



# Topic 4: Group Dynamics

The way our short-term mission group interacts and reacts is by far the strongest, loudest witness we have. Positive group dynamics require each member of the team to daily, sometimes hourly, commit to being focused, flexible, patient, supportive, and encouraging. A positive group dynamic develops unity, and a negative group dynamic creates division.

## Building Strong Group Dynamics

- **Prayer:** Pray together and pray for each other. Some teams may have prayer partners for the day or week as a means of supporting each other.
- **Patience:** Be patient with one other. This is a daily practice.
- **Serving one another:** Practice serving in the little ways. Let others take the front of the line instead of always rushing to be first. Don't be the first one in the shower, don't use all the hot water when you are in the shower...you get the idea.
- **Stick to the schedule:** Remember to be on time. It's unfair to make the team wait on you. When your leaders set a "lights out" time, don't hassle them on it.
- **Be an includer:** Be intentional about spending time with everyone in the group. Certain personalities will connect more than others, but look for ways to mingle more. Work with different people each day and at meals sit next to different people.
- **No 'hooking up':** Do not, under any circumstances, become romantically involved with someone on your trip. If you do develop feelings for someone on your trip, don't talk to anyone but your leader about it. No one on the team, especially that person, needs to know about it. You can talk when you get home, and if it's meant to be, it will work out then.
- **Watch out for the flirting:** Do not be a flirt, and no pseudo-dating touching either. Absolutely NO backrubs, hand-rubs, foot-rubs, or any other rubs for that matter. Don't hang on each other, punch each other, or hug each other. Pretty much don't touch each other, there's no need to. Never be alone with someone of the opposite gender at anytime. In many other cultures, this is a signal of an intimate relationship and we do not want to convey this.
- **Share space well:** Stay organized in your shared space, which is everywhere. Don't be a slob. Keep your stuff in a reasonable area of space, not spread all over.

## Group Travel Dynamics

Traveling in a large group is a process that requires everyone's patience, flexibility, and attention to following directions given by leaders. It takes a significant adjustment. The following are necessary guidelines that everyone has to respect so that the groups can be safe and effective:

- **Respect for leaders:** As soon as you arrive at PLNU for departure, we move into "ask the leader, don't tell the leader" mode. This mode will continue until the completion of the trip. Always ask your leader if you can do something, don't tell him or her that you are going to do something. Be ready for a "no" or a "not right now" with not much explanation. The leader might have to ask you to wait, and might not have time to explain why.
  - **Break the mold:** As travelers, the world assumes you are loud, obnoxious, and uncaring. Prove them wrong, especially in how you act as you travel together.
  - **Passports:** Your leaders will be holding your passports, distributing them only when needed, and then collecting them as soon as they are not needed. This is a precaution taken because one lost passport can change the itinerary for an entire group.
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## PLNU-Student & Adult Leaders

Your PLNU-student team leaders have been carefully chosen and grouped together. All other adult participants are youth leaders in their home church's youth group and/or are parents of participants. Adult participants, in particular, have sacrificed work, pay, time with family, good sleep, and vacation time to spend their week with you. Listen to your leaders, and be respectful of them. They are doing their best to work with the local pastors and with you. Keep in mind that every day there are new variables they have to respond to, and they might ask you to do things and not have time to explain why. Please don't expect a full explanation the minute you ask for it. Even more, try not to ask for an explanation.

Don't grumble/murmur about your leaders behind their backs. This can quickly undermine the group's positive dynamics. Be supportive, encouraging, and responsive.

Your leaders will be working alongside the local pastors and our hosts. This is not always the easiest thing for anyone involved, and sometimes it is trial and error. As team members, it is best to let the leaders and hosts work it out. Don't make suggestions for alternatives to the leaders or locals. Keep in mind, there are things at work that we as outsiders have no idea about.

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## Hosts, Pastors, Church Members

Don't mention preferences, suggestions, or hopes to the pastors/locals when it comes to food, shopping, sightseeing, or other recreational activities. Sometimes because of culture, and previous high-maintenance groups, your hosts will bend over backwards to accommodate; that is the last thing we want. We do not want to be seen as demanding, arrogant, high-maintenance, or fussy.

Early on in the trip, try to find a way for the pastors, church members, locals, or whoever is hosting you to share their story with the group. Include them whenever possible in what you are talking about, what the group is doing, and in any sharing/debriefing times that happen at the camp or ministry site.

## Small Group Debrief Times

We will be gathering each day as a whole group and as teams to share about what has been going on during the day and gradually throughout the week. This can be a great time of listening to each other process what the Lord is doing through the trip and to think through the trip for yourself.

*A few things to keep in mind for the small group times...*

- Each person in the group has his or her own journey. It is not your place to fix, assist, help or alter that journey. When someone shares a struggle, a perspective, or a process they are in, just listen and be supportive. Don't argue, don't try and help them; just listen and let their experience and perspective add to the collective experience of the group.
- Different leaders and teams will have different styles that evolve for these share times. You all will have your ongoing, and probably evolving, way of sharing together. Be intentional about including any church members or other hosts, in these times. These relationships can give great insight into cultural and other issues, but also require a significant level of maturity and sensitivity.
- Stay focused on having an open mind while debriefing and discussing as a team together. Be open to learning about what the Lord is doing in and through each member of the team and allow for your honesty and vulnerability to help everyone process what they are thinking and experiencing during the week.
- Don't feel pressured that you "have to" speak at every share time. If you're typically a shy person and need time to warm up to the group or you're just feeling more inward at the time, that's perfectly ok. At the same time, this week will most likely open your eyes to new things and it might be a good challenge to trust your team with your thoughts.
- Be patient with the language barrier. You may start to feel frustrated that you don't speak Spanish or even over the time it takes to communicate when you have to wait for translation. When you start to feel yourself getting annoyed, take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that the perspectives of your Mexican teammates are some of the most valuable aspects of the experience.
- Sometimes, your leaders may introduce group games or activities to help process the experience in a hands-on way. You may not feel like participating every time, but we encourage you to give the activity the benefit of the doubt. We work really hard to make sure that what we provide is quality and important.. Give in to the activity with full enthusiasm – you're sure to learn from it.
- Your groups will combine people from different churches. Although there will likely be people you know prior to the trip, try to avoid always sitting with people you know or clinging to your friends. Small group time can be a real opportunity to branch out, avoid cliques, and include those you may not know as well.

**Above all, the biggest influence on group dynamics and the overall effectiveness of the group is the combined effect of each person making the daily choice to have a Christ-centered, respectful, flexible attitude toward teammates and service.**