

TABLE 8.1. Suggestions for Responding to Difficult Clients in GroupsSilent Sam

With such clients the goal is to find a way to get all members, especially those who are less verbal, to participate in all group sessions.

- *“Mary, we haven’t heard from you tonight.”*
- *“Mary, I noticed that you haven’t said much tonight. How has your week gone?”*
- *“Bill has just shared his frustrations with the group. Mary, I know you’ve said you felt frustrated in similar situations. What advice can you give Bill?”* [This example directly targets a silent client by asking him or her to offer advice or suggestions to another client.]

Late Laura

Although most clients who come late to groups are aware of their behavior, some fail to understand the effect their behavior has on the group. Having the group respond to such clients is more likely to result in changes (e.g., coming to subsequent groups on time) than is being told they are late by group leaders. The following responses would be used only with clients who are repeatedly late or who miss several group meetings.

- *“This is the third time Mary has been late. What suggestions can the group provide to help her get here on time?”*
- *“I’m wondering how others feel about Mary being late for group several times.”* [Although this response is more direct than the first example, open discussion of some issues can increase members’ sensitivity to their own behavior, as well as help them understand how their behavior affects the entire group.]

Tommie Therapist

Such clients may have been attending a group for several sessions, or they may have considerable prior therapy experience. At times, such clients’ interactions in groups will parallel those of a therapist. Although such advice can sometimes be helpful to group members, on other occasions the advice can be disruptive or too direct.

- *“Bill, your comments have been helpful. Let’s see how others view Mary’s concerns.”*
- *“Bill, that is one way of looking at how Mary can handle the situation. What additional options can others offer Mary?”*

Chatty Cathy and Monopolizing Mike

Such clients dominate group discussions. Group leaders need to find effective ways to interrupt such clients, as they are often unaware of the impact that their behavior has on the group. A strategy that group leaders can use when a Chatty Cathy client is talking is to direct questions to the group as a whole. For example:

- *“Bill, it sounds like a lot has happened with you this week. I am wondering what has happened with other group members.”* (The group leader then calls on another member.) *“Mary, how did your week go?”*
- *“Mary, you seem to have had a lot going on this past week. Let’s take a look at what’s been happening with you for a few more minutes, and then let’s see how others have been doing this past week.”*

Interrupting Ivan

The behavior of such clients in groups is disruptive, as they frequently interrupt ongoing group discussions.

- *“We seem to be having an active discussion about [insert topic] today, but several members are talking at the same time. I’m wondering how this is affecting the group and what the group thinks we should do.”*
- *“I know we all have important things to say, but we need to respect each other and let others finish what they are saying before the next person speaks.”*

Resistant Roberta

Clients who feel they are forced or coerced to attend groups (e.g., by a spouse, probation officer, employer) are often not happy and, consequently, participate minimally, if at all.

- *“Bill, as with many people, it appears that you are upset about your probation officer telling you that you have to come to treatment. What suggestions does the group have for Bill?”*
- *“Mary, it sounds like you feel you had no choice in coming to group and you are angry. Who else with similar experiences can share with Mary how they’ve handled such situations?”*