

Some Behaviours that Facilitators can do during Group Work

Group interventions

- Interpreting
- Feeding back
- Challenging
- Reflecting feelings
- Summarising content
- Revealing reactions
- Focussing on 'real' issue(s)

Say something

- Ask a question of someone
- Ask if anyone agrees/disagrees and get them to explain
- Comment on non-verbal behaviours
- Express group feelings and discuss
- Feedback observed dynamics
- Summarise and ask or suggest what to do next
- Refer to group rules

DO something

- Use body language to limit/change behaviour
- Stand up and create authority
- Move around the group
- Use flipchart/overhead/picture/video/etc
- Non-verbally signal to someone to contribute
- Stay silent, watch, listen; 'holding the group'

Change the Process

- Introduce a new topic or task
- Take a break
- Divide group into smaller working units/pairs
- Take a vote or call for consensus
- Hand leadership to someone else

Responding to bad behaviour

- Reflect on your own feelings
- Observe how group is responding
- Consider hidden personal agenda
- Consider deeper group dynamics
- Consider the 'pay off'
- Consider if the group can take it or if you have to intervene

Watching Groups

- express yourself in your activity of watching
- allow yourself plenty of time
- work on it with nothing in your mind
- and without expecting anything
- just observe

(Paraphrased from 'Zen Mind, Beginners Mind' by Shunryu Suzuki)

Tactics for Dealing with Problem Behaviours in Small Groups

Types of problem behaviours

- Flight
- Fight
- Distraction
- Pairing
- Dependency

Types of problem group members

- Hair-splitter and pigeon-holer
- Joker
- Superior being
- Silent member
- Dominator
- Distracter
- New member

Some Tactics for Dealing with Problems

Flight/fear response – role taken by silent member, new member. These members may not get the best from the group and run the risk of being ignored and not valued by the others. In extreme circumstances particularly if others have bonded well, they may be resented.

Solutions

- allow period of settling in, then actively encourage their contributions
- set a group task that involves everyone, with specific roles for each person
- ask simple, direct and non-threatening questions to begin with, to give them confidence
- be aware that levels of contribution vary from time to time in the same person; respect this

Fight – role usually taken by the dominator/superior being/hair splitter/manipulator. These members persist in being argumentative and trying to control the direction of the group.

Solutions

- allow some limited air time in first instance
- acknowledge that they have a point of view but firmly indicate that there are other perspectives
- ask the rest of the group for their thoughts
- offer to speak in a 'one to one' after the session
- allocate a specific task in order to distract e.g. scribing and recording group process
- call a tea break if things really getting out of hand, and take the member to one side

Distraction – role taken by joker, distracter. These member persistently divert the group from its task and/or have private conversations with neighbour. May represent insecurities and/or lack of knowledge.

Solutions

- engage eye contact and walk towards the individual who is talking
- if they persist, ask them to share their viewpoint with group
- acknowledge the humour if in context, but if the joker persists with distractions, call a break and take to one side

Dependency – any group member might adopt a dependency role on the facilitator. This is more likely if the group meets regularly. Certain facilitators even encourage dependency by group members in the misguided belief that it enhances group working. This is dangerous for participants and facilitator alike. Note that all facilitators have an ethical duty to maintain professional distance within the teacher-learner relationship, as in the doctor-patient relationship.

Solutions

- if the group has been set up appropriately this should rarely be a problem
- avoid development of a 'special' relationship by dealing with all group members equally
- acknowledge the dependent member's contribution and at the same time ask opinions from others
- assign tasks equally
- firmly but gently encourage independence, particularly if dependency shows signs of persisting beyond the life of the group