



THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS EVERY
PASTORAL CARE FACILITATOR NEEDS
TO KNOW ABOUT RUNNING...

Groups

TIP SHEET

peoplecare.GLOBAL



What is group facilitation?

There are two primary types of therapeutic-educational groups. The first is a support group that gathers for guidance, emotional support and accountability. The second is a program group that follows a set curriculum (usually standardised and manualised, often accompanied by interactive discussions, practical group exercises and workbook activities). Even though both types of 'groups' aim to be therapeutic for participants (promoting positive life change), neither is designed to be, or replace, professional therapy. Group facilitators and therapists have different roles:

| FACILITATOR | THERAPIST |
|--|---|
| Leads group discussions | Gives professional advice |
| Formulates lesson plans | Formulates diagnoses |
| Provides educational information | Provides treatment and/or medication |
| Offers discipleship/coaching/mentoring | Offers interventions for Clinical Pathology |
| Helps advance Mental Health/Well-being | Helps Mental Illness/Emotional Disorders |

Faciliate, don't fix!

Rather than preaching or giving advice, the group facilitator's role is to act like a satellite navigation system. Facilitators offer direction, but let participants do the driving. This can be achieved by asking participants strategic questions that serve to steer and guide discussions but allows participants to think for themselves. Facilitators may also provide educational guidance and lead group activities and exercises. This helps participants think about life challenges in new ways. To do this well, facilitators need to create an atmosphere of participation. They should be careful to not allow any one person to dominate or control the group by speaking too long or too often. It is the facilitator's role to get to know the participants and create an environment where everyone is not just free to speak but motivated to participate.

Pace, don't race!

Ensure everyone has a good understanding of the key principle/s being taught before progressing to subsequent lessons. This can be achieved by summarising the main points at the end of a group meeting and again at the start of a new one. Ask participants at the end of each session to identify one new thing they have learned and share with the group what they enjoyed most. This not only serves to reinforce key principles for the person sharing, but also serves as a reminder for other group members. Repeat this process at the start of any new session. Ask participants to report on the highlights of the previous session and importantly, how they've implemented what they've learned. You can also provide participants with an opportunity for testify as to the positive and life changing consequences of putting into practice what they've been learning.

Be kind, don't leave behind!

Social support is one of the most effective ways to help keep group participants progressing together. However, if some participants are progressing fast (grasping concepts quickly) but others are progressing slowly (struggling to understand), simply encourage those who are advanced to help those who are falling behind. Not only is peer learning highly advantageous for those who struggle to grasp key principles, it is also advantageous for more advanced participants, as lessons when re-taught, are more deeply reinforced.



Enhancing group dynamics

People learn best when they have fun. Even when the topic of conversation is heavy, the atmosphere doesn't always need to be. The use of fun and laughter is healthy in group settings because it (a) helps people feel comfortable and at ease, (b) helps people to learn and remember key lessons, and (c) makes for an overall more enjoyable experience. Beyond fun and laughter, there are a number of ways to enhance group dynamics. Which of the following atmosphere-enhancing strategies would you implement to help participants to learn and grow?

| | |
|---|--|
| Hold trivia competitions (just for fun) at the start or end of group meetings - whether between group members or between participants and facilitators. | |
| When emphasising a key principle, share some of your own experiences (whether inspiring or embarrassing) in a spirit of humility. | |
| Give participants a fun quiz to test knowledge of key lessons learned in the group. Celebrate participation and effort. | |
| When working with a faith-based groups, start group meetings with prayer, worship/praise songs or reading of scripture. | |
| Play some fun developmentally appropriate games, put on puppet shows or perform magic tricks (to get participants engaged and ready for the session). | |
| Share a light meal, snacks or beverages with participants before commencing or after concluding a session. Encourage group members to contribute delights. | |
| When working with kids, start and/or end sessions with fun songs and/or dances (to get group members ready for active participation). | |
| Obtain session-satisfaction feedback from participants at the end of each group meeting to enhance participant-facilitator rapport and improve future learning. | |
| Allow for verbal testimonies of positive change that group members have experienced (or positive things members witnessed in fellow participants). | |
| Offer encouragement, plan milestone celebration points, issue certificates of achievement and throw a farewell party. | |