

Guidelines for Good Discussions in Casual Groups

Many of our groups spend more time than they would like in discussion. Seeking consensus, people sometimes end up feeling that their time has been wasted and that little progress has been made. These guidelines offer a simple and effective way to increase the impact of your discussions and use everyone's time to best effect. You may modify them as needed.

Please note that these guidelines apply to groups which are voluntary associations in which each member has equal standing and one vote. They are not designed for the workplace or for accountability hierarchies like the military or the judiciary.

All guidelines adopted by your group must be in harmony with the laws of the state in which your group is organized and, if applicable, your bylaws.

GUIDELINES

1. The presider (group-appointed leader) runs our meetings, ensures a fair process, maintains clarity, and helps our group observe its guidelines. The presider is not in charge of decision-making; rather, our group as a whole is responsible for making our decisions.
2. Members have a right to information to help make decisions.
3. Each member of the group will have an equal chance to contribute to discussions. To ensure this, no one may speak a second time until everyone who wishes to do so has spoken once.
4. Courtesy and respect for others are always required.
5. Discussion of other members' motives is never allowed.
6. We do not allow sidebar conversations such as whispering.

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7. CHOOSE ONE:

We do not allow text messaging, instant messaging, checking email, viewing Internet sites, playing video games, posting to social networking sites or using a cell phone or PDA.	Use of electronic devices must not disrupt the meeting nor distract the participants. Members who have urgent electronic business to transact will leave the room.
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8. Discussion must be relevant to the topic at hand.
9. Proposals for action that take more than ten words to be expressed will be written down, given to the presider, and read aloud before they are discussed and decided upon.
10. We will try to make decisions by consensus and will vote if we are unable to reach consensus.
11. Members with minority views have the full right to their opinions. Recognizing that diversity of thought is essential for good decision-making, our group will not exert psychological pressure towards conformity.
12. When voting, a majority vote (more than half of those voting in favor) is necessary for approval. Members may abstain from voting, and abstentions will not be counted. Proxy voting is not allowed.

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