

An Exercise to Explore Personal Bias

Thinking about our own biases, and how remarks at meetings might trigger unfortunate responses, is helpful preparation for leadership. Biases are the ideas that define our expectations; things we think of as "right." They can interfere with communication by closing our minds to new information, or by causing us to send conversation-stopping messages because we feel threatened. You might identify the biases that could affect your work as an LLL Leader.

Following is one example of how a Leader thought through her own bias about cow's milk (thanks to Mary O'Mally, Maryland/Delaware/DC and *LAD Lifeline*, 1997, No. 4):

- Look at a belief you hold strongly (Cow's milk is not made for human consumption. When mothers call with concerns over a fussy baby, my first thought is for them to eliminate dairy products from their diets.)
- Identify the reasons for it. (My daughter cried her way through her first four months of life until I eliminated dairy products from my diet.)
- Understand and recognize your right to your beliefs. (This happened to me, and is true for my family.)
- Identify reasons for different beliefs and approaches. (Babies fuss for many reasons. Not everyone is sensitive to dairy products.)
- Understand and recognize that people who have different beliefs have the same rights. (When mothers hear a variety of possibilities, they can figure out what they think is causing their baby's fussiness.)
- Be willing to integrate other people's information as well as ours into our approach to helping. (I need to make a special effort to listen to what a mother is saying. When I listen, I can learn from each mother's experiences and so be more informed for the next mother.)

It is useful to give some thought to how Leaders recognize personal biases in order to help mothers effectively. Even a quick, knowing glance between co-Leaders can leave a mother feeling judged. Perhaps you can recall remarks which came up at your local Group meetings and caused you to feel bothered. Thinking about responses ahead of time can help a Leader create a welcoming atmosphere for each mother who comes to meetings. While Leaders continue to present LLL philosophy, we also want mothers who believe differently to feel respected at meetings (2003 *Leader's Handbook*, pp. 40-43). Your Leader can probably give you samples of qualifying statements that she uses. Finding phrasing that feels comfortable to you can help you convey sincerity. The handbook discusses qualifying statements on pp. 36-37.

As you consider personal bias, you might also think about how this could apply to co-Leader relations. Although Leaders share a common mission and parenting philosophy, we may implement and present it in different ways, have varying personalities and styles, as well as unique family situations and needs. We need to give co-Leaders the same respect we give to mothers in the Group. The *Leader's Handbook* discusses co-Leader relations (pp. 86-89).