

5 Introduce members and pass the basket.

Invite all who wish to do so to introduce themselves. You may also wish to invite them to share their reasons for coming to the group.

A good time to pass a basket for donations may be immediately prior to your special program or activity, since everyone is still there. Consider giving first-timers a "free ride."

6 Have an activity that is meaningful to the members.

Although you may wish to include a special program at your first meeting to attract new members, it is best to make the organization of the group your main topic of discussion. Present the suggestions of the initial organizing committee, and open the floor for comments and additional ideas. Be sure to let the members know that this is *their* group.

At subsequent meetings you can use this time to feature speakers, hold discussions, participate in mutual sharing, or have special social activities. Some groups choose to alternate program meetings with social or informal discussion gatherings. Larger groups sometimes break into smaller groups to work on projects, programs, or specific types of sharing.

As you plan your programs, be sure to include lighter moments. Enjoyment and humor are effective tools that can help people build trust and deal with problems more creatively.

7 Deal with practical matters quickly.

Allow a few minutes for group business, announcements, and some enticing words about future meetings. Here are two hints:

- Use written notes to avoid omissions and rambling.
- Remind everyone of the time and place of the next meeting.

8 Close the meeting.

A warm closing can leave people with good feelings and a desire to return. Here are some ways to accomplish this:

- Leave on an upbeat note.
- Keep it short.
- Restate your group's policy about confidentiality (if this applies to your group).
- If a goal of the meeting was to work on a task, remind people in a positive way how much was achieved.
- Celebrate. Sing a song, have a big group hug, or say a prayer. (Do be careful that any prayer you choose reflects the beliefs of *all* members.)
- Say good-bye.

9 Allow time for informal sharing after the meeting closes.

This gives the members a chance to get to know each other better. Leaders may wish to gather to look at what went well and what might need to be changed at future meetings.

BUT WHAT IF NOBODY COMES?

"If you don't make mistakes, you're not working on hard enough problems."

— Author unknown

Ups and downs in attendance are normal. However, if your group has a regular pattern of low attendance, consider whether or not any of the following common problems are chasing members away from your group:

- Monopolizers who talk forever.** A "quick fix" is to set up strict guidelines for discussions. Some groups sit in a circle, allowing each member in turn to talk or pass. A 3 to 5 minute time limit can also help.
- Not enough real listening.** People like nonjudgmental groups in which others genuinely listen to and care about what they say. Consider having "active listening" training sessions to help members improve their communication skills.