**NO ONE PERSON SHOULD MONOPOLIZE GROUP TIME**

DBSA San Diego’s Support Group Guidelines state, “No one person should monopolize group time.” Everyone should monitor air time, but ultimately the facilitator is the Air Traffic Controller.

Your responsibility is to the group as a whole, not just a single attendee. Others will stop attending if they don’t find the meetings helpful. Be willing to accept some flak from the "injured" parties but do your job to take care of yourself and the group.

One comedian, Brian Regan, talks about the "Me Monster." The Me Monster is that individual who can hardly wait for you to finish saying your sentence so he can jump in and begin talking about himself. As leaders, we need to give a person like this some guidelines. If you know ahead of time that there are monopolizers in your group, spend some time at the beginning discussing why this is an important part of the group guidelines.

**WHY DO THEY DO IT?**
- Some attendees may talk too much out of an inability to tolerate silence or because they get carried away and talk too long.

- Most people who monopolize the conversation don’t realize what they are doing. If you know someone who rambles, don’t assume they know it about themselves.

- Some over-talkers may be aware that they are monopolizing, but don’t know how to stop, or they would have already. One mental health expert stated that such people fear intimacy, so they fill up the spaces with incessant babble to keep people at a distance.
Tips for Handling People who Monopolize Group Time

- Sometimes a person is living with anxiety and social settings leave them feeling very uncomfortable and so, they literally spew as one way to discharge stress.

- Personality disorders may also have a role...while the anxious person generally means no harm and is talking as a means to reduce anxiety and feeling of stress, the person with a personality disorder really does believe that their thoughts and ideas are superior to the rest of the crowd and they hold themselves in high regard with a strong and consistent pull to be the center of attention...sometimes even dramatically so.

◆ **SPEAK PRIVATELY OUTSIDE THE GROUP**
Give the monopolizer attention during breaks or before and after group. Ask them to come early or stay after for a bit – you have something you’d like to discuss with them. Approach respectfully and non-judgmentally and say something like,

“I appreciate your contribution to the group, but others need to be heard from too.”

“The group cares about you, but others need to talk too.”

"Sometimes when you talk for more than a minute or two without stopping, I feel frustrated."

"Can you try to talk for only a minute or so at a time?"

Another facilitator can be enlisted to help turn things around.

Ask the person for permission to interrupt them if you notice they are monopolizing the group’s time. If the behavior continues, develop a signal between the two of you to stop the monopolizing.

Another option is to ask the monopolizer to become the gatekeeper, help you with timekeeping to ensure that no one monopolizes the conversation. Say something like,

"Bob, I noticed you had a lot to say in last night’s meeting. I need you to help me out next time. As the facilitator, I need to make sure that everyone gets an equal opportunity to talk. I didn't want to put you on the spot, but could you help me with that?"

"I'm concerned that others in the group aren't getting enough time to talk. Would you be willing to try to make your comments brief in the group so that other people have a chance to share as well?"
“John, you have so much good information to share, but I feel as though you don’t give the rest of the group the time to share ideas with you. Can we talk about this?”

There may come a time when a group member can become so toxic for the group that they have to be asked to leave. That is the facilitator’s job, and it needs to be done in private.

Before asking someone to leave, the facilitator needs to try to explain and correct the problem. Here are the main points to get across:

1. We honor the time limits given for talking and the age-old tradition of taking turns. I know this is hard, but try to recognize that your problems and situations aren’t unique or special, they are not more important than anyone else’s, and they are not more interesting than anyone else’s. We tend to find ourselves infinitely fascinating. Most other people don’t.

2. Contribute when you have something to contribute and listen when you don’t. Listening is highly underrated, and it can actually help you. Other people know stuff. Learn from them.

3. This is not your therapy session. Most groups are not therapy groups, and even those that are run by therapists are groups, not private sessions. If you need an hour to talk about your issues, book an appointment with your therapist. Support groups are for mutual give-and-take and sharing.

4. Don’t be too quick to dismiss the ideas and experiences of other group members. While their situation might not be exactly like yours, they might have some thoughts or experiences that you can apply to your own situation. At the very least, they are trying to help.

The person may get angry and leave the group or he will be forced to change his ways. The other group members, along with the facilitator, exert the pressure necessary for the monopolizer to change their behavior. This may help the person become a valuable, contributing member. You don’t want to quiet someone completely because everyone has something valuable to share.

◆ NON-VERBAL WAYS TO GET THEIR ATTENTION
Move your focus away from the individual, stop giving them your attention and eye contact. Avoid direct eye contact with the monopolizer – it is harder for people to monopolize the conversation if the leader is not actively engaged.
Tips for Handling People who Monopolize Group Time

One common sign is holding up your hand, palm outward towards the speaker. Generally, this will be better received by the speaker if it is accompanied by a smile rather than a frown or obvious anger.

Make a “T” sign with your fingers to stop unwanted behavior.

Another non-verbal tactic is the "Aha sign". The "aha sign" consists of one finger held up, and is used to signify that you are enthusiastic about a point the speaker has made.

In extreme cases, you may have to wave a hand in front of them to get them to stop talking.

◆ INTERRUPT
Sometimes there is no choice but to interrupt so the discussion can move forward. If other methods fail, there may be no other choice. Be kind, but firm. Stop the individual, politely thank them, and say,

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but there are other people who would like to talk."

Then immediately move on to someone else.

“'I'm feeling that three or four of us are monopolizing the meeting. Does anyone else feel the same way?’”

Remind the individual of the ground rule pertaining to the need to give everyone an opportunity to talk.

Take advantage of the monopolizers' pauses. Use any pause to change the subject. Look them in the eye, thank them very much and direct a question to someone else, preferably in another area of the room.

Try a good-natured,

"Whoa! Whoa! Let me see if I got this right."

Interject with a summary when someone goes off on a tangent. Ask others to speak. Point out what topics are still left on the agenda and the remaining time. Use summary statements,

“‘We all seem to be bogged down right now. Maybe we could…’”

Set a limit on how long the person can talk.
**Tips for Handling People who Monopolize Group Time**

“I know this is important to you, but if you could wrap up in the next minute, we need to move on.”

“That's an interesting point. Now let's see what other people think.”

◆ **REDIRECT FOCUS TO SOMEONE ELSE**

When a participant takes over the conversation, try to accommodate his enthusiasm for attention. Tell the person that you think his comments are valuable and interesting, but you'd like to open up the discussion to other participants. Call on another person by name.

"John, your point about x is excellent. I really want to hear what Barb thinks about that idea."

From time-to-time, suggest that people who have not spoken might want to talk. Say that you want another person to respond to the issue. It is best to jump in when the speaker is catching a breath, saying something like,

"Lisa, what do you think about that?"

"Mary, thank you for your ideas. Brent, do you have any comments on that?"

“Can anyone else in the group relate to what Penny just said?”

“Who has some helpful ideas for Richard?”

There is an art to doing this kind of re-directing in a way that doesn’t hurt feelings yet keeps the meeting balanced. **You will get better with practice.**

Say the talker’s name. Do this several times in a row, if necessary. “Jill. Jill. Excuse me, Jill.” When you finally get their attention, smile and say something like,

“I'd like to hear what Harold thinks about this—go ahead, Harold, what do you think?”

“You bring up some interesting points. Does anyone else have comments or would others like to share how this relates to them?”

Interrupt the dominator, ask him/her to summarize the point quickly so that others can add their ideas, too.

"Thank you for giving us all those ideas, Erin. Let's hear from others in the group now."
“Thank you for your input, but I’m concerned that John didn’t have an opportunity to speak.”

"Let's see what others have to say about that. We want to be sure everyone has a chance to talk."

“There are others we’d like to hear from.”

“I think some other people would like to respond.”

“I’d like to hear from Joe – he hasn’t said much tonight. What do you think, Joe?”

When the person interrupts someone, say,

“Wait. I don’t think John was finished. I’d like to hear what he has to say.”

◆ REDIRECT TO YOURSELF

The facilitator can insert their own opinion - quickly and deliberately.

"Excuse me. Before you go on, I have something I’d like to share with you about that.”

“You know, Jill, I haven’t gotten to say anything for the past five minutes. It’s my turn!” Then chuckle and go right on with what you have to say.

“Hang on a minute. That's a very interesting point you just made, and I’d like to have an opportunity to comment on what you said.""}
Tips for Handling People who Monopolize Group Time

Point out to the person that he/she is not listening to the suggestions/experiences of other group members. Try to nudge a member by saying,

"I am concerned because you don't seem to think that anything we say or do or suggest will be helpful.”

“The group would like to help, but we just aren't able to. A therapist might be a better way to resolve these problems.”

“A therapist might be more able to help you with these problems.”

“You seem to have a lot of issues. Can you pick ONE issue you’d like to share with us?”

“It’s hard to hear such negative conversations all the time.”

“How can we help? What do you need from the group?”

“Do you have a counselor that you’re working with?”

"We have a list of counselors and psychologists that might be helpful for you.""I'm sorry things are so tough, but is there any good news? Let's focus on that for a while.""You have a lot to say, don't you?""You seem to be talking non-stop. Are you nervous? It's okay ... you are with friends here ... nothing to be nervous about."

◆ CLOSING THE TOPIC

“Could you tell us briefly how we can help? After that, we need to move on.”

“I think it’s time to end this discussion/topic--you've told us an awful lot and we have to stop now.""Fred, I appreciate your comments, but we need to move on. Perhaps if we have time at the end of the meeting, we can come back to this."
THE IMPACT ON YOU & THE GROUP

We want to create a relaxed atmosphere where people can share their hearts, but we have a responsibility to the group and to ourselves. The monopolizer ignores the obvious non-verbal cues. If you as the facilitator feel restless, bored or stressed, probably other people are feeling that way too. The facilitator needs to look around for the facial responses and body language of the group – blank stares, rolling eyes, frowns, looks of boredom or disapproval.

The facilitator may be so worried about being disrespectful to someone with chronic mouth diarrhea that they disrespect their own needs and the needs of the group by letting them talk way too long. The facilitator does a disservice to both the talker and the group by not being more direct. Not only are monopolizers insensitive to the needs of others, the facilitator is also being insensitive to the needs of the group (and their own needs).

Being an ear dumpster can be exhausting and saps the group’s time and mental stamina. By calling a person on their monopolizing behavior, the facilitator may shame and disenfranchise them. But by allowing them to take over the group’s time, everyone is disenfranchised.

“I am feeling frustrated and I get the sense that some other people in this group are also feeling frustrated.”

“Jerry, you’re really telling us a lot, but not giving the group a chance to respond. Did you know that?”

“I am finding it difficult to listen.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m having trouble paying attention.”

Non-stop talking is a form of torture with no escape.