



the
Self
Help
Connection

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LEADING THE GROUP

- ♀ Encouraging Participation
- ♀ Developing Leadership Skills
- ♀ Preventing Burnout
- ♀ Closing the Meeting
- ♀ Letting Go

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

Everyone has something to offer to the group. People in the group can participate in a variety of ways. As group leader it is your responsibility to ensure that members are getting fair air time from the group. If some members are monopolizing the conversation or using more than their fair share of air time, the group leader has to ensure that other members are not getting discouraged or leaving the group. You may have to intervene and hand over the air time to other members who may wish to share experiences or express opinions on the issues.

You may have to encourage the participation of shy members or members who lack confidence.

Tips

- Invite participants to do specific, small things, such as read the guidelines, introduce the guest speaker, go over the agenda, set the coffee ready.
- Take turns during discussions, but remember, members have the right to pass. right to "pass."
- Ask members to choose a chore to do.
- Sign an activity sheet specifying what you want to do, can do or like to learn how to do to share the work of the group.
- Encourage participation in other ways besides verbally:
 - ✓ art
 - ✓ take notes
 - ✓ draw
 - ✓ pot luck
 - ✓ crafts
 - ✓ socials
 - ✓ plan guest speakers
 - ✓ set up room
 - ✓ make coffee
 - ✓ clean-up
 - ✓ mailouts
 - ✓ phone trees
 - ✓ visits to group members who are sick
- Set up a one- to-one buddy system which can be used outside of meeting time.

- Use ice breakers (see Glossary and Resource List).
- Use rounds (see Glossary and Resource List).
- Involve quiet members by just asking them to do something such as read a line/section of the guidelines. or involving them behind the scenes.
- Encourage members to be involved in non-verbal activities.
- Have a suggestion box.
- Encourage one-on one sharing on break or after meeting.
- Boost the self-esteem of members so that they feel comfortable in participation.
- Use your own judgement, and trust your gut feelings.
- Accept differences in members — some like to learn by listening, by osmosis.
- Call people and remind members personally about the meeting.
- Set limits on your commitment to the group — this is it, If we don't share the work, it's not going to get done.
- Package it — give members reasons why something has to be done.
- Form a group that can meet after bingo!.
- Get a partner to share responsibilities.
- Change time, day and how often you meet.
- Ask members to make a commitment to the group.
- Find out what group members want.
- Share responsibility for the group running smoothly.
- Provide a variety of activities.
- Tell people your needs.
- Set a time for the meeting to start and to finish and stick to it.
- Write down chores needed to run the group and post it on the wall. be posted.
- Put participation on the next agenda and discuss it with the group.
- Break up into small groups.
- Set an agenda and try to stick to it:
 - ✓ business
 - ✓ check-in
 - ✓ sharing
 - ✓ break
 - ✓ program
 - ✓ closure
- Ask for volunteers.
- Approach someone after the meeting.
- Get people to do something with you.
- Call on members to participate in discussions.
- Pair off and talk about anything.
- Talk to person over coffee "to break the ice."
- Pick up a member early and drive them to the meeting. Maybe they will feel comfortable sharing one-to-one.

- Offer to babysit so a member can attend a meeting.
- Build trust so that members won't fear being criticized or judged when they participate.
- Watch for clues as to why a member may not be participating, such as body language.
- Encourage people to write out ideas and feelings, and let someone else read it.
- Pass out feelings chart with coloured markers, coded happy faces and let members "draw" how they feel.
- Encourage songs and non verbal methods of communication.
- Write alphabet and yur feelings beside each letter.
- Ask them on the side/in private why they aren't participating and what needs to happen in order for them to feel comfortable participating.
- Ask them after meeting.
- Ask them to do another job that's non-threatening.
- Encourage them to participate in rounds/check-ins.
- Find out why the person is not participating.
- Use your own judgement or give it time.
- Be conscience of different learning styles — some members may like to learn by listening or watching role models in action.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Beware of "Founder's Syndrome." After a year or two (or less for some groups), the group's capable and hardworking founder becomes exhausted and loses interest in the group. With no one ready to assume major roles or share the work, the group may die. The transfer of power from person/people who started the group to others in the group is a very necessary process. Dependencies on leaders can develop, and once they do, it is hard to encourage others to take on the work of the group. All group members can develop leadership skills from day one, and we encourage leaders to be thinking about this from day one.

Tips

- Watch other groups to see how they do things successfully.
- Get to know the expertise of each person in the group and determine how this can be matched with the needs and goals of the group.
- Keep group member informed so they feel they have a stake or ownership in the group.
- Call the Self-Help Connection to find out about their leadership workshops.
- Call the Women's Centre or local community agencies dealing with your issues, continuing education departments of schools and universities and see if staff there can do some training sessions with your group.
- Organize the group so all members share in decision making and leading the meetings.
- Rotate jobs among members.
- Organize the work in pairs so people can learn from those who held the job before.
- Try to delegate even the small tasks — people are usually happy to start small.
- Keep a list of the responsibilities to be done for each job, so that whoever takes on the job will know exactly what they are getting into.
- Encourage members to sign up for a "term of office", so they know their commitment is time-limited.
- Review on a regular basis the group's purpose to make sure members still agree with it. Members will feel a greater comitment to the group and be more willling to take on positions or responsibilities. This review will also new members a chance to "buy into" the group.

PREVENTING BURNOUT

Why do leaders burn out? Research shows that role ambiguity, inaccurate perceptions of the leader's role by members, activities related to member recruitment and retention and lack of shared leadership are all related to leader burnout.

If you don't plan from day one to share responsibilities, everything gets left to the person who starts the group. Burnout is the number one occupational hazard for self-help group leaders. Recognize it can happen to you or in your group, and take steps to prevent it.

Tips

- Evaluate the leadership every three or four meetings.
- Suggest it's time to rotate and/or share the leadership.
- Plan for the succession of leaders.
- Complain.
- Set limits on how long you will lead the group.
- Develop leadership skills in your group from day one.
- Tape the meeting so members can get a feel for group dynamics and make suggestions on how they would handle specific situations.
- Use a suggestion box for tips on how to improve the running of the meetings.
- Form guidelines around the leadership role.
- Promote and/or develop new role for ex-leaders.
- Learn stress reduction and relaxation techniques, and do them as a group.
- Join a self-help group for stress and burnout.
- Build up a cliche or network of leaders, and share coping skills.
- Use your friends, families.
- Find a mentor.
- Debrief with your co-leader or a mentor or another leader, and analyze how you might handle difficult situations.
- Close the meeting on a positive note, and don't take the problems of the group home with you.
- Join a health club.
- Find free entertainment.
- Decide when it might be time to go - size of group, time, dynamics.
- Delegate responsibilities:
 - ✓ contact person
 - ✓ telephone committee
 - ✓ coffee person

- Appoint co-facilitators, then pick two to work together, but be there as a consultant and mentor.
- Encourage each other — you're the experts.
- Be an advisor.
- Fade out gradually.
- Watch the size of the group — split if too large, let veterans be together and facilitator go with newcomers.

CLOSING THE MEETING

Closure is seen as a skill as important as facilitation. There is more opportunity for sharing the spot light. Especially if emotions have been running high in the meeting, leave with positive thoughts. Giving people opportunity to leave when on time limits. To leave meeting on a positive note. Resources (get title of Debbie Fitzgerald's book.) Settles things down. (See closure chapter). People may leave frustrated. Everyone must leave with a sense of having been heard.

Tips

- Questions or unresolved issues should be noted and slated for the next meeting, e.g., put in the Parking Lot.
- Plan time - Maybe a quarter of meeting set aside for closure.
- Adopt a closing ritual:
 - ✓ song or laughter
 - ✓ joining circle
 - ✓ relaxation exercise
 - ✓ one-on-one
 - ✓ socializing with coffee
 - ✓ reading
 - ✓ meditation
 - ✓ reflection
- Rotate the closure.
- Check before you ask members to close their eyes; this may be too frightening. Instead, have members pick a spot, and cast their eyes down.

LETTING GO

If you decide you no longer want to be the leader of the group or no longer need the group, how do you pass the leadership over to someone else? Changing the leadership is a critical time for the group, as the likelihood that the group will disband is high when leader turnover occurs.

Tips

- Inform the group that you are there for set time.
- Decide when it might be time to let go - size of group, time limit up, dynamics of the group.
- Rotate the leadership.
- Delegate responsibilities:
 - ✓ contact person
 - ✓ telephone committee
 - ✓ coffee person
- Appoint co-facilitators, then pick two to work together, but be there.
- Encourage each other — you're the experts.
- Be an advisor.
- Fade out gradually.
- Watch the size of the group — split if too large, let veterans be together and facilitator go with newcomers.