new roles and to you. Don't be overly concerned with infrequent demonstrations of challenging behavior, but look for consistent patterns of behavior. When these occur, you must move quickly to defuse the situation.

The most effective facilitators have as their goal to change, reduce, or eliminate challenging behaviors without impacting the participant's willingness to contribute in the future. They watch for nonverbal messages, apply the Adult Learning Principles, and treat each participant with respect.

## TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

### Managing Under-Participation

- Invite specific people to contribute.
- Pose questions; do not make statements.
- Have a ground rule that states, “Full participation; equal time for all.”
- Encourage equal participation by having everyone write down their thoughts first and then go around the group.
- Have everyone speak in turn.
- Give positive feedback, then ask for additional input.
- Have people discuss a question in twos or threes, then have them report back to the entire group.
- Conduct an icebreaker or brainstorm on how to ensure everyone participates.
- Use humor, music, stretch breaks, etc., as appropriate.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Direct a question to a specific person if you know he or she has input. Ask if the person would share with the others what he or she has shared with you.
- Summarize what has occurred in the group so far, ensure there’s agreement, and suggest that the group move on.
- Elicit people’s expectations and concerns about the meeting and/or being part of the group from the beginning.

### Managing Dominating Group Members

- Ensure equal participation by having everyone write down their thoughts first and then go around the group.
- Have everyone speak in turn; begin so that the dominant person will be the last to speak.

## TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS, CONTINUED

### Managing Dominating Group Members, Continued

- Get the group to agree to focus on the issue at hand. The group then becomes the gatekeeper.
- Avoid discounting the person. Don't put anyone down.
- Acknowledge the contribution. Comment on something valid that the person has said. Give him or her credit for constructive contribution.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings.
- State the need for opinions from others.
- Ask the group or specific individuals for their ideas, opinions, etc.
- Acknowledge that there may be many points of view.
- In case of personal attack, paraphrase and redirect the focus.
- Have a "parking lot" to capture ideas/issues. Then move on. Writing them down acknowledges the person and his or her idea.
- Know who will be in the group and the possible "dominating" person. Speak to him or her before the group meets and agree on how you will interact with him or her in this different situation. This is especially important if this person is your boss, executive, group leader, etc.

### Managing Side Conversations

- Stand by those who are having the side conversation, pause, and look at them with a friendly, nonverbal invitation to be quiet.
- Ask people not to have side conversations.
- Have a ground rule that states, "One person speaks at a time."
- Invite the people having the side conversation to share their ideas with the entire group.

## TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS, CONTINUED

### Managing Group Members Who Ramble

- When the person pauses for a breath, interrupt and refocus the discussion.
- Summarize the key points the person has made, then move on.
- Ask the rambler to summarize before moving on.

### Managing Expert or “Protective of Turf” Group Members

- Get group agreement and reinforce the agreement that the group has the right to explore all areas.
- Reinforce that everyone in the group is there to learn and work together to come to agreement or consensus. Ask the expert to “teach” the others, when appropriate, so that they can move forward as a group.
- Talk to the person outside the group meeting and ask for cooperation and patience.

### Managing Digression and Tangents

- Use a posted agenda.
- Develop a timed agenda and assign a group member to help keep the group on time.
- Have a “parking lot” to capture ideas, issues, etc., that are not appropriate at the time, but which the group will address later.
- Use statements like “We’ve gotten off track. Let’s refocus and get back to the topic at hand. We were talking about ....”

### Managing Feuding Group Members

- Know who will be in the group and the potential for feuding between members.
- If possible, talk to the feuding members before the meeting. If not, address the issue at a break or between meetings.

## TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS, CONTINUED

### Managing Feuding Group Members, Continued

- Ask the feuding members to take their discussion “off-line” if it is an inappropriate topic.
- Use ground rules to reinforce agreed upon behavior and point out the inappropriate behavior.
- Try to find points of agreement between the feuding members.
- Acknowledge and clarify individual viewpoints. Ask, “What do you want instead of ...?”
- Seat group members appropriately. For example, have someone who may have a moderating influence sit between the feuding members.

### Managing Hidden Agendas

- Know who will be in the group and address the issue ahead of time.
- Have a discussion with the group on the issue of hidden agendas. Brainstorm and develop ground rules to help deal with the problem.

### Managing Group Members Who Need Greater Detail

- Make sure the scope of the meeting is clearly defined and posted. Refer back to it as necessary.
- Note the time allotted for the meeting and the need to complete the specific task or part of the agenda.
- Ask the question, “Are we dealing with this at the right level?”
- Know your group members.
- Explain that if it’s necessary to go into greater detail, it will be done at a later meeting.

## TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS, CONTINUED

### Managing Group Members Who Are Late

- Start on time. Don't penalize those who are on time.
- Post times to return from break and start at that time.
- Include timeliness in the ground rules.

### Managing Group Members Who Rush To Complete the Meeting/Task

- Remind the group of their goal and agreed upon process for coming to consensus or conclusion.
- Make sure that members understand that improvements, changes, ideas, etc., take time.
- Confront the specific person in a positive manner and emphasize the goal and agreed upon process.
- Help the group to look at the issue another way before coming to resolution.

## ROLE PLAYING RESPONSIBILITIES



### ROLE PLAYING RESPONSIBILITIES

- Be as authentic as you can be in the role
- Don't do irrational things just for fun
- If the facilitator tries to engage you, try to react in a genuine manner or in keeping with your role

6-3

## EXERCISE: MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

### Scenario 1:

You are a manager in a large local child support enforcement agency in a county that is near the State line. Your agency has a large interstate caseload with many initiating and responding Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA) cases. The processing of interstate cases continues to be a problem and there is much confusion about the use of long-arm statutes, controlling order determinations, and direct and administrative enforcement options.

You are part of an Interstate Work Group that has been formed to identify, discuss, and analyze problems and come up with recommendations for addressing these problems. This is the first meeting of the Interstate Work Group.

### Scenario 2:

You are a manager in a large local child support enforcement agency. Your agency collects arrearage payments on a significant number of cases. Each day, the accounting department receives inquiries about the distribution of these collections.

You have been asked to be part of a task force with other managers in your office. You are meeting to identify the appropriate staff who can accurately distribute child support collections and who can clearly describe the process when answering inquiries.

### Scenario 3:

You are a manager in a large local child support enforcement agency. Your agency recently hired 10 new caseworkers. Each new caseworker will be assigned a caseload after learning to use the statewide-automated child support enforcement system.

Previously, new caseworkers were given a brief training on the automated system before being assigned to a caseload. These caseworkers continue to struggle with the automated system and do not have a good basic understanding of child support functions.

You are part of a group of agency managers whose task is to come up with solutions to the problem described above. Group members include the manager of the training program and the manager responsible for the automated system.

## EXERCISE: MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS, CONTINUED

### **Scenario 4:**

You are a member of the Customer Service Unit staff in a large child support enforcement agency. The local newspaper has published many letters from people who are displeased with the way the Customer Service staff treats them when they call or come in to the office. Since customer service is a priority in the agency, your manager has called a meeting to discuss the issue and identify ways to provide customer service to the clients and still get assignments completed.

### **Scenario 5:**

Your agency recently moved into a new secure building. The new building has interview rooms that are designed to keep caseworkers safe. The old building had no interview rooms so caseworkers conducted interviews in their personal offices.

Lately, the Establishment Unit caseworkers have been taking custodial and noncustodial parties to their own offices for interviews because they don't want to wait for a secure interview room. Other units are complaining about having nonemployees in their workspace because there have been past incidents with clients being abusive or violent. Management is concerned about the safety risk to employees.

You are part of a meeting that has been called to discuss and resolve this problem.

### **Scenario 6:**

Your agency is very concerned about the retention of qualified staff. As part of the agency's retention efforts, a team has been formed to create a career development program for OCSE staff.

You are a member of the team and this is the team's first meeting.

## MODULE 6 KEY POINTS



### MODULE 6 KEY POINTS

- Under-participation, over-participation, or hostile or aggressive behaviors present special challenges
- Defuse these behaviors by thinking and acting quickly
- The goal is to reduce or eliminate the behaviors without affecting the person's willingness to contribute in the future

6-4

