In a group like an NP group, the participants are expecting the facilitator to enforce the rules that the group has set for itself and ensure a welcoming, non-judgmental, empathetic setting where there is a place for everyone.

In a group, it is not uncommon for there to be one person who talks constantly. That person always has an anecdote about the meeting’s topic or constantly goes off-topic and tells personal stories. Conversely, there is the quiet person who hardly speaks during the meetings. The facilitator’s role is very important when these situations arise so that every participant feels comfortable and also to maintain harmony within the group.

WHAT DO THESE PEOPLE BRING TO THE GROUP?

Those who dominate: people who talk easily and a lot are usually dynamic people. Their challenge often involves learning to consider those around them and their environment. These participants get caught up in their ideas and enthusiasm even though they may not necessarily be relevant to the group.

Those who are not as prominent: people who hold back and are silent present the same challenge for a facilitator as people who talk a lot. This type of participant can be positive for the group or be a source of considerable irritation. The facilitator must balance their interventions and those of the other participants in order to build group cohesion.

A FEW TIPS FOR BETTER COACHING THOSE WHO DOMINATE

• For some of them, a comment or statement like the following is enough:
  – “I believe that X had asked for the floor first.”
  – “Does anyone else have an experience to share, or have you experienced similar emotions?”
  – “Let’s return to our subject.”
  – “What do you think about what Y just said?” or “X, briefly, what do you wish to share with the group about the topic we are discussing?”
• Put the question to the group again to enable the others to respond or ask for the opinion of the others following the comments of the parent in question.

• Use a talking stick or some other meaningful object that the participant must hold in order to take the floor, to give everyone the opportunity to speak.

• Direct call: “We can see that it’s often the same people who speak. We’re going to try letting each person have a turn and listening to each other.”

• When you know that it’s always the same person who has something to say, we can start with that person’s anecdote at the beginning of the meeting. He/she will then have had a chance to speak and will be more inclined to give the floor to the others than if we constantly ignore the person or prevent him/her from speaking. You can also inform that parent of the time available for speaking. The facilitator can sit near that parent and touch his/her arm to signal “Stop,” “Wait,” “It’s your turn,” etc.

If a situation of this type was not identified during the pre-group contact and if, after all these attempts, the person in question still talks just as much and the group seems annoyed, there is the option of meeting with the person individually and agreeing upon a discreet sign for reminding him/her about letting the other participants have a say during the workshops. It is important to take action before the situation worsens. Parents are entitled to have a positive group experience, and the facilitator’s role is to protect all participants.

### A FEW TIPS FOR THOSE WHO HOLD BACK

Note: To enable everyone to express an opinion, the following tips, provided for people who dominate, can also be helpful.

• Accept moments of silence during a workshop; they can allow the quietest participants to speak while fostering observation and reflection about the learning in progress.

• Keep a log book to underscore the week’s events pertaining to the topic in order to always have ideas for discussion.

• Every participant anonymously puts some scenarios on paper and then into a box. The shyer people can wait for their suggestions to be pulled out, without having to mention that they are theirs.

• Holding activities in pairs or sub-groups is less intimidating for the shy people.

• Express appreciation for these people’s opinions and contributions when they take the floor.

• Having short written evaluations filled out at the end of the workshops is another way to obtain the opinion of the shyer people. Vary the way that the facilitator addresses the group during evaluation of the meetings: “in a few words, you…,” “on a scale from 1 to 5, would you say that….”

• It is important to respect the quieter personalities of these people. Invariably, they are there because they want to get something out of the group, and if these people feel obliged to speak, we are likely to make them leave the group.

• Therefore, during the pre-group contact, it is important to question the future participants about their “participant style” and how the facilitator can interact with them in the event that they feel overwhelmed or need support.