

Small Group Common Characters:

Remember, any one teen could play a number of these roles and it could change from day to day. Do not pigeonhole them. We are all dynamic, complex people, and our teens need us to address their changing and developing needs.

For ALL of these scenarios, if you continue to have trouble encountering a specific teen, regardless of which character they are most like, **REACH OUT** to David, Clint, or Annie for further help. The following "Do's & Don'ts" are just the first steps in dealing with behavioral issues. If you have recurring behavioral issues, **DO NOT** tell yourself "I should be able to handle this" as justification for not bringing it to our attention. Our job is to help you so that the teens can be loved best and encounter Christ.

Our teens are more important than our pride in being able to handle things on our own.

The Talkative One- this teen loves to talk. Whether it be about the topic at hand or what they had for breakfast, they are all about sharing their thoughts. They probably don't like silence, so will be more than happy to be the first to respond to all your questions, and could probably just keep talking if no one else tried to stop them

Do:

- Value their contributions to the group
- Encourage/praise them for their bravery/example in being willing to share with the group
- Be firm in keeping them on track (maybe even set up a "one thought at a time" rule to help mitigate meandering responses to questions)
- Invite them to help you encourage others to speak too
- Offer them one on one time outside of small group time (at the beginning or end of the evening)

Don't:

- Look disappointed when no one but this teen raise their hands to answer a question
- Ignore them when they are signaling they'd like to say something
- Tease them for talking a lot (not even playfully)
- Pit them against the group (we don't want to accidentally create an "us and them" mentality for our teens where the talkative one then feels like "they're all the small group and they just put up with me and what I say")

The Silent One- this teen likes to sit on the proverbial "side-lines" during discussion. When they do speak, they tend to speak quietly and with few words. They probably enjoy just listening and processing the discussion in their own time.

Do:

- Welcome them by name
- Praise them when they do participate
- Pay attention to body language and other signs which help you to learn about what they like/dislike/enjoy/etc.

Don't:

- Ignore/forget about them
- Always ask them what they think right away

The Off-topic One- this teen might like to be the comedian of the group, cracking jokes and trying to get facilitator off track, they might have a developmental need that makes staying on track difficult for them, or it might be another issue--whatever it is, they find it hard to stick with the scheduled topic

Do:

- Be patient and firm in redirecting the conversation
- Try and understand why they're behaving the way they are
- Validate their desire to participate, and encourage proper participation
- Invite them into a leadership/example-setting role for the rest of the group to help motivate them to center their focus on the issue at hand (ex. Let them ask the discussion questions, ask them to invite their peers to respond, etc.)

Don't:

- Reject their ideas or thoughts (this often translates to them as if you have rejected them as a person)
- Reprimand them in front of their peers
- Let it get under your skin (kids are kids and when they behave in this way they either don't know better and need help learning to focus, or they are testing you--getting irritated tells them they won)

The Uninterested One- this teen is prone to side conversations, distracting themselves (and others) with their phones, and other such behaviors that suggest they simply don't want to be there. Sometimes their disinterest even comes across as hostile to those in their group/their leaders who *do* want to be there.

Do:

- Learn their name, likes and dislikes, greet them by name, and ask them questions so they know you care about them
- Invite them into the conversation
- Praise/engage them when they do participate
- Try to understand why they are uninterested, maybe even ask about what is taking their focus away from the group and find a way to bring it back into the topic at hand (the root of most things we give our focus to is *the desire for happiness*, and the spiritual life is all about *supreme happiness*, so if you can get their distraction to be distilled down to happiness, it's pretty easy to rope it back into the conversation)
- encourage them to make the most of the time that they have there

Don't:

- Discipline them in front of the group
- Take away their cell phones
- Get upset with them for not participating
- Let your interactions with them/attempts to engage them be to the detriment of the rest of the group. (sometimes people just don't want to be here and there's nothing we can do about it)

The Debating One- this teen tends to argue against whatever information they've been given. They often have a perceived air of superiority and/or skepticism.

Do:

- Be confident in knowing that Truth is on your side, but patient and understanding in how you communicate truth
- Try to understand where their doubt/desire to go against the culture is coming from: ask questions like "Why do you feel this way? What makes you believe what you're saying is true?"
- Remind teens that understanding Truth is a life-long endeavor, and it's good to question things in order to come to a deeper understanding
- Recommend resources for further study on their part
- Keep in mind the way the rest of the group is responding to their objections/conversation and perhaps **invite them to Whataburger Wednesday** to keep talking about topics/issues that you can't continue in small group

Don't:

- Become combative or defensive
- Let them get under your skin
- Dismiss the teen as just being difficult
- Engage every debate
- Take up all of small group time on a tangential topic that only a couple people in the group are invested in

The Emotional One- this teen expresses deep emotions freely during small group even when the rest of the group is not in an emotional frame of mind, sometimes creating an uncomfortable environment.

Do:

- Validate their emotions
- Affirm the teen that this is a group of people that care for and love them
- Patiently bring the discussion back to a place where others feel it is ok to share again if it is off track or makes it difficult for others to share
- Offer them your support outside of small group
- Be honest with the group that sometimes we all experience intense emotions, and it's ok to express them
- Offer them resources like confession times, counseling services, prayer practices, etc.
- Monitor their emotions week to week, and talk to David, Clint, or Annie if the extreme emotions persist

Don't:

- Panic
- Cut them off during small group and then not follow up with them afterwards
- Alienate them from the group
- Immediately try to "fix" their hurt, sometimes they just need to be heard

The Flirty One- this teen likes to flirt with members of their small group, other people's small groups, and sometimes even the small group leader. Their flirting creates an awkward environment for you and for the other members of the group, and disrupts the free and authentic sharing we're working for.

Do:

- Encourage the group to stay focused on the topic
- Let David, Clint, or Annie know that this is happening
- Separate the teens who are flirting if the issue persists
- Always maintain boundaries between yourself and teens

Don't:

- Call the teen out in front of his/her peers
- Entertain the flirtation or joke about it
- Humiliate or embarrass the teen

The Sensitive Issues One- this teen has had troubling experiences in life which lead to concern on your part or the part of other members of the small group, and they have revealed some of this sensitive information to you regarding their physical well-being or their mental/emotional health.

Do:

- Reroute the conversation back to the topic at hand
- **Follow up** with them after small group
- Tell David, Clint, or Annie **AS SOON** as you learn this information, and continue to communicate with them afterwards with any new developments
- Pay close attention to the teen to learn more about how you can help them to feel supported, loved, and protected
- Offer them the appropriate resources

Don't:

- Panic
- Try to fix it
- Make a big deal in front of their peers
- Gloss over potentially important information

In Short:

Our primary objective as small group leaders **IS NOT** to cover all the questions on the question sheet, it **IS NOT** to make sure the kids memorize the material we're offering them, but it **IS** to help establish an environment wherein the Holy Spirit can most freely move and deeply touch the hearts of the teens. We are the instruments that help facilitate authentic encounter between the teens and each other, and the teens and God.

If you keep this in mind when encountering your small group, the rest will flow naturally (not always easily, but naturally).