

## Suggestions for Working With Challenging Participants

- Use the group rules to help keep participants from disrupting the group.
- Ignore inappropriate behavior, redirect participant toward appropriate behavior, and reward even the slightest movement toward appropriate behavior.
- Utilize “Thanks” Chips to try to control problem behaviors.
- Use group exercises to encourage participation in ways that may not come naturally to certain types of participants.
- If necessary, speak with challenging participant individually.

### *PARTICIPANT DISCOMFORT WITH SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL*

Ensure that there is a group rule about “right to pass (not participate)” or explicitly provide instructions that individuals do not have to participate if they do not want to.

Support the participant’s rights to her own values. Give “Thanks” Chips when participant makes an effort, for example, were she to experiment with less explicit objects, such as scarves or lotion, during the eroticizing safer sex exercise.

### *POOR LITERACY*

Most people with reading problems have developed some mechanism for coping with this, and “not having my glasses” often is a code word for literacy issues. Don’t offer your reading glasses; a facilitator should offer to assist with reading or writing.

### *PARTICIPANT PROVIDES MISINFORMATION*

Acknowledge their opinion, and allow others to express their concerns about the validity of the information without saying personally negative things about the misinformation giver. Use the curriculum to help you correct misinformation, without demoralizing the participant. Offer to provide supportive materials later. Avoid lengthy debate with “can we agree to disagree on this one?”

### *PARTICIPANT DOMINATES DISCUSSION*

Make sure there is a group rule regarding monopolizing discussion. Establish early during the first session that there is a great deal of content to go through during each session within the allocated time and that you might need to cut participants off in order to keep on topic. Call on other participants and solicit

their opinions. Use the “Parking Lot.” Take the participant aside and ask for her help in encouraging others to participate

### *CONFLICT BETWEEN MEMBERS*

Make sure there is a rule about respecting other people’s opinions. Use the rules to prevent them from making repeated negative comments about other participants’ opinions or ideas. Emphasize points of agreement and give “Thanks” Chips for positive behavior. A facilitator may stay physically close in order to reinforce through her presence. Alternatively, ignore, redirect, and reward.

### *PARTICIPANT EMOTIONAL DISTRESS*

Allow time for the woman to collect herself. Having the session run overtime a few minutes is less important than paying attention to the participant. Often, other participants provide “Thanks” Chips when very personal issues are disclosed. Acknowledge importance of her feelings. A co-facilitator can offer to talk with the woman separately, if she needs more time, or to meet with her after group. Following group, provide needed or requested referrals to appropriate resources.

### *PARTICIPANT SEEKS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP*

Some women attend groups to make friends and are lonely or needy. They may see you as a potential therapist. It is important not to blur roles. Set clear boundaries.

### *MANAGING YOUR OWN REACTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS*

If and when you find yourself having a negative reaction to a participant, it clearly could affect the way you deal with that person in group. Positive feelings could affect your facilitation as well. Use the Feeling Thermometer to try to pinpoint what you’re feeling and the thoughts behind it. Work with your co-facilitator to help you process this and to make sure your feelings don’t influence the group.