

## 10 Tips for Facilitating a Learning Group

*"The better facilitator you become, the fewer words you will have to use."*  
**Geoff Ball**

As you guide your Family Group through its ever-repeating process of forming, storming, forming, and performing, and provide the required task and maintenance functions necessary for them to do such reflection upon their experiences, we encourage you to integrate the following principles into your practice:

- 1) **Comfort** - an uncomfortable group will be more easily distracted. Get comfortable. Use chairs. Take breaks for bathroom and food. Move and stretch; play active games for energizers.
- 2) **Beware Expectations** - Consider this: If I have an expectation in mind, it usually gets fulfilled. If I have certain expectations in mind for the group, I deprive it of the possibility of achieving something completely new from our experience together.
- 3) **Read the group** – notice the cues they offer you. Respond to their current place, and their needs. Be flexible & responsive.
- 4) **Set the Tone** - with your own words of introduction ("We have a great opportunity to ..."), with a game or exercise (like a Trust Lift), with props like a talking stick or candle, or with guided imagery ("Imagine that your week since our last meeting was videotaped. Rewind the tape. Now play it on the big movie screen in your mind.") Then verbally guide participants to recall their week's major activities, and the feelings they experienced – this helps put the preceding class period in context and brings to the surface material for discussion.
- 5) **Ask Open-Ended Questions** – A facilitator is a catalyst and mirror, not a person who necessarily provides the answers. A facilitator leads a process of guided discovery, leading out of participants what is inside of them, so they can articulate their own observations and find their own answers.
- 6) **Know when to intervene:**
  - to enforce ground rules / prevent injury / preserve safety - to take advantage of teachable moments. Ambassadors' discussions will inevitably unearth concepts that present learning opportunities and warrant being highlighted for the group.
  - to adjust frustration level. If the group gets frustrated trying to solve a problem or come to agreement, you may wish to stop the discussion and ask a question or two to reframe the perceived problem.
- 7) **Change** - If it doesn't work, try something else. Do what works. Experiment to find the best ways of doing things. When what you said didn't produce the intended result:
  - take a breath and remember that their response is right, for them, always
  - live with the silence (if you think that seeds are being planted . . .)
  - ask them what the silence means
  - use humor: "I thought I used English but let me try again."

- rephrase what you said
- try approaching the issue from another angle: Instead of "What did you learn from that intervention?" Try "What is one thing you noticed happen between the people you confronted?"
- move on to a different topic
- try an activity

8) **Avoid passing judgment.** When asked "How did I do?", you might first ask the person to discuss how they might answer that question. But it's also important to avoid being so aloof that group members cannot discern your true feelings/thoughts and establish personal rapport with you.

9) **Confront destructive patterns** – you are not here to support participants' destructive and unfulfilling habits. At times you must confront firmly, but gently and with the utmost professionalism, sharing your observations about behavior, attitudes and their effects.

10) **Resistance** - Not every person in every group will be excited about the SSA program, or about discussing their thoughts and feelings relative to it. Some may actively resist participation, and some of your efforts might even help them resist more. General guidelines for handling resistance are:

- love, which does not mean liking what a person is saying or doing;
- honor that they too are human;
- accept that they are acting as they are for reasons that are very valid to them;
- get more information: "I am clear that you do not want to be here; why did you show up?" A reply of "I had to" is an opportunity to discuss the other situations where this person is being "forced" to do things by others, which can lead to what they really do like & want to do, which in turn leads to what they can do with today's opportunities;
- do not bother trying to "convince" a person to do something, just offer opportunities, acceptance and love. What *can* you do here in this situation? What can you offer us?
- stop sabotage firmly: resistance does not deserve to ruin the program for others;
- adhere to your own professional or personal principles, never compromise them.

The Family Group meeting is not meant to be a place to provide therapy. If an Ambassador is in crisis, confidentially discuss the situation with your Program Advisor to determine the most helpful course of action. Refer Ambassadors to more qualified people when their needs or the discussion itself exceeds the bounds of your knowledge.