Facilitating Learning in Small Group Sessions


✓ In the groups I lead, do I....

- Build trusting relationships and foster collaboration?
- Orient the learners and attend to introductions?
- Determine the learners’ experiences, needs, strengths, and interests?
- Help the learners understand pre-formulated learning goals or develop new ones?
- Discuss with the learners how to work together?
- Facilitate the learners’ active participation?
- Monitor the flow of the session(s) and the group process?
- Facilitate the flow of the session(s)?
- Deal effectively with learners who affect the group process negatively?
- Deal with disagreements and manage conflicts constructively?
- Facilitate the achievement of the members’ learning goals?
- Invite learners to process and summarize what occurs during each session?
- Evaluate the learners’ participation and capabilities doing what is needed to help them and me learn from the experience?
- If the group meets multiple times and the members are close knit, prepare learners for and manage the group termination process with care and sensitivity?

Special Tasks for Coleaders

✓ Before the (first) session, did we....

- Get to know each other (e.g., our respective views on education and healthcare)?
- Gather and share information about our learners (e.g., relevant experiences and courses)?
- Review our understandings and hopes for the session (e.g., goals and activities)?
- Decide how to share the leadership responsibilities?
- Negotiate any differences we had?
- Develop a plan for the session(s), including our respective roles and tasks?
- Agree on ways to communicate with each other during the session(s)?
- Decide how to arrange the meeting room?
During the session(s), did we....

- Introduce ourselves and invite the learners to introduce themselves?
- Explain how we as leaders would be working together?
- Model the ways that we want the learners to interact with each other?
- Model skills by role-playing?
- Support each other’s leadership efforts?
- Reinforce each other’s contributions?
- Accommodate to a shared spotlight?
- Communicate with each other throughout the session(s)?

Special Tasks for Coleaders

✔ After the session(s), did we....

- Share and compare our impressions/reaction?
- Constructively critique our partnership?
- Each critique our individual efforts and provide constructive feedback to each other?
- Use what we learned to prepare for the next session?

Planning and Facilitating Discussions/Dialogues

✔ Did I....

When preparing for groups

- Plan or review plans for external experiences for the learners (readings, lectures, panel discussions, filed trips) that were intended to help stimulate discussion/dialogue?
- Plan or review plans for internal experiences for the learners (video triggers, readings, case histories, role plays) that were intended to help stimulate discussion/dialogue?
- Prepare myself (intellectually and emotionally)?

During the session
Did I....

During the session (continued)

- Create a collaborative environment?
- Do an initial assessment of the learners’ levels of readiness and acknowledge any preparations they made for the session?
- Initiate the interchange with an engaging, relevant challenge and use mainly open-ended questions and comments?
- Encourage learners to participate (e.g., by allowing enough “wait time” when learners or I asked questions; listening actively and nonjudgmentally and encouraging learners to do like-wise; keeping the conversation from being dominated by a subset of learners; building what learners said into the discussion; making clear that my statements were open to being challenged?
- Help learners communicate clearly (e.g., by asking for clarification and encouraging learners to do likewise; helping learners reframe their ideas and comments when needed; helping learners focus or expand their ideas, as needed)?
- Help learners be aware of and examine their understandings, assumptions, and values?
- Encourage active listening (e.g.; by asking learners to paraphrase and identify barriers to their hearing others)?

Planning and Facilitating Discussions/Dialogues

- Foster dialogue among the learners (e.g., by being silent even when I was eager to speak)?
- Help learners consider multiple points of view (e.g., by helping them value diversity and present and elicit alternative points of view; by raising unspoken points of view)?
- Create an environment in which the learners felt they could take risks (e.g., by modeling risk taking; supporting learners who took risks; helping learners be critical of ideas not people)?
- Probe the learners’ understandings and foster higher-level thinking and discussion?
- Invite the learners to elaborate, make connections, and think together?
- Help the learners digest what they were hearing (e.g., by using silence)?
- Acknowledge the learners’ feelings and my feelings?
- Monitor and facilitate the flow of the session?
- Help the group reach satisfactory closure, as needed?

Planning for and Teaching Communications Skills

Did I....
Before the Session(s)

- Review the general steps involved in preparing for leading small groups?
- Take steps, if needed, to remind myself of the perspectives and needs of beginners?
- Select and ensure that I knew how to use any needed resources (e.g., video playback unit)?
- Carefully plan any demonstrations that were done?
- Select and/or prepare any video trigger tapes that were used?
- Develop scenarios for intended role plays?
- Prepare standardized patients, if they were used?

During the session(s)

- Use the introductions for the practice of communication skills?
- Discuss the learning goals, the plans for the session, and our respective responsibilities?
- Assess the learners’ needs throughout the session?
- Prepare the learners for self-assessments?
- Prepare the learners for giving feedback to each other?
- Demonstrate/illustrate skills, as appropriate?
- Provide adequate opportunities for the learners to practice?
- Use video triggers?
- Use role plays, including some that the learners help plan?
- Help the key learners assess their efforts?
- Guide the learners in providing constructive feedback to each other?
- Intervene, as needed, if the feedback was not constructive?

Planning for and Teaching Communications Skills

During the session(s) (continued)

- Provide feedback to learners and secure constructive feedback from others (e.g., standardized patients), as appropriate?
Facilitating Support Groups

Did I....

- Orient the learners and assess their levels of readiness?
- Help learners understand the need to reflect on the human issues in the health professions?
- Create a safe, trusting environment?
- Help learners establish goals, roles, boundaries, and ground rules, and ensure that the ground rules were adhered to?
- Use an exercise to begin building trust, and allow sufficient time for learners to become trusting?
- Respect learners’ boundaries and limits?
- Support learners whose needs exceeded the group’s goals and resources?
- Help learners identify and talk about their issues?
- Model self-disclosure and give normative permission?
- Use brainstorming and encourage learners to be as specific as possible?
- Encourage learners to identify their feelings and how they dealt with them?
- Show empathy and help learners be congruent in what they said and did?
- Allow space for learners to experience their feelings?
- Include experiences that engendered positive as well as negative feelings?
- Ensure that all learners had a chance to participate?
- Help the learners listen to each other actively and nonjudgmentally?
- Help learners support each other and explore their possible sources of stress?
- Help learners identify strategies for dealing with stressful situations?

Help learners use the group experience itself for personal growth?
Help learners use the group as a laboratory?
Help learners reflect retrospectively on feelings they had in the group?
Help learners reflect on their feelings close to or during the time of event, and on the possible sources of their feelings toward others in the group?
Help learners reflect on whether difficulties from outside of the group affected the group?
Help learners give feedback to each other?
Help learners summarize and reach closure?