



SESSION B

Consensus Decision Making

RATIONALE/GOAL:

This session is designed to help the community learn how to make decisions as a group on a consensus model rather than on a purely democratic model. A decision made by consensus ensures that all voices in the group are heard and produces an outcome that is agreeable, though perhaps not ideal, for all members of the group. This session presents a particular structure that provides a basis for the development of the particular needs of the community. Because this process may be unfamiliar to many in the group, this session may take longer than the others in this handbook (possibly up to three hours for the entire evening). Set realistic goals and remember that consensus decision making will take less time as the group becomes more familiar with it.

OPENING PRAYER: Acts 2: 42-47

PROCESS

- I. Choose an issue of particular relevance to the community at this time. This may be scheduling and the expectations for weekly community events, deciding on a budget and types of food the community will buy, defining chores and developing a system for chores, or another issue with practical ramifications for community life.
- II. Read aloud the attached "Rules for Cooperation."
- III. Set a time limit for coming to a decision (Suggestion: two hours maximum; you should do this each time you make a consensus decision as a group.)
- IV. Follow this process:
 - A. **Statement of the Issue**
 - Facilitator takes it from an agenda created by the community, or
 - Person who puts it on the agenda states the issue
 - B. **Getting a sense of where everyone stands/ "go-around"**
 - Facilitator (or someone else) may suggest a go-around, in which everyone in the circle states feelings on the issue at hand
 - Each person gives thoughtful feedback; what does each person prefer to see happen?
 - Rules for go-around: no interruptions, no discussion, clarifying questions only
 - C. **Generating Ideas/Brainstorming**
 - Get a variety of ideas, emphasizing everyone's participation, not focusing on practicality

- Do not criticize ideas at this stage

D. Evaluate/Discuss Ideas

- Sort through ideas, everyone identifies pros and cons of each proposal
- Emphasize practicality more
- Needs take priority over wants

E. State Proposals

- More than one proposal can be considered at one time
- Strive to incorporate everyone’s needs

F. Test for Agreement

Simple call for agreement:

Facilitator may say, “Are there any objections to the proposal?” If there are no objections forthcoming, then you have agreement.

“Weighting” (A method for testing for agreement)

Weighting allows members of the group to register not only their support of or opposition to a proposal but also the relative strength of commitment behind their position. For example:

+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3
Very Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Very Strongly Disagree

Group decides how to proceed

- The facilitator may suggest the next step to the group or help prioritize answers, e.g. “X wants more proposals”; “Y wants to discuss”; “Let’s discuss and brainstorm more if we need to”.

Seek positive agreement

- The facilitator might say, “Since there are no objections, then we agree to the A.”
Everyone gives some sign of approval.

V. Evaluate the process

CLOSING PRAYER: 1 Cor 13: 1-13

RULES OF COOPERATION

1. No Scarcity

I agree that I will choose to act on the belief that the most important things in our life together will be most available if we cooperate and that cooperating is the best way to work together.

I will act on the belief that cooperation leads to a more fulfilling life than does either competition or compromise—and that cooperation, ultimately, fosters love and tenderness in relationships.

“No Scarcity” is both the beginning and end point of a cooperative life.

2. Equal Rights

I will act towards others with respect for their feelings and dignity. I will assume that the right of others to express their preferences in relationships is equal to my own. I assume that we have equal responsibility to attend to one another’s concerns and will support other community members as they seek their goals.

It is important to understand and agree upon differing roles and responsibilities we each may have in our relationships.

Conflict will arise when:

- There is not agreement/clarity regarding responsibilities and/or decision-making authority.
- Needs and desires are not clearly expressed.

3. No Secrets

In terms of our relationships, I commit to share with the group my feelings, my wants, and my appreciation of you.

The key to this agreement is recognizing that it is desirable for us to examine our relationship and share with one another our wants, apprehensions and appreciations.

Elements of a “No Secrets” relationship include:

- Full participation
- Sharing any apprehensions or feelings of fear or resentment
- Expressing my appreciations and sharing the things I’m proud of

4. No Power Plays

I will not seek to get what I want from the community without clearly and directly asking for it.

Conflict arises when:

- One person seeks to attain their wants through remaining quiet, yelling, withdrawing or appealing to some special authority to support their wants over others.
- When a minority claims a special privilege that has not been clearly defined or agreed upon.
- When the majority rules.

I value my own and your gifts. I seek ways to empower myself and others to live most fully our gifts. I honor the agreements we have made and under which I have committed myself. I will ask for what I want in a straightforward and clear manner and expect others to do the same.

5. No Rescues

I value our relationship more than I value accomplishing tasks. I will not act in the relationship in ways that generate resentment towards others. I will acknowledge my feelings of resentment.

For example, I will assume that you will do what you say and say what you mean. If you cannot or do not want to follow through on something you agreed to, I allow you to take responsibility to ask for help or a change. I will not “take over” your responsibilities without talking to you. If I have a concern that you are not able or willing to do what you agreed to do, I will address this concern directly to you.

This does not rule out acts of love and support, nor creative surprises. In fact, a “no rescue” relationship provides the healthiest atmosphere for these acts of fresh and generous giving.