




# Keeping people's attention

There are many different types of people who behave very differently at meetings. Probably every **Home & Country** reader has been to a meeting where one person is carrying on a conversation with another, or where one person talks about something unrelated to the agenda item. Here are a few suggestions on how to deal with these "special" circumstances.

HOW SHE/HE ACTS	WHY	WHAT TO DO
Overly talkative 	She may be an "eager beaver" or a show-off. She may also be exceptionally well-informed and anxious to show it or just naturally garrulous.	Don't be embarrassing or sarcastic — you may need her traits later on. Slow her down with some difficult questions. Interrupt with: "That's an interesting point — now let's see what the group thinks of it!" In general, let the group take care of her as much as possible.
Highly argumentative 	Combative personality — professional heckler, or may be normally good-natured, but upset by personal or job problems.	Keep your own temper firmly in check, don't let the group get excited either. Honestly try to find merit in one of her points — express your agreement (or get group to do so) . . . then move on to something else. When she makes an obvious mis-statement, toss it on to the group, let them turn it down. As a last resort, talk to her privately during a recess — try to find out what's bothering her and see if you can win her co-operation.
Quick, helpful	Really trying to help, but actually makes it difficult, keeps others out.	Cut across her, <b>tactfully</b> by questioning others. Thank her, suggest "we put others to work". Use her for summarizing.
Rambler	Talks about everything but the subject. Uses far-fetched analogies, gets lost.	When she stops for breath, thank her, refocus her attention by restating the relevant points, and move on. Grin, tell her her point is interesting, point to blackboard and in friendly manner indicate, we are a bit off subject.  Last resort; glance at watch.
Wrong subject	Not rambling, but is just off base.	Take the blame; "Something I said must have led you off subject, this is what we should be discussing." (restate point or use board).
Griper 	Has pet peeve. Professional griper. Has legitimate complaint.	Point out that we can't change policy here; problem is to operate as best we can under system. Suggest private discussion later. Have a member of the group answer her. Indicate the pressure of time.