

GROUP LEADER RESOURCES

Increasing Vulnerability in Your Group

Do some of your group members clam up when you ask probing questions? Are they okay with surface conversations but resist opening up? As the group leader, it's important for you to create a safe environment that fosters vulnerability. These approaches may help.

1. **Check your expectations.** Based on personalities and backgrounds, some people hold their feelings and experiences close to the vest. You can help them take baby steps but they may never be fully transparent.
2. **Model the way.** You set the tone for the group. The more real and open you are, others will likely follow your lead. Of course, don't share *everything* - like the details of the last big fight with your spouse that almost sent you packing - but your transparency will set the example.
3. **Don't judge.** Judgment can easily shut a person down. If someone shares something shocking, try not to react, no matter how you feel about what they said. Even your nonverbal impulse can send a judgmental message, so take notice of your thoughts and feelings to control your reactions.
4. **Don't fix.** We've all had experiences we think others could learn from. With the best intentions, our "helpful questions" and "useful advice" could make a group member feel like we're trying to fix them or their situation. Resist the urge to diagnose and prescribe, unless the person specifically asks for people's opinions.
5. **Don't force the issue.** When you ask questions - especially when you call on a group member or ask a follow-up question - you may notice resistance. Instead of pushing, give them an out ("That's okay. You don't have to answer." Or, "You can think about it."). This helps them feel safe for future sharing. If you sense their reticence to share with the group, you might follow up with them privately to see if they want to talk about it.
6. **Pray if it's okay.** In a case when someone has been vulnerable about a struggle, thank them for sharing and ask if you can pray for them. Without making a huge deal of it, just pause and pray. Then continue with the discussion. Non-vulnerable people don't like being in the spotlight, so make it brief.
7. **Follow up.** If a group member has taken a positive step toward vulnerability, you might text, email, or call them, thanking them for opening up. Remind them how their openness and sharing of their challenges helps other group members relate and learn.

You won't change a wallflower into a sunflower overnight. But the more you and other group members model vulnerability, the more likely they will follow suit.