

Matthew 18 Initiative:

Correcting inappropriate language and behavior at Ponderings

The Pondering Pub

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

-Matthew 18:15-17

Although The Pondering Pub invites everyone from all backgrounds and in their current states in their lives to come and participate in community, that community must be rooted in faith. Ponderings are a place to explore new ideas, creativity, find truth, and also to just have a good time with friends. Ponderings do not provide a space for inappropriate topics, discussion, and behaviors. Pubs will also include their own rules regarding discussing certain topics that lead to a culture of divisiveness and discomfort – political discussions for example.

When inappropriate topics and behaviors are present, it is up to the Pub leadership to take action. The steps below are intended as a guide to help leaders take the correct steps to address situations and to address individuals who continue to create an inappropriate atmosphere at Ponderings.

Step 1: Redirect the conversation away from inappropriate topics.

During the pondering discussions, it is important to draw attention away from conversation that changes the atmosphere and may cause people to feel uncomfortable. It is entirely possible to direct the conversation away, making it obvious the topic isn't appropriate, and to minimize embarrassing the attendee that put the conversation on the wrong track.

Step 2: Hold a private discussion with the attendee.

Privately discuss with the attendee why the topic or comment wasn't appropriate. Communicate the Pub rules to them and why those rules exist. Be gentle, but firm. Ask them to make sure their topic or comment is appropriate before speaking. Don't overwhelm the individual. It is sufficient for one of the Pub leaders to complete this step.

Step 3: Bring a second to help address the problem.

If inappropriate behavior and comments do not stop, both the Pub leaders should address it together with the individual. Reference the below tips in handling conflict. Let them know if the behavior continues, they will not be welcome at the Pondering Pub anymore.

Step 4: Tell them they are no longer welcome until they change their behavior

If the problematic individual does not stop bringing up inappropriate topics and conversation, the last step is for leadership to inform the individual they are no longer welcome at the Pondering until they stop the inappropriate behavior and conversation.

Tips to handle conflict, from an attorney:

For a plaintiff to bring suit before a court, they must have suffered damages, caused by the defendant's actions, and their grievance must be redressable by the court. Here, you must point to a specific action the problematic individual is causing, how that is negatively affecting the Pondering Pub as a whole, and what specifically will remedy the situation.

1. Point to a specific problem.

Things like, "You give off weird vibes" or "My wife doesn't like you" doesn't help the other person improve as a person. Make Specific the grievance, such as "The conversation topic you brought up last time was not appropriate" or "You need to shower before you come here." If the situation is too broad in nature, bring up a few examples so they know exactly what it is you are referring to. "You talk too much. After the most recent presentation, you spoke for 8 minutes straight, where most others only spoke for 2."

2. Explain how their behavior is negatively affecting the Pondering Pub as a whole.

Some negative actions are self-evident once observed, but the perpetrator may not have observed them. For example, many people don't realize that they smell, but once it's brought to their attention, they will want to fix the problem. Sometimes, you may have to be more direct. "You make snide comments about this political group. I know you think it's flying under the radar, but others have noticed and it makes them uncomfortable."

3. Offer a solution that will remedy the situation.

As Christian leaders, you need to offer a way for the problematic individual to practice repentance and be welcomed back into the group. It is your job to ensure that if they hold up their end, they are received back. This requires you to set a realistic standard they should achieve, and then advocate for them once they achieve it. For simple and easily measurable things, like "You need to shower," the remedy will speak for itself. But for more deeply seated problems, you must play pastor on both ends. "What you've been saying over the past several months has made people very uncomfortable. You need to apologize to the group for these sentiments. If you're willing, we'll help." Then, if they do sincerely apologize, you should advocate for them. We live in a deeply polarized world. While hateful behavior is totally unacceptable, we also must practice true and sincere repentance. This includes allowing someone who's been bombarded with hate the opportunity to change.

Note: Sexual acts are a different category and if serious enough, can immediately warrant termination. If sexual harassment or touching has occurred at your Pondering, contact the Outreach Coordinator immediately.

Below is space to jot your thoughts so you remember what must be done before confrontation:

1. The Specific Problem _____

2. How is their Behavior negatively affecting the Pondering Pub as a whole _____

3. Offered Solution _____