

## Crushing Distractions

**R**elational small groups that use Bible Storying encourage everyone to engage. And they do! Most of the time it's evident that the Holy Spirit is guiding them in learning Bible Truths (John 16:13-14). As facilitator, you're listening carefully to understand each contributor's spiritual development progression. Spiritual infant? Spiritual child? Spiritual young adult? Spiritual parent? Dead in sin? Candidate to be an apprentice to start a new small group?



But, well, sometimes the group discussion drifts and

prayer requests and even planning items pop up: "Hey, did you know they have the cutest top at the mall?"

- "Tommy's son was caught shoplifting there."
- "Oh, that reminds me—we've got to get supplies for the missions project."

Meanwhile the Bible story has been left drifting in the void. What's a small group leader to do?

Some people do have an attention deficit disorder, but most people just need help focusing during the dialogue. Here are five ideas to try:

1. **Rabbit Hunter:** Assign one person in advance to identify and "kill" random ideas that slip into the group (clothing in a mall, for instance). They become the "bad guy," not you. They may need to be equipped with a sponge-shooting dart gun.
2. **Parking Lot:** Sometimes great ideas do surface, but at the wrong time (such as praying for Tommy's son and the need for supplies for the missions project). This goes for prayer requests, too. Grab the idea and put it on a marker board. Explain you'll visit it later—and do.
3. **Man the Manipulatives:** Attention drifts in most groups after 15 minutes of dialogue. Choose that point to introduce a manipulative. In TruthSticks Training, I use wads of paper with hidden messages and pipe cleaners (fuzzy wires) that re-focus on the central truth of the story. These take planning in advance.
4. **Delay Sugar & Caffeine:** If refreshments are served prior to Bible study, why not move them to the end? If some participants are hyped up, it will be hard for them to be quiet for long. It also cuts down on bathroom breaks from the Tiny Tanks present.
5. **Defuse Dominators:** Don't let someone become the spokesperson for the group. Don't be shy to say, "Okay, let's hear from some of you who have yet to respond." You may need to talk separately with a dominant person and while expressing appreciation, explain why it's important for everyone to participate.

As the small group leader, you have the responsibility to be pleasant, but highly focused on the group's spiritual needs. Remember, you DO want to encourage interaction. Free-wheeling discussions can actually add a positive emotional component to the group. With a little quick-thinking, the group will stay engaged and grow spiritually!