



Facilitating Small Group Discussions

The Facilitator Role and Things to Know

The role of the facilitator is simply to facilitate discussion by showing empathy, and guiding the group to a deeper understanding of individual experiences. Creating a safe space for this discussion is essential to meaningful dialogue.

Be genuine. Don't facilitate with an attitude that appears that you are "check-boxing" the issue. Show you really care. It's better to familiarize yourself with the Bridge Chat facilitation guide and issues surrounding the topic. Do not use this guide, prepared questions, or notes as a crutch.

Listen. Listening is more important than speaking as a facilitator. Active listening means that you are being present in mind and listening intently to what the speaker is saying. Minimize distractions in the room and others interrupting another person while speaking.

Remain neutral. This is achieved by not appearing to take sides on an issue. Avoid making someone feel that their concerns or views are wrong. Acknowledging someone experiences and asking them, "Why do you think that?" or "What makes you feel that way?" is appropriate.

Keep your bag closed. As a facilitator, avoid injecting your personal beliefs and/or values in effort to persuade others from their beliefs.

Ground Rules. Facilitators should begin by first establishing a safe environment. This is achieved by laying out ground rules before starting the conversation. Suggested ground rules are included below.

Facilitation Techniques

Share. Open the conversation with a story, sharing your own experience. If you do not have an experience to offer, you can share what your thoughts and feelings are about the topic being discussed.

Lean in. Lean in more by pulling more out of the conversation. Ask follow up questions that explores a person's thoughts or feelings.

Never leave a question unanswered. One of the worst things a facilitator can do is ignore or not acknowledge a person's question no matter how complicated it may be. It gives the impression that the discussion is just "check-boxing". It is okay to say, "I don't have an answer," or "we do not have all the answers now," or "...this is the beginning of the conversation." Take any questions and get back to the person asking.

Acknowledge. Do not let someone's story go over your head (fall on deaf ears), by not giving them the feedback they deserve. Provide a response that lets them know that you heard them. For example, say, "Thank you for sharing your story," or "I can see it took a lot for you share."

Non-verbal cues. Pay attention to member's non-verbal language to keep them engaged. For example, someone rolls their eyes, ask, "How do you feel about this..."

Feedback. Ask questions that would explore individual's taking personal responsibility and commitment to change within their sphere of control. For example, say, "We know this will not change overnight, but what can we/you do to effect change?"

Finally, depending on the topic, prepare yourself for emotional responses.



Small Group Discussion Ground Rules

1. This is a safe place.
2. My story is my story.
3. Be respectful.
4. Speak in first person. (“In my experience...”)
5. Clarify by asking question.
6. When hearing opinions, seek first to understand, than to be understood.
7. When responding to others, paraphrase their statements before communicating you point. (For example, “What I hear you saying is...”)
8. Thank your teammates for sharing.
9. Excuse yourself if you need to.
10. Reach out to your Community Support Coordinators, Violence Prevention Integrators, SARCs, EO professionals, or other helping agencies for assistance.