

STARTING POINT

FACILITATOR TIPS



Tips on being an effective group facilitator

So much of the group's experience is determined by the quality of the facilitator's skills. It's important to be warm and welcoming, put people at ease and let them know their experience and contribution is valued. Your role as a facilitator is to help each person in the group have a good experience.

The facilitator brings balance and harmony among people from different backgrounds and opinions by developing an atmosphere of mutual respect. People enjoy exploring their lives and being involved in discussions about things that matter.

It is important for the facilitator to follow closely the curriculum guidelines and avoid expounding in other directions. Be sure to prepare well and study the facilitator's guide carefully. Feel free to contact ministry support with any questions as you work through the Starting Point series.

The following tips will assist you as you embark on the adventure of leading a Connect group:

- Be polite and considerate and never put anyone down.
- Be well organized and prepared for the group session. This includes getting to the room before the rest of the group so you can greet each person as they arrive.
- Establish a set of ground rules with the group and have people adhere to these.
- Encourage one person to speak at a time and make sure everyone gets a turn (air time).
- Allow people to 'pass' if they want to, but next time around don't 'forget' those who passed.
- Try to involve everyone by encouraging the shy person, but don't 'push' people to participate.
- Encourage gradual participation, eg 'What do you think, Janet?'
'How do you feel about that, Peter?'
- Remember that each person in the group is unique - different from you and the others in their ideas, feelings and thoughts. Respect everyone's right to have his/her own personal ideas, thoughts and feelings.
- Try to be an unobtrusive facilitator, serving the needs of the group and not your own needs as a leader.

- Concentrate on the process, not the content.
- Encourage and accept feedback even if this is negative or critical of yourself or the group's operation. Validating their concerns is not the same as agreeing with them. It is a good idea to ask for written comments at the end of each session.
- Use and practice communication skills such as 'reflective listening' eg 'So Angelo, you're saying we should?'
- If you have to be forceful and confront the group, use an 'I statement' eg 'Excuse me Barbara, when you get off topic, I get concerned because I am afraid we won't get through everything we want to discuss tonight.'
- Be aware of your non-verbal behavior as well as what you say and make sure these compliment each other.
- No two groups of people are exactly alike. From this, derives the need for facilitation skills and the never-ending challenge of working with each new group.

Group Meetings: Troubleshooting

Common problems that arise in discussions and suggestions for managing them.

What to do with the over-talkative person?

Arrange that person to sit to one side of you so you can easily "not notice" them. Cut in on his/her speeches after a complete thought has been expressed with, "Just a minute, I want to hear from ... I'll come back to you" or "That's a good point; how do others of you feel about that?" You can also simply say, 'let's give others a chance to speak. Alex, do you have a question?' Invite the over-talkative person to talk to you privately later.

Cynics

Cynicism can poison the atmosphere. Often cynics throw out thoughts based on emotion without really thinking about it. You can manage that by asking such questions as, "What made you say that?" Emphasize we are looking for solutions.

Non listeners

You can refocus people by asking whether A heard what B said and if no, get B to repeat the statement. This prompts people not to space out!

External issues

(matters that don't pertain to the session topic or discussion) "Can we have an

agreement that issues unrelated to Starting Point stay out of the discussion?”

Aggressive behavior

This behavior is best inhibited by asking specific questions, “Why did you say that, John?” “What would you like me to do?” (Encouraging a solution)

What about the shy and withdrawn person?

Listen carefully to whatever they say and perhaps restate the remark to let them know you understood, as well as to clarify it to others. Don’t ask her “What do you think?” since it might be too threatening. Ask her, “Anna, do you want to comment on that?” or “Anna, you have an older brother; did you ever...?” Let her feel free to signal that she does not want to speak.

Side conversations

Ask them to speak up and share the discussion with the whole group. This inhibits their inappropriate or untimely sharing.

Quiet person

Offer opportunities/don’t pursue them for their comments; allow them space. Perhaps talk privately outside of the group asking, “How is it going?” You might be pleasantly surprised.

How do you handle the resentful or rebellious person?

Listen but without encouragement. Continually direct their thoughts to larger concerns, to the purpose of the whole. Help them to find points of gratitude. Give them extra attention outside of the group.

What to do with the complainer?

Help them to clarify what they are gaining and learning, rather than focusing on their dissatisfaction.

What about the quiet group?

Break the ice and generate energy by getting them to talk about anything. During discussion time, ask each person to ask a question, make a comment, or answer a question, either in turn or by your calling on them. Try throwing questions back to the group and patiently waiting until someone attempts to answer the question themselves.

What's the best way to handle the arrogant one who "knows all this already"?

Acknowledge what he/she says and seek the opinions of others as well

Words of caution when including long-time members in a group

Avoid long stories about how they found God 10-20 years ago. The group may be wondering if they've met Him since! Have the person share briefly about current experiences and encourage them to bring out points that most resemble the new members' situations. Be as natural, honest, and unique as you can. Avoid in-house language such as "I am first or second gen" or discussion of "central figures, etc" You may want to prep your long-time members ahead of time.

In Summary

The goal for the discussion time is to give the group members a chance to have lively give and take. You must listen carefully and attentively to what they share. We must allow the group members to openly express their ideas and reveal their hearts. A situation where one participant does all the talking is to be avoided. Be respectful of opposing points of view and try to understand why they have that point of view. You should control the time; do not lose the point of the discussion/activity through trivial arguments and endless opinions. It is ideal to involve every person as you draw out important points of inspiration and agreement. Don't forget to have fun! Thank you for volunteering to be a facilitator.

To contact us with comments or concerns, email:
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