



Quiet Group Members GroupWords

Groups come in all sizes. For some, it feels like a group when there are ten to twelve people. The gathering feels small, intimate, and comfortable to talk and share. For others, it feels like a group when there are two people. Any more and “sharing” feels too vulnerable. This is why in our small groups some are always ready to enter into the discussion while others are much quieter. It is these more silent members that I want us to think about for a minute.

It’s true that the quiet group member can benefit from listening to the verbal members. But it’s also true that the more involved a group member is, the more they will gain.

And so, how can we encourage more group involvement and at the same time allow group members the freedom to be quiet?

1. Encourage Involvement. This may sound too simple, but people need to be encouraged, and some need to be given permission to talk. Try to make the encouragement verbal. And if they seem especially nervous about entering in, ask them *before* the group begins if you can call on them to read or share an experience during the group meeting.

2. Provide Information. Sometimes a person is quiet because they simply think longer about what they’re going to say before they talk. If you can give them some coaching, or supply them with some information ahead of time, they will feel more equipped and able to enter into the discussion.

3. Watch Body Language. Nonverbal communication is especially important. A person’s gestures or expressions can communicate their state of mind — interest, anxiety, or amusement. These can give you signals to know when to involve them in the discussion. For example, “John” may have been quiet thus far, but you see him nodding in agreement to something another group member is saying. This is your signal to affirm him, *“It’s obvious that John and several others agree with what Susan is saying. What can the rest of you add?”*

4. Build Trust. Take the time to build a friendship foundation — lunch, notes of encouragement, conversations at other gathering. These “deposits” in a group member’s friendship bank will make it easier and more natural for them to respond to your questions and leadership in the group setting. They will be responding to a friend, to someone they are coming to know and trust.

5. Use Specialties. Learn the quiet group member’s occupation and/or special interests or hobbies. They will feel much more comfortable talking about their own specialty. Use this information in the group to illustrate the topic of discussion. Find a way to bring them into the discussion.