

## **Group Facilitator Guidelines & Suggestions**

***Your Role As Facilitator:*** Remember that your role is to hold a safe space for your group to go through their process. You do this by setting boundaries and helping to maintain adherence to the agreed upon rules so that the group can function optimally. The boundaries actually give participants freedom to explore and express themselves.

***Emphasis On Conversation:*** In Latin, “conversari” means to associate with or keep company. A facilitator accompanies participants and creates spaces in which we all can be present, committed, and open to the narratives (stories) of all. Your role as a facilitator is to help participants feel safe, comfortable, and respected so that they can share candid feelings and thoughts about the given topic. With your guidance and participation, the dialogue can be places for deep connection and discovery.

***Keep Time Boundaries:*** Start and end on time. This is an important part of holding the group space and being clear and consistent. If from the beginning you are lax on time, you will find that people will come in late and not take the group as seriously. If you constantly end late, it creates confusion as well. You also want to be aware of time when people share. Let them know how long they should speak so everyone gets a turn. You may even choose to have a timekeeper or use a timer. Remember, a clear container creates a safe space for exploration.

***Mirroring/Active Listening:*** Think of yourself as holding up a big mirror to the group in order to help them see themselves better. You can mirror an individual by saying back to them what they just said. This makes participants feel heard. You can mirror a group by saying what you are seeing happening (i.e., “Everyone seems really energetic today” or “This topic is provocative for you.”) Remember that mirroring is not interpreting, so do your best to keep these reflections simple and to the point.

Track for what is underneath what people are saying. When people are talking, listen for what is beneath their sharing. Often there is something else going on just below the surface. This could be something that they are afraid to say or that they are not fully aware is going on for them. You can ask questions like, “Tell me more about that,” or “It sounds like that upsets you; do you know what that might be about for you?” Don’t make assumptions about what may be going on and avoid having the group do that for an individual. It can feel very intimidating to have a group of people analyzing you! It’s much more powerful when the person has the realization for themselves rather than being told from someone else what might be going on for them.

***Track For Process:*** As part of your role as leader, you want to try to track process, not just content. Content refers to what is being discussed, what is on the surface. Process refers to the dynamic beneath what is being said. Tracking for process will help you notice when the group is off-topic or on a negative, ineffective tangent. It will also help you reflect their progress and increasing clarity. Your role is to be part of and witnessing the group - to see the bigger picture so that if they get caught up, you can reflect back and guide them back on track.

**Switch Sharing Formats:** Sharing can be done in many ways, and switching it up can be helpful at times. Group sharing can be done discussion-style, which is like a conversation, or counsel-style, which means that when one person is sharing everyone else is listening without comment. Counsel-style sharing is a very effective group tool; often, without it, a simple check-in can take up half the group time! In counsel-style sharing, we ask that people “speak, learn, and share from their hearts.” We often pass a ‘talking stick’ around the circle or we go “popcorn-style,” where the stick is in the center of the circle and whoever wants to speak picks it up and returns it when they are done. Another style is to have the person with the stick pass it to anyone in the group when they are finished. This keeps people from worrying about what they’re going to say and when.

You can also have people share in groups of two, three, or four. Remember to always give the option to not share.

**Don’t Take It Personally:** Anytime people go through a process of self-inquiry, emotions, vulnerability, discomfort, and confrontation come up. As the group leader, you may find participants projecting some of their feelings onto you. If this happens, listen to what they have to say and see if there is something for you to learn from it. Acknowledge them and let them know that you’ve heard them. You don’t need to fix it, though.

**Acknowledge Your Own Humanity:** It adds a lot to the group if you authentically communicate and acknowledge your own humanity. If you can role model self-acceptance for your fears, limitations, and flaws, you create an atmosphere of self-acceptance for the participants. You don’t have to tell the group all of your problems and fears either! Just don’t feel like you have to hide your humaneness. So often people idealize their teachers and feel like they could never be like them. We are here to say that everyone can make a difference and you don’t have to be enlightened or perfect to do so!

**Closing Circle:** Just as opening with intentionality is important, so is closing the sessions and the group’s work together. Some ideas for a closing circle: doing a short meditation or simply taking a deep breath together; go around and have each person say one word to describe what they will be taking with them; read a poem or make a prayer (you can do this or invite in one of the participants); gratitude.