

Dealing with Negative Participants

Most participants come to training ready to participate and learn. However, from time to time, a participant in the class may exhibit resistive or disruptive behavior. We have two goals in dealing with difficult participants: 1) to get them on board, and 2) to minimize their impact on others.

It is helpful and encourages involvement if the trainer lets the group establish ground rules, especially when a group will be together for one or more full days. At the beginning of the session, divide the participants into groups and ask them to come up with two things:

1) What trainers do to ruin a training session, and 2) What participants do to ruin a training session.

Have the groups report their results. Place the information on flip charts and post the charts around the room. Tell the participants that you promise to avoid negative trainer behavior and ask that they promise to avoid negative participant behavior.

For individuals who dominate the conversation, use a procedure in which participants share one idea or question from their activity. Rotate among the groups. Ask that no one repeat an answer that has already been mentioned by another person.

Use random methods to select group spokespeople. For example, draw names from a hat, or designate the oldest at the table, the youngest at the table, the person who was born the farthest away, etc.

For reluctant participants, have a variety of involvement options. Some people might not be comfortable doing a role play, but might volunteer to be the timer. Have enough group roles during the activity so that everyone in the group must assume one of the roles.

For a disruptive participant, talk to him at one of the breaks to see if there is anything that can make the course more valuable to him. Asking, "How's it going?" may be all it takes.