Five Goals For an Effective Group Discussion

- **PERSONAL FEELINGS** *(members feel understood, accepted, validated)*

- **GOOD COMMUNICATION** *(members listen to each other, are supportive, and have honest communications)*

- **INFORMATION IS EXCHANGED** *(members learn coping strategies, alternatives, scientific findings)*

- **CONNECTIONS ARE MADE** *(members feel sense of community, linkages to resources, supportive networks, "You are not alone")*

- **OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND** *(for personal growth, helping others in group, shared leadership)*

SET THE STAGE

ATTEND TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Members need to feel comfortable, safe and free of distractions into order to contribute to, and focus on, the group discussions

- CHAIRS ARE IN A CIRCLE
- EVERYONE CAN SEE PROPS
- PEOPLE CAN HEAR EACH OTHER
- SPACE FOR BREAK-OUTS
- SPECIAL NEEDS ARE MET
- NEWBIES FEEL WELCOMED

- TEMPERATURE IS COMFY
- SITE IS PHYSICALLY SAFE
- SITE IS FREE FROM STIGMA
- NO OBNOXIOUS ODORS
- LIGHTING IS GOOD
- NO OTHER DISTRACTIONS
- OPTION FOR TABLES

USE THE FORMAT WISELY

All parts of the group format / structure can be used to positively influence the group discussion

- MISSION STATEMENT *(focus group discussion on it)*

- GROUND RULES ("SHARED VALUES") *(To help deal with problems)*

- START & END TIMES

- CHECK-IN *(sets the tone for the meeting)*
  - *Find relevant topics*
  - *Find out who's leaving early*
  - *Take "temperature" of group and the members*
  - *Start group on positive note (goals, successes, positive things)*

- GROUP DISCUSSION, GUEST SPEAKERS, OTHER ACTIVITY
  - *Use these effectively so that they deal with members' needs*

- CHECK-OUT (OR *'TIL NEXT TIME*)
  - *Set goals. Help everyone leave committed to action!*
  - *Find out what worked during meeting…And what didn't*
  - *Gather suggestions for next meeting*

HELP DEVELOP A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

If members feel emotionally safe, understood, listened to, and not judged, they will likely share with each other on a deeper, more meaningful level

- Encourage sharing of experiences & coping skills
- Always use "I" statements
- Never allow advice giving
- Deal with "bad behavior"
- Point out the good members do
- Don't take sides
- Teach members to listen

- Ensure that members are non-judgmental
- Use ice breakers to develop community, solve problems & to inspire
- Empower members to take on more group responsibility
- Point out similarities and commonalities
- Be a positive role model

Keep the Discussion Positive

- **Ground Rules/Mission** *Share hopes, successes*

- **Ask for Solutions** *before you go on to next problem*

- **Focus on Progress** *that the group & members are making*

- **Set Goals** *talk about them at start and end of meeting*

- **Assign Homework** *Think about solutions*

- **Ask Good Questions** *Use open-ended questions to guide, learn and share*

- **Share Good News** *scientific advances, etc*

- **Encourage Old Members to Stay** *They provide hope*

- **State your Feelings** *If group feels negative, say so*

- **Share "Helpers High"**

- **Bring in a Little Exercise** *Try ice-breakers to inspire*

- **Allow Venting** *but problem-solve afterward*

Focus On Recovery

HOPE * **EMPOWERMENT** * **EDUCATION** * **SOCIAL SUPPORT** * **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

All of which occur naturally in a well-run support group

- ENCOURAGE LEADERSHIP / PARTICIPATION
- ENCOURAGE MEMBERS TO SET GOALS
- DISCOURAGE ADVICE GIVING – ENCOURAGE PROBLEM SOLVING
- DISCOURAGE STIGMA / DISCRIMINATION
- FOCUS ON STRENGTHS
- CELEBRATE SMALL GAINS
- TURN FAILURES INTO LEARNING EXPERIENCES
- TURN PROBLEMS INTO CHALLENGES
- CULTIVATE OPTIMISM
- EMPOWER EACH OTHER IN SIMPLE WAYS
- USE WELLNESS & RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

RESPONSIBILITIES OF GROUP MEMBERS

Ensuring a Good Group Discussion is Not the Sole Responsibility of the Leader....Members Need to Help, Too!

- Help others feel comfortable
- Be sure speaker is done before offering feedback. Ask if they want feedback
- Listen attentively. Don't interrupt.
- Promote positive comments
- Encourage silent people to contribute
- Participate in the discussion. Share experiences and ideas
- Helps others feel empowered. Point out their strengths

- Ask, "What happened to you" not "What's wrong with you."
- Allow others to vent
- Maintain confidentiality
- Make a commitment to the group and yourself
- Be non-judgmental
- Don't rescue! Problem-solve
- Support & challenge each other to grow and change
- Introduce yourself to new members
- Share your successes & encourage others to do so

Phrases that Cut Off Connections

When you hear these phrases, get ready to intervene

ADVISING

"I think that you should..."

ONE UPPING

"Oh, that's nothing. Wait until I tell you about me!"

JUDGING

"That really was the wrong thing to do."

CONDESCENDING

"You only did that because you are not educated."

INTERROGATING

"WHY did you do that?"

STORY TELLING

"That reminds me when I....."

CORRECTING

"That's not what happened. This is what happened."

JOLTING

"Gasp! I can't believe that you would do that!"

Some Common Group Problems

Deal with Problems in a Caring and Timely Manner

Problems Don't Go Away on their Own...but Members Do!

- Monopolizer
- Person is stuck
- Conflict
- Group is Silent
- Yes-But'er
- One Upmanship
- Angry Member
- Non-Talker
- Newcomers don't return

- Pity Party
- GROUPS GETS OFF TOPIC
- Confidentiality Broken
- People come late
- SIDE-CONVERSATIONS
- Hard to Understand
- Crying or emotional
- ADVICE GIVING
- Personal agendas

Dealing with the Monopolizer
The Person Who Can't Stop Talking and Goes On and On and On...

- **GROUND RULES**
  - *"Share the Air"*
- **USE A TALKING STICK**
  - *They choose who talks next*
- **HAVE TIME LIMITS**
  - *Use check-in, sign-in, etc. to see who needs to talk*
- **BREAK INTO SMALLER GROUPS**
- **USE EYE CONTACT**
- **HAVE A TIME LIMIT**
  - *Egg timer, gavel, etc.*

- **DISCUSS TALKING STYLES**
  - *Develop hand or verbal signals*
- **HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER**
  - *Take minutes, scribe*
  - *Summarize meeting at end*
- **PUT TOPIC IN PARKING LOT**
- **SAY SOMETHING!**
  - *"Mary, we are running out of time. Can you sum up in one sentence."*
  - *"Very good point, Larry. Does anyone else have experience?"*
- **READ BODY LANGUAGE OF MEMBERS**

THE INTERRUPTER

The person adds their "two cents worth" after everyone who speaks

- **GROUND RULE**
  - *Can't speak again until all have spoken*
  - *No Interrupting Others*
- **PENNIES IN A JAR**
- **NIP THE PROBLEM IN THE BUD**
  - *"Whoa! There is no interrupting allowed."*

- **CALL ON THOSE WHO HAVEN'T YET SPOKEN**
  - *" Let's hear from those who haven't had a chance to speak yet."*
- **NO FEEDBACK UNLESS SPEAKER REQUESTS IT**
  - *"Hold it! Let's see if Susan is interested in getting feedback from others."*

Symptoms of Unhealthy Group Discussions

Meetings are too negative
– *Group becomes a complaint session*
– *Little or no constructive support*
– *No underlying tone of hope*

Meetings are too boring
– *Group only covers old ground*
– *Different opinions not allowed*

Leadership too domineering
– *Group doesn't seem to belong to all*
– *Members ideas are ignored*
– *Facilitators take sides in a fight*
– *Facilitator talks too much!*

Group Feels Exclusive
– *Cliques have formed*
– *Subgroups within the larger group*

Meetings Feel Shallow
– *No talk about underlying issues*
– *No time for personal sharing*
– *Too many outside speakers*

Meetings Feel Threatening
– *Discussions too intense*
– *Members are afraid of angry confrontations*
– *No sense of balance or fairness*
– *Problems aren't dealt with quickly*