Group Facilitation Basics
learning, connecting, and growing in group settings

URBANALLIANCE

Group settings offer a unique opportunity for people to come together around a common goal. Generally, groups are divided into five types:

Support Group: People with a common struggle or life situation meet to support each other and learn together with the goal to increase emotional or relational support. The leader is usually a person who has experienced the struggle or life situation. It is usually a lay leader.

Example: NAMI support group for people with serious mental illness

Educational Group: People come together with a common learning goal to increase knowledge or skills. The leader is a person with considerable knowledge or expertise.

Example: Financial literacy class

Psychoeducation Group: People come together to increase knowledge and skills related to coping or emotional health. This often involves a curriculum or manual. The leader can be a lay person, credentialed professional, or person with considerable knowledge and expertise.

Example: "Rhythms of Renewal" book study

Clinical Group: Group offered by a person with a professional credential, usually a licensed clinician, to people with a diagnosable mental health condition.

Example: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy group

Discipleship Group: Group of people that meets for a defined period or ongoing with the goal of discipleship, building relationship, and offering support.

Example: Bible study, life group

Groups can be used to help people accomplish a variety of goals including, but not limited to, increasing support and connection, increasing sense of empowerment, improving coping, knowledge, and support for family members of people with mental health struggles, increasing knowledge and skills related to parenting, health, financial literacy, emotional health, etc.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."
Proverbs 27:17

Table of Contents

Steps for Starting a New Group

Talk to leaders. Start by talking to leaders at your church or organization. Before you meet, put your thoughts on paper. Outline the needs your group will meet, who will participate, what you will do during meetings, where you will meet, and how you will recruit group members. By taking time to outline your plan, you will be better prepared when you communicate with leaders. It is important for leaders to be on board with the plan to start the group.

Understand the need. Take time to better define and understand the needs the group will meet. This may involve exploring community research, reading books, and talking to people with experience or expertise. This will ensure you understand the needs and the unique life situations of potential group participants. It is also important to learn about other supports available to meet the need.

Determine logistics. There are several logistics that need to be worked through to offer a group. These include, but are not limited to, identifying a space, a leader, and a curriculum or content, and recruiting participants.

- **Find space:** The physical environment of the group is very important. When selecting a space, it is important to consider the size, décor, temperature, confidentiality, flow of traffic, and set-up. Leaders should make the space comfortable and hospitable, configured appropriately for the type of group, and ensure the environment is warm and inviting.
- **Identify a leader:** When identifying a leader, it is important to identify a person with strong relational skills, appropriate expertise, strong communication skills, and strong emotional intelligence. In some cases, leaders require training to ensure they are equipped for the role and often leaders have a person passion for the class, workshop or group mission.
- **Choose curriculum and focus**: Some groups have the goal of increasing participants' knowledge on a topic. When this is the case, leaders may choose to follow a curriculum and may benefit from training related to the curriculum. In other cases, the group may be organized around group discussion and support with less reliance on content or information. When this is the case a curriculum may not be needed.

Recruit participants. There's not a group without participants. Therefore, leaders will need to develop a plan to share about the group with people who might be interested. It is important to communicate about the opportunity in a way that entices potential participants. This involves using strength-based language, communicating about the benefits of participation, sharing about aspects of the group that will be fun, engaging, or that meet needs. It is also important to make a plan for distributing information that ensures it gets to the intended audience. In some cases, a flyer is distributed directly to a group. In other cases, emails, social media posts, or news articles allow many to receive the information. Directly asking individuals allows for a more personalized approach and can be an effective recruitment strategy, too.

Offer ongoing leader support. Group leaders benefit from ongoing support from more senior leaders at the church or organization. This involves ensuring they have everything they need to facilitate the group (e.g. agreed upon funds, access to facilities and needed supplies), emotional support (e.g. opportunities to talk about the group, share successes, and challenges), and spiritual support (e.g. prayer for the group). Many also benefit from opportunities to sharpen their facilitation skills and learn new information to support the group.

Qualities of a Healthy Leader

While all leaders will have their own unique personality, facilitation style, and strengths, the list below provides important leadership qualities. Leaders should strive to embody each of these qualities. If there is a place you are weak, spend some time exploring what makes that area challenging. Talk to a mentor or leader and intentionally take steps to grow.

- Belief in the group process
- Confidence in yourself and your ability
- Courage to risk
- Willingness to admit making mistakes and having imperfections
- Organization and planning abilities
- Flexibility
- Ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty
- Appropriate sense of humor
- Self-awareness
- Humility and a non-defensive posture

Common Leader Mistakes

There are common mistakes that are easy to fall into as a group facilitator. Sometimes leaders feel too responsible, afraid of making a mistake, afraid of feeling out of control, or lack self-confidence. These thoughts and feelings can lead to behaviors that are often not in the best interest of the group. Examples include:

- Feeling too responsible for the group
- Speaking too much
- Pushing too hard
- Acting like a therapist (unless it is a clinical group and you are in fact a therapist)
- Doing too much behind the scenes
- Lack of self-awareness
- Not building in an adequate support system

"But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant."
Matthew 20:26

Qualities of a Healthy Group Member

Just as it is important for a group to have a healthy leader, groups also need healthy members. The list below outlines helpful qualities of group members. In some cases, members will come to the group with these qualities and in others the leader will need to offer education and support the development of these qualities.

- Committed to the group
- Willing to adhere to group ground rules
- Uses active listening skills
- Willing to share as they feel comfortable
- Open to learning and trying new things
- Respects confidentiality of other members
- Self-awareness

Qualities of a Healthy Group

When the group consists of a healthy leader and healthy members, the process is likely to be most impactful for all. The following list highlights qualities of healthy group process:

- Open communication
- Connection between members and the leaders
- Trust, acceptance, and belonging
- Wanting to be together
- Self-disclosure and vulnerability
- Giving and receiving support
- Movement and exploration
- Healthy boundaries and honoring of group ground rules
- Learning from one another and the leader

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."
Ephesians 4:2

Group Stages

Groups are often considered to have four stages from start to finish. While different terms are used to describe these stages, Brown (2011) describes the stages as beginning, conflict and controversy, working and cohesion, and termination.

Beginning: This stage reflects the beginning of a new group. It includes the time between when a person hears about the group and the first meeting as well as the first few meetings. During this stage people decide to participate in the group, register, and attend the first few meetings.

Conflict and Controversy: As members engage with the group, they become more comfortable. During this stage people may feel increasing dissatisfaction. They may express this dissatisfaction either directly or indirectly. These feelings will be worked through during the working and cohesion stage.

Working and Cohesion: During this stage, the group members work through points of tension and become more cohesive. The leader and group members establish a rhythm of interaction. This will look different depending on the type of group.

Termination: Termination can occur because a group comes to an end, or a group member has to leave before the group comes to an end. Ideally, closure can be planned and provides members an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the group and the impact they have experienced.

Table 1 describes each of these stages in more detail and compares their level of participation, group interactions, resistance, behaviors, tone, and feelings/emotions.

Table 1: Qualities of a Healthy Group

	Beginning	Conflict and Controversy	Working and Cohesion	Termination
Level of participation	Tentative, cautious, anxious; may engage in storytelling.	Increasing participation by members; a willingness to explore personal issues on a deeper, but still superficial level, and more interaction between members.	Members' levels of participation are high, and significant personal issues emerge and are worked through.	Reduced or frantic participation; may withdraw or bring up new material; may end participating before the group ends (premature termination).
Resistance	Usually high until safety is established; ask many questions; appear or say they are confused.	There is still considerable resistance, especially to being present-centered; storytelling abounds with little or no recognition of commonalities between members; members are also resistant to group-as-a-whole process commentary and may tend to personalize comments.	Resistance is more openly acknowledged, worked through, and understood by members and the leader; members are more accepting of comments about perceived resistance.	Renewed resistance, this time to experiencing feelings around termination; either holding on or letting go.
Communication patterns	Most communication is to and through the leader; members do not talk directly to each other but to the group, to the leader, or to no one in particular.	Members begin to talk directly to each other; communication through the leader to the group and speaking for the group are reduced behaviors; members begin to make supportive statements to each other and to challenge each other.	Considerable member-to-member interaction; cliques and subgroupings may be prevalent; the group functions more as a cohesive unit.	Members talk to each other, but communication may revert to occurring through the leader.
Member-to-member relationships	Tentative, polite, cautious; fear of hurting others, being hurt, or being different; tend to focus on differences, but search for similarities; try to relate through advice giving.	Conflict emerges in the group; members feel safe enough to challenge each other and to report their feelings of anger or irritation; past experiences with each other are revisited; projections and transference become more apparent.	Members are more willing to explore relationships with each other; they will work to develop and maintain relationships to the extent that conflicts may be minimized; when conflict does emerge, it can be worked on or through in constructive ways.	Members begin to pull back from investing in relationships that may be ending; the quality and quantity of member relationships will change after termination.
Member-to-leader relationships	Respectful; see leader as the expert, the magician; expect leader to anticipate and meet their personal needs; want to be reassured that they are valued and accepted by the leader; want to know they are safe and will be taken care of.	The leader is attacked by members; he or she has failed to be the magician or expert and members feel the loss of that idealization; the members still expect the leader to take care of them, but are more willing to make their needs and desires known.	The leader is perceived as a guide and consultant, not as a magician or expert.	May be a realization of the value of the leader, an awareness of what he or she contributed, or a feeling of deprivation at the loss of the person and relationship; can be experienced as anger, annoyance or sadness.

Table 1: Qualities of a Healthy Group Cont.

	Beginning	Conflict and Controversy	Working and Cohesion	Termination
Nonverbal behaviors	Fluctuates for individual members from lots of movement (nervous) to little or no movement (tense). There may be little or no eye contact between members; closed gestures, such as arms folded across chest, backward lean; few attending behaviors; speech may be rapid or slow and tentative.	Members' postures and gestures are less studied and contrived; they appear to be willing to let their nonverbal communication be more consistent or congruent with their verbal behavior; the leader can tune into nonverbal communication because members are more genuine.	Members are much more congruent in nonverbal behaviors and verbal communications.	Failure to maintain eye contact; looking at the floor, ceiling, or away from the leader and members; shifting in seat; gathering possessions.
Group tone	The overall tone from group members may range from apprehension to resentment, hostility, and despair; usually, members leave with a sense of relief and hopefulness; many feelings are experienced by members during these first sessions, but the overall tone reflects the confusion, ambiguity, and frustration of group members as well as the changes induced by the leader's interventions.	Members are combative and irritable, producing a group tone that is uncomfortable; some members may fear conflict because of past experiences; when conflict emerges, they may regress to old feelings associated with conflicts for them; if conflicts are worked through constructively, the tone becomes one of relief, having a sense of accomplishment and hopefulness.	Warm, accepting; a spirit of cooperation and satisfaction, excitement.	Sadness, relief.
Aroused/expressed feelings	Members will be somewhat reluctant to openly express feelings, but instead they tend to try to suppress or deny them. This behavior affects the functioning of the group. Common feelings experienced are fear of rejection, fear of engulfment, fear of destruction, fear of shameful secrets, confusion, and frustration; the leader's behavior can contribute to feelings of hopefulness, being cared for and valued, and having something of value to contribute to the group.	Irritation, annoyance, anger, rage, fear, and guilt are common feelings that arise and are expressed in this stage.	Irritation, annoyance, caring, warmth, liking, excitement at accomplishments, anticipation of continued learning about self, shame, and guilt.	Appreciation, pleasure, sadness, relief, abandonment, loss, grief.

Taken from *Psychoeducation Groups: Process and Practice* by Nina Brown

Facilitating Meetings: Beginning, Middle, and End

A group consists of a series of meetings and each meeting has a beginning, middle, and end. Many leaders find that building in a routine around these parts of the meeting help establish shared expectations and a rhythm.

Beginning (open and focus): The beginning of each session involves opening and focusing. This involves welcoming members, introductions, and focusing the group around the topic, question, or main content. The list below consists of activities that often occur in the beginning of each meeting.

- Ground rules
- Introductions
- Personal check-ins
- Short reading to focus group
- Setting or reviewing agenda
- Focusing discussion or content

Middle (facilitate, dialogue, educate): The middle of each group involves facilitating according to the group goals. This involves strong communication, listening, and facilitating skills as well as the ability to maintain healthy boundaries and encourage engagement. The list below consists of activities that often occur during the middle of the meeting.

- Being present with the group
- Communicating and listening effectively
- Establishing boundaries
- Managing challenging behaviors
- Offering education or other content

End (summarize and close): Leaders bring each group meeting to an end. This often involves summarizing the group, takeaways, and reviewing next steps. The list below consists of activities that often occur at the end of each meeting. These help bring closure to the meeting.

- Check-ins
- Reading or quote
- Stating common themes
- Summary of discussion
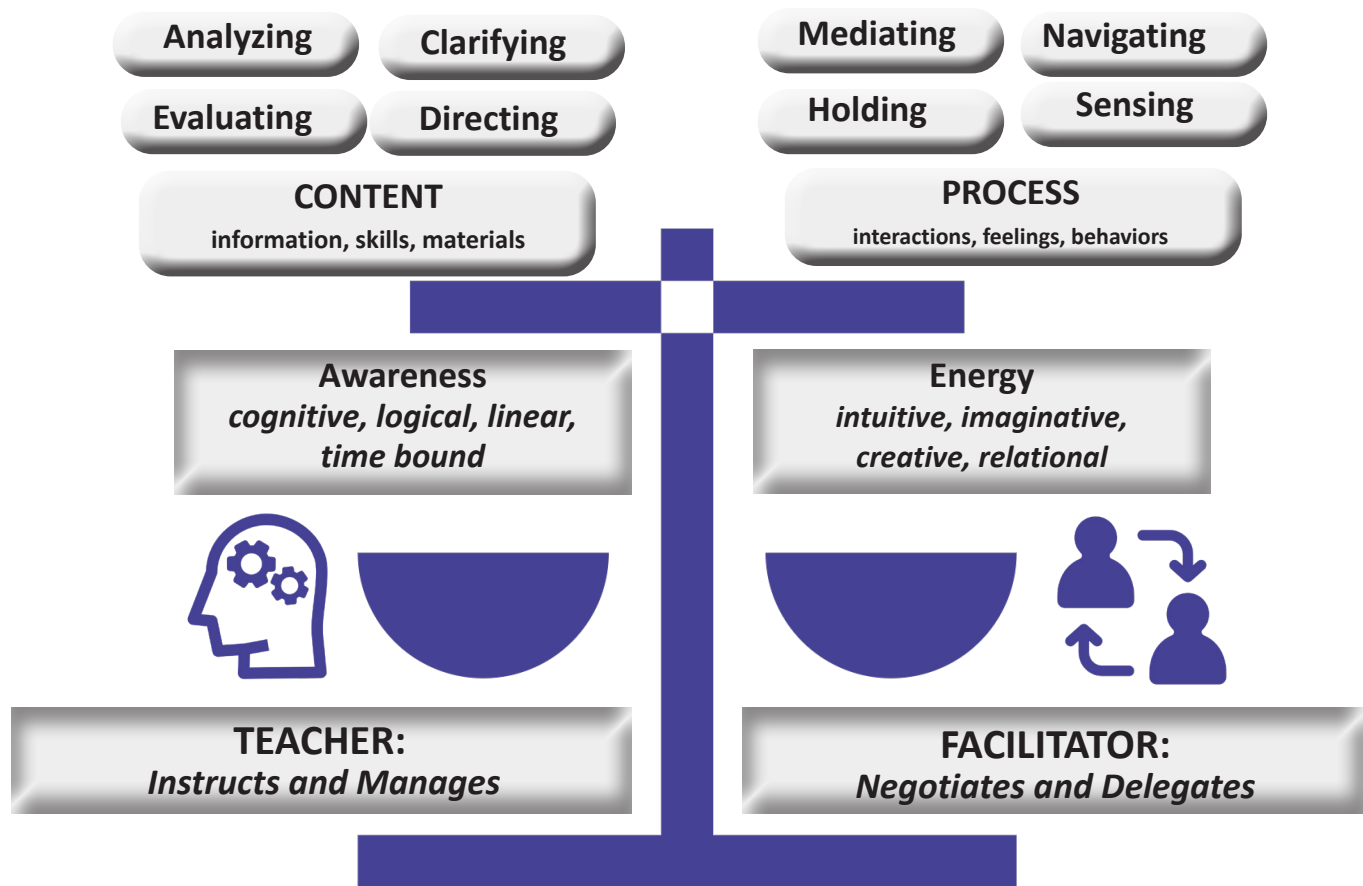- Takeaways or goals
- Reviewing upcoming events

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."
Ephesians 4:2

Facilitating vs. Teaching

Strong leaders assume the duel role of managing content and facilitating process. A teacher creates structure and curriculum, sets goals, communicates information, demonstrates skills and manages the way the group gains knowledge. A facilitator creates positive energy, mediates interactions, and helps members surface, explore, and understand assumptions, beliefs, and values

Analyzing   **Clarifying**   **Mediating**   **Navigating**

Evaluating   **Directing**   **Holding**   **Sensing**

CONTENT
information, skills, materials

PROCESS
interactions, feelings, behaviors

Awareness
cognitive, logical, linear, time bound

Energy
intuitive, imaginative, creative, relational

TEACHER:
Instructs and Manages

FACILITATOR:
Negotiates and Delegates

Monitoring Content and Process

Leaders need to be aware of both content and process. This involves raising awareness of what is said and how it is said.

Content describes "what" is discussed or shared. Examples include:

- Topics or themes for discussion
- The task at hand
- The problems being solved
- The decisions to be made
- Agenda items
- Goals and objectives

Process describes "how" things are discussed or shared. Examples include:

- Communication patterns and styles
- Group dynamics
- Rules, norms, and guidelines
- Relationship quality
- The "climate" or tone

Leaders should do their best to be aware of both content and process. When appropriate they may reflect back to the group content and processes they notice to further the dialogue.

Growing in Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (otherwise known as emotional quotient or EQ) is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict. This involves self-awareness, social-awareness, self-management and social-management.

	Awareness	**Management**
Self	**Self-Awareness** • Self-confidence • Awareness of emotions • Recognition of how your behaviors impact others	**Self-Management** • Keeping emotions in check • Acting in congruence with values • Handling change flexibly • Perseverance despite set-backs
Social	**Social-Awareness** • Awareness of others' emotions • Empathy for others • Understanding content and process in group discussion	**Social-Management** • Handling conflict effectively • Building strong relationships with others • Strong communication skills • Responding with empathy to other person's feelings to manage interactions effectively

It is important for leaders to access their strength in each of these areas and through support and supervision seek to grow in their emotional intelligence.

### Want to learn more about emotional intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence 2.0
by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves

Emotional Intelligence 2.0 delivers a step-by-step program for increasing your EQ via four core EQ skills that enable you to achieve your fullest potential:

1) Self-Awareness
2) Self-Management
3) Social Awareness
4) Relationship Management

Emotional Intelligence 2.0 is a book with a single purpose—increasing your EQ.
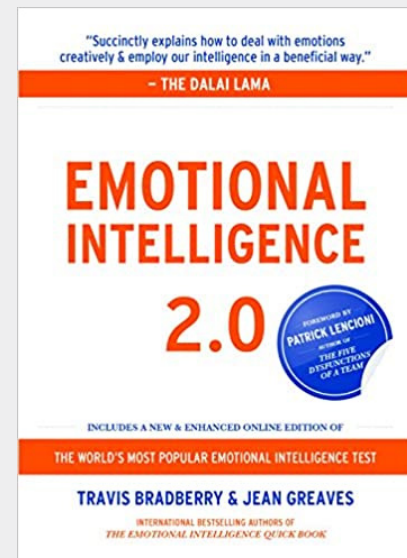
Active Listening Skills

Body Language: Face the person and use your posture and facial expressions to communicate you care and are interested in what the person is saying. For example, nod occasionally, lean forward, smile and avoid closed body language, such as crossing your arms.

Minimal Encouragers: Use brief, positive prompts to keep the conversation going and show you are listening. For example, "umm-hmmm", "oh?", "I understand", "then?", or "and?".

Restating: To show you are listening, repeat every so often what you think the person said, not by parroting, but by paraphrasing what you heard in your own words. For example, "Let's see if I'm clear about this…"

Reflecting: Instead of just repeating, reflect the speaker's words in terms of feelings or meaning. For example, "This seems really important to you…"

Emotion Labeling: Putting feelings into words will often help a person to see things more objectively. To help the person begin, use "door openers". For example, "I'm sensing that you're feeling frustrated… worried… anxious. Is that correct?"

Summarizing: Bring together the facts and pieces of the problem to check understanding. For example, "So it sounds to me as if…" or, "Is that it?"

Validation: Acknowledge the individual's problems, issues, and feelings. Listen openly with empathy and respond in an interested way. For example, "I appreciate your willingness to talk about such a difficult issue."

Clarifying: Ask questions to better understand what the person is communicating and draw out additional information. For example, "When did that happen?"

Encouraging: Ask questions to convey interest in what the person is saying and encourage them to keep talking. For example, "Can you tell me more about…?"

Probing: Ask questions to draw the person out and get deeper, more meaningful information. For example, "What do you think would happen if you…?"

Effective Pause: Deliberately pause at key points for emphasis. This will tell the person you are saying something that is very important to them.
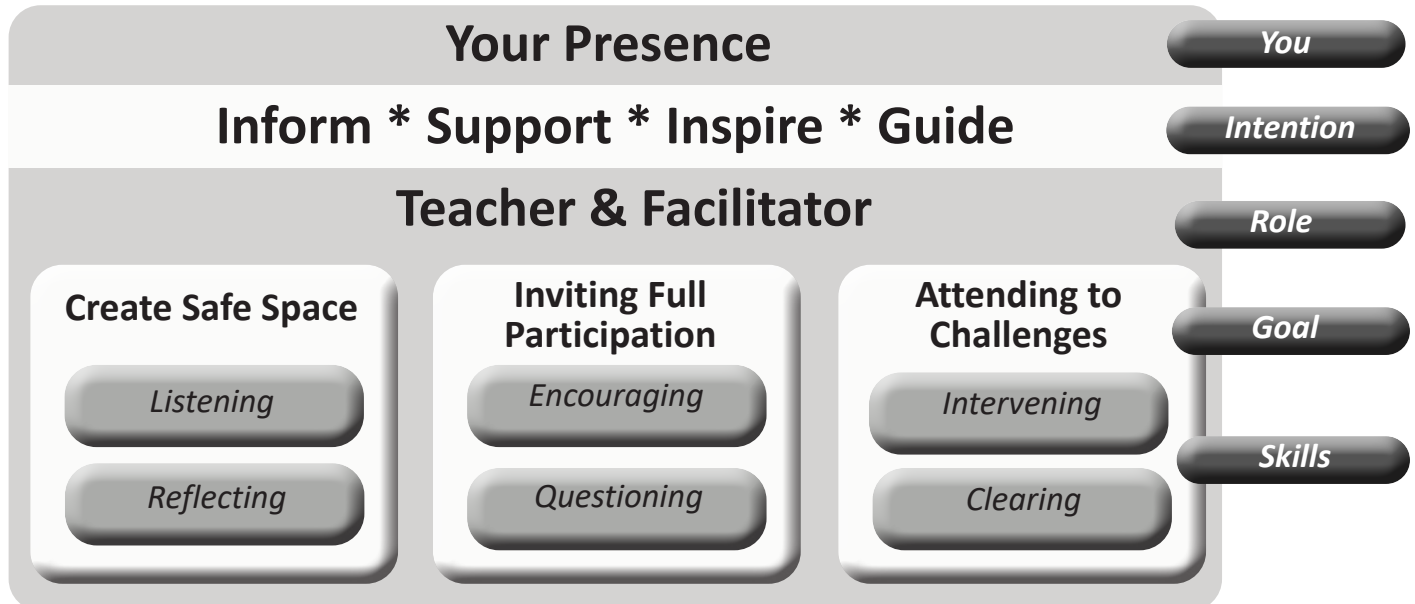
Silence: Allow for comfortable silences to slow down the exchange. Give a person time to think as well as talk.

Giving Feedback: If you have the other person's permission and it seems appropriate, let them know what your initial thoughts are on the situation. Share pertinent information, observations, insights, and experiences.

Communication and Engagement Skills

As you lead your group keep three goals in mind. Each requires a different skill set and type of communication. The diagram below illustrates ways the leader uses their presence to teach and facilitate in group settings.

1. **Create Safe Space:** Create a space where participants feel seen, heard, and accepted.
2. **Invite Full Participation**: Create an environment where participants can share, engage, and immerse themselves fully.
3. **Attend to Challenges:** When obstacles, upsets, or confusion occur, mediate, and support resolution.

Your Presence	You
Inform * Support * Inspire * Guide	Intention
Teacher & Facilitator	Role

Create Safe Space	Inviting Full Participation	Attending to Challenges	
Listening	Encouraging	Intervening	Goal
Reflecting	Questioning	Clearing	Skills

Strategies to Keep People Engaged

The following strategies can be used by leaders to keep people engaged throughout the group.

- **Say something shocking**: Grab people's attention by saying something unexpected.

- **Share a story**: Share an engaging story linked to the group content

- **Emotional/tone inflections:** Shift the emotional tone or volume as you speak

- **Journaling:** Give an opportunity for personal reflection using journaling.

- **Change the pace of your speech:** Shift the pace of your speech from fast to slow or slow to fast

- **Sensitively call out an individual:** Call out an individual for something positive

- **Bring jokes:** Tell a joke and link it to the group or use as a icebreaker

- **Poll the group**: Ask questions and have people raise their hand if it applies to them

- **Slides or props:** Slides or props can be a helpful visual tool to keep people engaged

- **Role play:** Act out a scenario or practice a skill

- **Break-out groups:** Encourage the group to engage with the information in small groups

- **Repeat that:** Ask the group to repeat phrases that are particularly important

- **Positive energy:** Communicate through tone, words, and body language that you are engaged, glad to be facilitating and interested in the content or conversation

How strong are your communication skills? Complete the "Effective Verbal Communication Behaviors Questionnaire," which measures the degree to which the leader has strong communication skills. This questionnaire can be found in the appendix section of this booklet.

Leading and Learning Preferences

Learning preferences reflect the unique ways you prefer to learn. Most often leaders share information according to their preferences. It is very important to be aware of your tendencies and ensure that you share information and facilitate using a diversity of strategies.

1. **Personal Relationships**: Your tendency is to perceive, learn, and appreciate in terms of your value system, and making personal connections is very important to you.

2. **Consistent-Precise**: You value order, predictability, and a sense of accomplishment, and you like to finish things.

3. **Flexible-Spontaneous:** You get excited about new ideas, projects, and the like, but may fail to follow through until completion.

4. **Logical-Rational**: Your interest is captured by ideas that trigger your thoughts.

5. **Creative-Imaginative**: You tend to become interested when your imagination is triggered. Yours is a world of possibilities, and you want to explore them.

6. **Factual-Realistic:** You tend to be very much the opposite of the creative-imaginative person. You are grounded in facts and reality, and may not see the need or value of flights of fantasy.

7. **Reflective-Thoughtful:** Your inner world is very important to you and is the source of your energy. You value contemplation over action and can be patient with the unfolding process for learning and growing.

8. **Energetic-Distractible**: Your energy and enthusiasm can be contagious and group members can respond in kind. .

Which is your preferred learning style?

Complete the "Learning Preferences Scale."

This questionnaire measures the degree to which you use eight different learning styles. Most often leaders rely on their learning style when facilitating. The questionnaire can be found in the appendix section of this booklet.

Complete the questionnaire to identify your top three styles.

Taken from: "Psychoeducation Groups: Process and Practice" by Nina Brown

The **VARK Model**, developed by Neil Fleming, identifies four learning styles:

1. **V**isual: learns by seeing
2. **A**uditory: learns by hearing
3. **R**eading/Writing: learns through reading and writing
4. **K**inesthetic: learns through movement and touch

Consider ways to incorporate each into group settings!

Challenging Situations and Behaviors

There are a many different types of group dynamics that can pose challenges for group leaders. These often involve crossing boundaries. A boundary is a line that marks the limit of an area. Boundary crossing occurs when one or more person acts in a way that violates an agreed upon boundary. Examples include talking out of turn, arriving to the group late, or interrupting.

It is important for group members to agree upon healthy boundaries for the group. These are often referred to as ground rules. When these are defined collaboratively with both members and the leader, boundary crossings can be prevented and are more easily addressed. The list below includes best practices for addressing boundary crossings.

Best practices for addressing boundary crossings:

- Use a positive approach
- Choose words that suit the receiver's emotional state
- Be concrete and say what is on your mind
- Be aware of the impact you are having on the receiver
- Wait for a response or reaction
- Be sure of your facts
- Do not exaggerate or make broad generalizations
- Think before you speak
- Check to ensure that you are being understood accurately
- Stick to the topic and do not bring in other concerns or issues
- Try not to criticize
- Do not impose your views, just express them
- Be receptive to feedback
- Listen to the other person
- Do not interrupt
- Give people the time they need to absorb the information

When a challenge arises, it is the leader's role to ensure it is addressed in a healthy way. In some cases, the leader addresses the challenge either directly or indirectly and in other cases a member or dynamic is addressed by a member of the group. In either scenario it is the role of the leader to ensure the issue is handled in a healthy way. Boundary violations are similar to boundary crossings except they have a stronger negative impact on the group or a particular member.

Addressing Challenging Situations

There are a variety of different types of challenging situations that can occur in the context of group meetings, which can be addressed in a variety of different ways. When determining how to address a boundary crossing or violation it is important to consider the following questions:

1. Is it harmful?
2. Is it repetitive?
3. Is it intentional?

Depending on the answers to these questions, a stronger or more subtle response from a leader may be warranted. The following section describes different types of challenging group dynamics and examples of strategies for managing them. Initial comments refer to early responses that are more gentle or subtle, "next level comments" should be used if a behavior has been previously addressed, and "advanced level comments" should be reserved for members who are struggling to change a behavior after it has been addressed several times.

The following pages describe each of these challenging group member behaviors and strategies for managing them.

Member Behaviors:

- The Dominating Voice
- The Silent Member
- The Story Teller
- The Uncommitted Member
- The Fuzzy Thinker
- The Fighter
- The Caregiver
- The Advice Giver
- Erroneous Information

The Dominating Voice

Dominant members take too much time sharing their feelings with the group and seem unaware that this violates the basic assumption of equal sharing of attention and support. These members may also dominate in the way they talk, implying they have the "right" answers or everyone should follow their advice.

Concern: Other members may not have enough space to share or may be intimidated by the dominant member and more reluctant to share.

Goals: Help the member learn to share time evenly with other group members and comment in a way that reflects respect for the autonomy of other members.
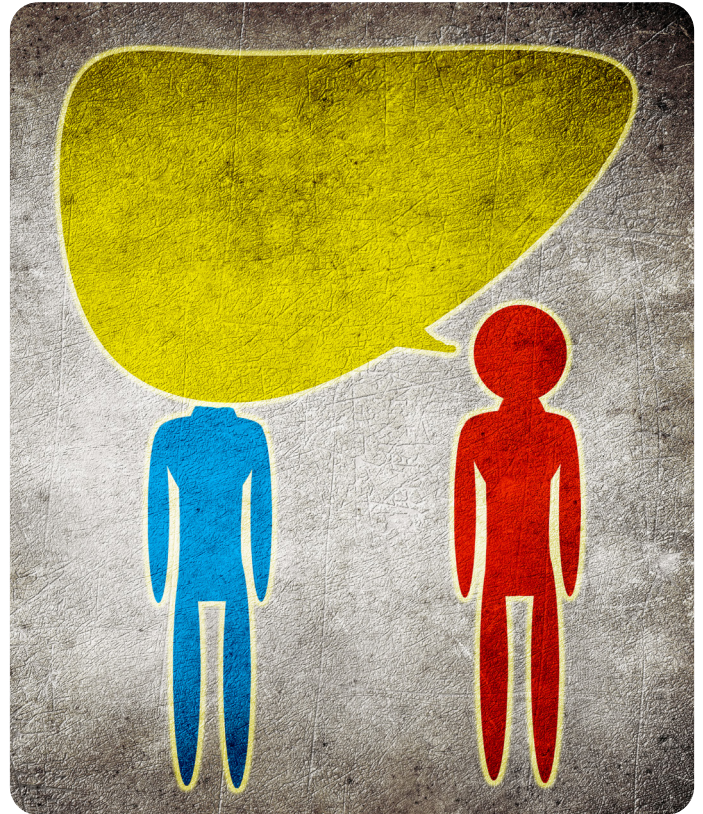
Examples of initial comments:
"We've heard a lot from you tonight, Jon. I wonder how others are doing."
"Is there anyone who hasn't had a chance that would like to share before we close?"

Examples of next level comments:
"How are we doing tonight in terms of sharing time evenly? Does everyone feel they are getting a chance to be heard?"
"Jon, I've noticed you've spoken more than anyone else for the last four meetings. What do you think about that?"

Examples of advanced level comments (outside of the group setting):
"John, I think we need to come to an agreement about how much you and other members talk. I understand that you want to share a lot with the group, but for the sake of other members, we need a clear way to ensure time is shared evenly. Would you be willing to limit your comment to XX time?"

The Silent Member

The silent member tends to not share or share very little, failing to take part like other members. They may feel anxious, uncomfortable, or insecure.

Concern: There is concern for the member and that there may be something in the group that gets in the way of participation. The group's negative perception of the member's silence can also be a concern.

Goals: Ensure they are engaging in the group as much as they can tolerate and that the group can deal with their silence.

Examples of initial comments:
"We've heard a lot from a number of people tonight. Mary, I wonder if you have any thoughts you'd like to share? Or, is there anyone who hasn't shared that would like to say something?"

Examples of next level comments:
"Mary, I can tell you have a lot of thoughts about what we are talking about. I wonder if you would be willing to share?"

Examples of advanced level comments (outside of the group setting):
"Mary, I wanted to check in with you about how you are feeling in the group. You are one of our quieter members, and yet I can tell you are very engaged. I suspect the other group members would love to hear more about your thoughts and experiences. Is there anything I can do to make it easier for you to participate?"

The Story Teller

The story teller tends to make comments in the form of long detailed stories that take up a lot of time. They often do not know which parts of their story are relevant to the discussion and which are not.

Concern: They take more than their allotment of time and attention, and other group members may become frustrated or make angry comments.

Goal and Initial Comment: Speak with them outside the group to express concern that their comments take a long time to make and briefer comments would generate more interaction. The goal is to help them share in a more focused manner.

The Uncommitted Member

The uncommitted member tends to have uneven attendance and may talk openly during the group about their mixed feelings about participating in the group.

Concern: In groups with established attendance expectations, the uncommitted member may become a distraction or disrupt group cohesion and safety.

Goals: Understand the causes of uneven attendance and encourage more regular and predictable attendance.

Examples of initial comments:
"Bob, we've been sharing how we feel about coming to the group. Would you be willing share your thoughts on this?"

Examples of next level comments:
"Bob, I see that you are back at the meeting tonight. We missed you. I appreciate your participation when you are here and would love to see you come more often. Is that possible?"

Examples of advanced level comments (outside of the group setting):
"Bob, I wanted to check in with you about how you are feeling about being in this group. You are one of our members who is not able to attend as regularly as others, and yet I can see you are engaged. I suspect other members would love having you as part of the group more often. Is there something I can do to make it easier for you to be more consistent?"

The Fuzzy Thinker

The fuzzy thinker often makes comments that are unclear in meaning and leave the group confused.

Concern: Often there is a silence at the end of the person's comment because the group is not sure what is meant or how to respond.

Goals and Comment: Help clarify what the person said by asking follow-up questions or paraphrasing and checking in, if you think you understood.

The Fighter

The fighter engages in a relatively large number of arguments or conflicts with other members or you as the leader.

Concern: The conflict may damage connections within the group or create an emotionally unsafe environment.

Goal: Help the members recognize their pattern of arguing and talk openly about it.

Examples of initial comments:
"As with all groups, different people feel differently about many things. This is something that leads to conflict. I wonder about how people feel about conflict. How do you typically deal with conflict?"

Examples of next level comments:
"We've been talking recently about people's reactions to some of the conflicts in the group. I wonder if some of the members see any patterns in the conflict that they would be willing to share?"

Examples of advanced level comments (outside of the group setting):
"Sarah, I wanted to check in with you about how you are feeling about being in this group. You are one of our most engaged members, but also one who tends to get into more conflict in the group than others. I'm concerned that the amount of conflict is challenging for the group and is hurting your relationship with the group. You are a valued member of the group, but I think we need to work towards reducing the amount of conflict. What can we do?"

The Caregiver

The caregiver tends to focus on helping other people, but does not talk about themselves or their needs.

Concern: The group does not benefit from their full participation, and they do not fully benefit from the group.

Goal: Help them use the group for support.

Example:
"Jerry, you have been very supportive of other group members. But, I'm less clear on what the group can do to support you. What can we do to support you?"

The Advice Giver

The advice giver routinely responds to other's comments with advice about how to solve the problem.

Concern: Occasional advice is not a problem, but a pattern of advice giving may frustrate the group and not allow people the space to reflect on what solutions they would like to try.

Goal: Shift the feedback from advice to sharing stories about what they personally have found to be helpful for themselves.

Example of initial comment:
"Bob, instead of giving advice, would you share what you personally have found helpful in similar situations?"

Example of next level comment:
"Mary, you just received a lot of advice –was that helpful? What might have been more helpful?"

Erroneous Information

A member offers suggestions that include incorrect information.

Concern: Other group members may follow the suggestion and it could be harmful.

Goal: Communicate that you value the member's experience and perspective (whether or not you agree), avoid embarrassing them, and share more accurate information.

Examples:
"I'm very glad that worked for you. Other people have found that _____worked better for them."
"I'm very glad that worked for you, but all the references we've seen do not recommend it."
"I'm glad you brought that up. That used to be what was generally recommended, but now new research has found that…"
"You've brought up a really interesting issue. Let's look it up in (a specific reference) and see what they say about it."
"That's too bad. What could you have done differently if you had the information we have talked about today?

Practical Strategies for Challenging Member Behaviors

Dominant Member
- State the value of each person's participation, emphasize the importance of giving space for everyone's views
- When you know in advance that an individual tends to dominate a group, propose a ground rule at the beginning of the session that everyone "monitor the airtime;" explain that for some, this means talking less and for others, it means talking more
- Before the discussion starts, propose a standard for the length of comments. For example: "Let's hear from a few people for no more than 2 minutes each"
- Summarize what the person has said and move to someone else
- Move closer and closer to the person, maintaining eye contact. Get in front of him or her. The problematic behavior will start to stand out (even to the person)
- Stop the person, thank him or her, and say you'd like to hear from someone else
- Interrupt tactfully with a focused question or summary

Silent Member
- Introduce "round robin" and let members know you are going to give each person a chance to share
- State the value of hearing from everyone, and the importance of learning from each member
- Use a warm-up exercise and give the silent member a major role in it
- Make eye contact with the person and ask the person direct questions on topics in which you know the person has expertise
- Tell the person in private that the group really needs their input, and ask them if there is a reason they are not contributing

Fighter
- State value of hearing each person's perspective, nonjudgmental stance
- Acknowledge their point of view, note it on paper, and shift the conversation or ask what others think
- Many of the strategies for the dominant member may work

Uncommitted Member
- Set ground rules at beginning around attendance, timely arrival, etc.
- Start on time, and do not recap (waiting for the person and recapping can enable behavior)

Story Teller
- Suggest an amount of time for each person's sharing
- Interrupt tactfully with a focused question or summary

The Fuzzy Thinker
- Ask fuzzy thinkers to summarize their thoughts into a few bullet points, and then summarize them out to help them focus their thoughts

The Advice Giver
- Ask the person with the issue, what would be most helpful from the group; if they are looking for suggestions solicit feedback from multiple people
- Set ground rules around giving advice
- Set concrete guidelines for the types of responses or feedback that would be most helpful in response to a question
- Shift the feedback from advice, to sharing stories about what they personally have found helpful for themselves

The Caregiver
- Remind the group that it is important for each member to both give and receive
- Talk outside of the group about the person's caregiving role

Erroneous Information
- Some of the 'advice giver suggestions' may be used to shift away from offering advice and information
- Set a ground rule of providing a citation or reference for all information provided

How to Facilitate Groups: 7 Easy Steps
by Caden Burke

Are you looking to up your game as a facilitator? Or are you considering starting a facilitation gig?"How to Facilitate Groups" is a great guide to help you make a move from simply putting people together for training, meetings, group discussions and workshops to creating a collaborative group in 7 easy steps.
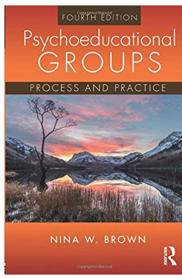
Psychoeducational Groups: Process and Practice
by Nina W. Brown

With this 4th edition, Psychoeducational Groups remains the only comprehensive, user-friendly guide to planning, implementing, facilitating, and evaluating psychoeducational groups. The 4th edition expands the discussions about group leaders' knowledge base, self-development, and techniques; best practices for group facilitation; and effective uses for group therapeutic factors. Substantial new material includes templates, scripts, and sample forms; suggestions for leader interventions for group and individual issues and difficulties; a social media policy; and the effectiveness of manualized and cyber/virtual groups.
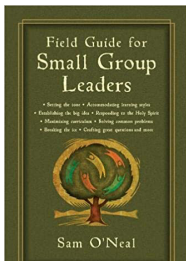
Field Guide for Small Group Leaders: Setting the Tone, Accommodating Learning Styles and More by Sam O'Neal

The Field Guide for Small Group Leaders focuses in on the small group gathering as spiritual event. Useful to newly minted leaders and as a ready resource for small group experts, this go-to guide helps leaders prepare themselves to prepare their groups for the adventure of a collective encounter with a great God.
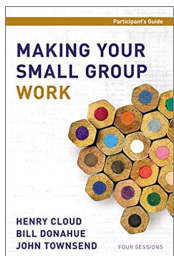
Making Your Small Group Work Participant's Guide
by Henry Cloud, Bill Donahue, John Townsend

Whether you're a new or seasoned group leader, or whether your group is well-established or just getting started, this four-session video-based Bible study (DVD/digital video sold separately) will lead you and your group together to a remarkable new closeness and effectiveness. Designed to foster healthy group interaction and facilitate maximum growth, this innovative approach equips both group leaders and members with essential skills and values for creating and sustaining truly life-changing small groups.
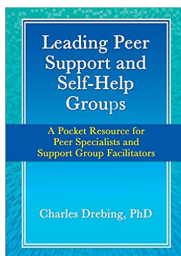
Leading Peer Support and Self-Help Groups
by Charles Drebing

Few peer support/self-help group leaders have more than minimal training in how to lead a group successfully. This pocket resource is designed to provide easy access to key information and strategies to help Peer Specialists and other lay group leaders develop and expand their group facilitation skills so they can lead healthy thriving peer support groups.
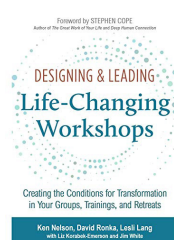
Designing & Leading Life-Changing Workshops: Creating the Conditions for Transformation in Your Groups
by Ken Nelson and David Ronka

Become a transformational teacher! If you lead, or aspire to lead, workshops, trainings, or retreats, Designing & Leading Life-Changing Workshops is your blueprint for helping your students and participants learn, change, heal, and grow.