

RECOMMENDED RESPONSES

Synod Sessions — FALL 2023



Diocese of San Diego

SYNOD | SÍNODO

2021- 2024



Building Eucharistic Communities

**RECOMMENDED RESPONSES
TO DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IN
DIALOGUE SESSIONS**

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Recommended Responses to Difficult Situations in Dialogue Sessions

We are providing these recommendations to assist facilitators in their task to guide the small-group sharing. One of the most common challenges they will face is addressing people who speak past their allotted time. Another challenge is when participants express strong emotions. Rarely, will a person's behavior interfere with the circle process. However, it is best to be prepared in the event a difficult situation arises. Below are some general guidelines based on advice from the experts who are supporting us.

Person Speaking Past the Allotted Time

At the beginning of the circle, the facilitator emphasizes that everyone will be given the same amount of time to share his or her response to each question. The facilitator will have a one-minute warning sign. Should someone in the group not respond to this prompt, the facilitator may need to interject. Acknowledge the person sharing and remind him or her that they need to respect the circle process. Ask for the talking piece to be passed to the next person.

Person Cries

The human response is for someone in the circle, perhaps the facilitator, to embrace and comfort the person crying. However, that should not be done. Crying is a natural emotion and a form of expression. The person crying should be allowed to express himself or herself this way.

It is important to remember that participants should not feel compelled to respond to what is said within the small-group sharing. We are listening with the heart. We recommend a box of tissues be placed at the center of the circle.

If the person continues to cry for an extended period, then the facilitator should stop the circle for a few minutes, inviting the person in distress to take a break outside of the circle, and asking the rest to take a break. The facilitator should reconvene the circle in a few minutes and continue the process. If the person in distress is not ready to rejoin the group, then the facilitator can ask the parish coordinator to talk to him or her away from the circle. The coordinator can suggest he or she contact the appropriate diocesan office for assistance.

Person Shares Traumatic or Painful Experience

The facilitator should pause for a few moments to let the story be considered by the others, in this way acknowledging its power and feeling. Then the facilitator should continue with the circle process. If appropriate, a simple prayer, such as “Come Holy Spirit,” “Glory Be,” “Hail Mary” or “Our Father,” could be said for the individual before continuing with the process.

Person Shares Experience of Sex Abuse

After the circle process ends, the facilitator should address the individual privately and ask if they would like assistance or someone to talk to about the experience they shared. If so, then inform the parish coordinator/Pastor and let them know that one of the people in the circle shared a story about sex abuse.

If the story told involved an allegation that a member of the clergy had sexually abused a minor, or an allegation of misconduct by a diocesan employee with an adult, then that is something that should be brought to the attention of the diocese’s Victim’s Assistance Coordinator, Mary Acosta, 858-490-8353 or macosta@sdcatholic.org

Person Becomes Angry or Combative

The essence of the circle is to be a safe and sacred space for sharing one’s feelings. The facilitator will halt the circle process if a person displays strong anger, hostility or is combative. The facilitator will ask the participants to take a break for a few minutes. The facilitator can acknowledge the person’s emotions (“I see something is deeply bothering you. Would you like to take a break for a few minutes?”). After a few minutes, the facilitator can evaluate if the person is able to rejoin the circle. If not, the facilitator can contact the parish coordinator, who can talk to the person away from the circle. If the person does not agree to respect the circle process and intentions, then the facilitator can ask him or her to leave. Alternatively, the facilitator can inform the person that he or she may share their input through the survey that will be available in the summer.

Expectations for Dialogue Questions

The intent for the small group dialogue sessions is not to seek clarification of the answers provided by the participants. Each participant will have an opportunity to reflect upon each question without further scrutiny from the facilitator or note-taker. Remember, the circle process does not engage in active discussion amongst members, rather, each person is to listen respectfully and only respond to the question from their experience when holding the talking piece. There is no right or wrong answer, the Holy Spirit is working and we must trust the process.