**Strategies for challenging and managing the "difficult" group member**

Remember:

- Conflict or "difficult " behaviour is healthy and normal
- All difficult behaviour is communicating something
- The "difficult" person may be expressing something for the group and not just speaking for themselves
- Separate the content and the process of the message and consider the meanings of both

Try to distinguish between different types of tension

- **Intrapersonal** (conflict within oneself):
  - ❖ issues of confidence and self esteem
  - ❖ anxiety or nervousness
  - ❖ identification or resonances with past experience
  - ❖ fear of mistakes, failure or risk taking
- **Interpersonal** (conflict between groups or individuals):
  - ❖ content conflict over definitions, interpretations, accuracy
  - ❖ basic values conflict over philosophical or ideological differences
  - ❖ pseudo conflict over misunderstandings (i.e., no conflict actually exists)
  - ❖ simple conflict where one party must lose for the other to win
  - ❖ ego conflict where parties attack each other on expertise or competence, personal worth, image, who has power over whom.

**Strategies for nipping problems in the bud:**
Seating plan needs to be non-hierarchical, ie circular; putting a known vociferous contributer next to the facilitator will give you more control (eg touch and out of sight lines)
Clear introductions, and "getting to know" exercise(s) particularly when the group members don't know each other or come from different disciplines; emphasise the positive aspects of multidisciplinary group work; emphasise the "common ground"
Check out personal baggage (and your own) at the beginning of the session; it gets it "out of the way"
Clarify the group rules which should include personal responsibility for membership, respect, listening etc
Clarify the objectives of the session and getting agreement will help ownership
Model inclusiveness, listening skills, and building relationship skills with the group right from the beginning; also explain that you will "teach" as well as facilitate if that is the case
Use enthusiasm, dynamism, reflection and empathy as appropriate

**Strategies which help for "even" contribution from group members**
Give a task to the non-contributor eg writing on the flip chart
Value/acknowledge the message/content from the over contributor (if true) but reflect back the behaviour (process) if the group is finding it difficult; "that seems an important point – interesting; let's see what everyone else thinks…." and follow with a round

Pairs exercises or trios will encourage the silent member and limit to some extent the over-contributer; you can do this on the task in hand or a round of feelings if this is appropriate
Singling a member out is a high risk strategy and it may be best to talk to the member outside the group

**Strategies which help with difficult feedback from a member**
Model non-judgmental descriptive feedback, but again value the content, try to be neutral and even handed/supportive or the group will resent you rescuing the receiver of the feedback
Try humour "ooh that feels hard......"
Or "I'm feeling a bit defensive here...what do the rest of you think?"
Or "good comment" and rephrase it quickly yourself without fuss
Or hold up a mirror to the group and reflect what is happening, "I'm sensing that....", "I've noticed that....", but move on fairly quickly to a suggestion for a constructive way forward.