

Establishing Ground Rules

During the first meeting, discuss ground rules for the group. Ground rules should be simple, few and have widespread support. As a full group or in small groups, participants discuss the best and the worst training experiences they have had. After identifying what made them the best or worst, members suggest essential elements of a positive learning environment. Record key words or phrases, discuss briefly and quickly reach consensus on the rules. Post them. Common rules from such a process might include;

- Speak with “I” statements. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing (“I” instead of “they,” “we,” and “you”).
- Listen actively- respect others when they are talking.
- All questions are okay. It is O.K. to disagree with each other respectfully. Refrain from personal attacks- focus on topic
- Share “air time” with everyone
- Set your own limits. You have the right to pass.
- Passing on information and ideas should be encouraged, but keep personal statements or experiences confidential.
- Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses- they can be as disrespectful as words.
- No side conversations.
- Sessions begin and end on time.

In one county, the group agreed to respectfully challenge what they called “Ouches”; statements or behavior that appear contrary to the values and best practice promoted in ABC. This can be a valuable learning activity because real attitudes, behaviors, language, program structure or policy are discussed in relation to the development approach. If not handled well, it can result in people feeling put down, and damage group relationships and process. Ground rules should be set.

Respect Behaviors

Treat each other with respect

Be tolerant of differences

Be considerate of the feelings of others

Don't threaten, hit, or hurt anyone

Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements.

Tips for Group Leader

- Encourage, be considerate and sensitive to group members.
- Be organized and prepared. Have the room set up, handouts ready, refreshments out, etc.
- Give clear statements of purpose for coming together.
- Use positive body language - warmth, humor, eye contact, and enthusiasm.

- Be honest. Be yourself. Don't pretend to be something you are not or believe something you don't.
- Start and end sessions on time. It demonstrates respect.
- For early arrivers, spend one-on-one time, or ask for help with remaining set up.
- In processing activities or leading discussions, be comfortable with silences. Ask open-ended questions, and wait for responses. Silently count to 10 before you speak again.
- Encourage the group to help facilitate discussion. They have valuable knowledge and experience to share.
- Be democratic in handling participation; offer opportunities to speak to all who wish to speak. Encourage those who don't volunteer, without embarrassing or making them feel pressured. Always thank participants for contributing.
- Use a team approach for each session or objective; one person facilitates, one records, and another observes the process and serves as timekeeper.
- De-brief after each session. Evaluate and record the experience while it is fresh.
- Have key assertions for each session posted on the walls.
- Plan stretch breaks and energizers. Many people struggle with long periods of sitting. Standing, stretching, moving and laughing can provide just enough break to help people stay focused.

Facilitator “Do’s”

Facilitation means to “make something easier.” In order to be effective group leaders, facilitators need to do the following:

- Be empathic and reflect the emotional content or theme of the material being covered.
- Be supportive and encouraging.
- Respect, accept, and value differing perspectives and experiences.
- Ask gently inquisitive, open-ended questions.
- Summarize both factual and emotional content.
- Be aware of cultural differences that influence values, beliefs, and behaviors, but do not make assumptions.

Dealing With Difficult Group Members

One of the most challenging aspects of training or group facilitation is effectively handling difficult group members. Here are a few typical behaviors and suggestions to help you deal with each. These situations require your best communication and facilitation skills.

Non-participant

Validate. Call the person by name. Direct an easy, non-threatening question to them. Respond to their body language (Is it fear of speaking, resentment at being there, or boredom?) Check in with them after class.

Monopolizer

Summarize quickly, then move on. Call name to get attention. Use hand signals and body language to recognize others. Interrupt, if the behavior continues. Ask for input from those who have not been heard from.

Challenges Facilitator/Doubting Thomas

Generalize. Remind group that there is no “one way”. Cite sources. Recognize frustration with the challenges and complexity of the work. Use “I” statements.

Demands “The” Answer

Generalize. State that there may be many answers. Invite others to express opinions. Remind the group that facilitators are not experts.

Rude Behavior (laughing, side conversations)

Review ground rules. Invite back into conversation “Sue, do you have something to share on this?” Ask another member to repeat what they said, because you are not sure everyone was able to hear.

Know It All

Generalize. “What works in one situation or with one person may not work with another.”

Gives False Information

Summarize and ask for group input: “What do the rest of you think about that? Have others heard of this? Ask member to recheck source. Check your resources and clarify at the next session.

Wanderer (from the topic)

Ask if you may put this topic on an Issues List of topics the group will come back to, if time permits. Return to the scheduled topic. You might also suggest that those who would like to continue this discussion do so at break or lunch.

Cultural Differences

Acknowledge at the first session that culture influences our values, behaviors and interpretations, in our lives. Ask participants to speak up if they have a different perspective or interpretation to share. Use the contribution as a teachable moment, to increase understanding and ask all participants to be respectful of differences. Thank the member for speaking up.