

Facilitation for Group Leaders and Chairpersons Trainers and Group Workers



When is Facilitation Appropriate?

- * When the group leader or chairperson wants to fully participate as an ordinary member and an outside professional is required.
- * When the group needs to take time out, to step back and look at the bigger picture such as in evaluation, review or planning.
- * When the group is stuck.
- * When the group needs a process to ensure everyone has the chance to participate and contribute

Prepare, Prepare & Prepare

- * Be clear on the purpose of the event. Often a group will give a facilitator a verbal explanation of what they need or their situation in advance. Write this up and confirm back to the group contact person that this is what is agreed.
- * Design the event. For every hour of engagement with a group a facilitator can easily spend 2 or 3 hours designing how the session will go. There needs to be a logic and a flow as you work the group through a process based on their stated needs - it takes time to think this through and hone it down.
- * Have all your materials ready; flipchart stand and paper, pens and markers, blu-tac and masking tape, hand-outs, materials for games and activities. Get yourself a sturdy box.





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Open the Event

Case The Joint!

- * Know the venue beforehand. If you can't visit in advance then arrive early. Ensure things are in place for the comfort and smooth running of the event; the lay-out of the room, tables and chairs, heat/ air conditioning, sufficient lighting, power sockets, drinking water, etc.
- * Avoid delays or distractions, think it through beforehand and get things organised so that you and the group can focus on the task in hand. What numbers are you dealing with?
- * What is the best seating arrangement that facilitates their participation? Will you use a circle or a U-shape? Do you need to use tables for each person or can you use an open format?

- * People can arrive to a facilitated event with some apprehension; what is it all about, what is the facilitator like, what is expected of them? The facilitator needs to put people at ease by making them feel welcome, by having a clear agenda and plan, and by clarifying their expectations.
- * Setting 'ground-rules' or better still agreeing a 'group contract' also helps groups to take ownership of the session. If the group, or even some of the group don't know each other then introductions are needed.
- * Explain the plan for the event. Go through the time frame, tea breaks, finishing time etc





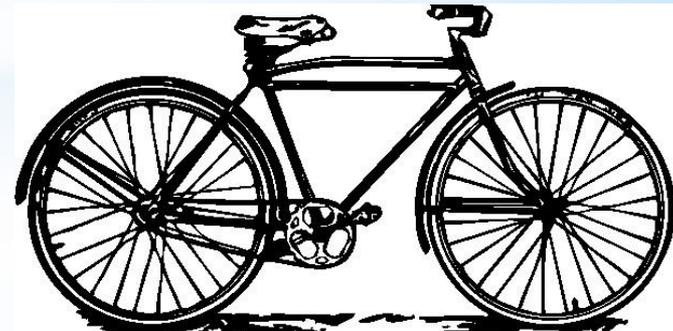
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Structure & Flexibility,
Task & Process.

Ice-breakers

- * You need to have a clear purpose in your own mind for each activity you use. Is the ice-breaker to introduce people to each other? to help overcome shyness? or is it to warm up a group that already know each other well. Eg there is not much point in doing a name game when people have been together for years!
- * Also, bear in mind the type of group when choosing the ice-breaker, ie energetic young people or an older group with somewhat less mobility. Maybe the group has never done this type of activity together before - this is not a reason for not doing an ice-breaker, but be selective in which one you use.

- * Each group is different and each situation is different. The facilitator needs to bear this in mind, and while a well-planned structure to the event is necessary, you need to be flexible.
- * When to be flexible - this is a judgement call, and you need to be sensitive and responsive to the dynamics and moods of the group. The facilitator is constantly gauging progress and making adjustments or changes to maintain the balance between task and process, like the wheels of a bike.





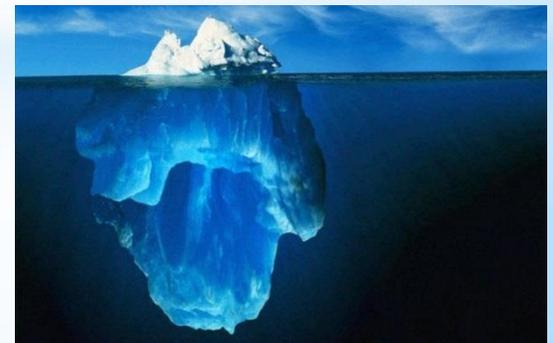
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Minding the Group - Set & Maintain Boundaries

Be a Good Time Keeper

- * It might be stating the obvious but you need to start on time and stick to the timeframe you have set. Have the plan/agenda for the day written up on the flipchart with break times etc.
- * The group is expecting you to keep to time, if not people can begin to get anxious. This links back to your preparation - how much time do you allocate to the different sections of your plan? It is hard to be scientific about it, but not having any timeframe is too loose.

- * A group is like an iceberg - there is a lot going on under the surface! While these dynamics may not be initially obvious, this is often where a group needs help.
- * In the process of working with a group, issues, difficulties, challenges and new ideas may arise, and the facilitator works to gather this feedback.
- * Therefore, setting and maintaining clear boundaries is necessary to ensure people feel safe and free in contributing their thoughts, feelings and suggestions.





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Difficulties & Challenges

The Question

- * The job of facilitation relies a lot on asking the right question. I don't think there is a simple tip as to how to ask the right question. It is a matter of giving careful thought in advance to what you are trying to achieve according to the briefing from the group.
- * A clear, short, relevant question can give great results. Avoid lone-winded questions, complicated use of English, multiple questions within a question etc.
- * Brainstorm during your preparation, what type of response might you get and does it fit in with the purpose of the event?

- * Despite all your preparations things can go wrong. Usually you can tell that things aren't going as planned - what to do? That depends on what the problem is. Can you 'sit' with the problem and ask the group for their opinion?
- * If an individual is challenging you, widen the debate and consult with the group on the issue, ie de-personalise it. If an individual is disruptive you need to point this out to them and refer to group contract.
- * If you can't think clearly then take a 5-minute break to gather your thoughts or consult with the group contact person.
- * If you are working over a period of time with the group then look for guidance/supervision to analyse the problem and identify a solution.





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Keep Learning

Closing

- * Like a ship coming in to berth, the facilitator needs to have a prepared ending for the session. Again it is a matter of timing - you could give a quick round asking for a word from each person on how they feel after the session or allow more time for each person to say what they learned.
- * There are a range of ways of doing this eg name 2/3 things I am taking away with me/ what I am going to do next/ the best thing about the day, etc. The day needs to come to a conclusion so ensure you have the time to summarise back to the group the overall outcomes and decisions arising from people's time and energy.

- * Facilitation is not easy. It takes time, practice and reflection on experience to develop your skills, knowledge and confidence.
- * Study the principles and theory behind facilitation and groups, it will help deepen your understanding.
- * Seek out training and development opportunities. Get supervision support to help you reflect on your practice and learn from your experience.

