

HELPFUL HINTS FOR SMALL GROUP PARTICIPATION
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Group Process

There is a considerable amount of literature describing the stages that groups go through. Here is one way of describing them.

Stages of a group (supportive)

1. *Forming*- getting to know each other
Initial exploration of personalities and issues. Characterized by high anxiety and negativism--testing of ideas
2. *Storming* - discussion of conflicting ideas
Confrontation regarding limits and norms at appropriate times. Pressure on deviants. Conflict management.
3. *Norming* - cohesion, trust, cooperation
Cohesion and internalization. Leveling or the minimizing of the importance of differences.
4. *Performing* - productivity, problem solving
Caring and mutual respect. Celebrations and sharing. Respect for differences. Interdependence

Communication - Things to remember:

Body language - This component is 80% of communication.

Cultural framework - Personal space, gestures, etc. vary by group. For example, some groups are more comfortable speaking closer than 20 inches apart (the U.S. norm).

Verbal

Fouls*:

name calling	sarcasm	
blaming		pushing
not taking responsibility		threats
not listening		insults
getting even		bossing
bringing up the past		making excuses

Principles of interacting in a group; being a good group member

- Confidentiality - Open communication is built upon trust -- within the group keep in mind: "what is said here, stays here"
- Effective groups (table attached)
- Disagreements/conflict* - Effective steps to resolve conflicts/disagreements:
 - Identify** the problem
 - Focus** on the problem
 - Attack the problem, not the person**
 - Listen** with an open mind
 - Treat feelings** with respect
 - Take responsibility** for your actions
- Speaking up (reprint)

*Abrams, G., *WinWin!*, Miami: Peace Education Foundation, Inc., 1994

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Hints for having a successful group**

1. Test assumptions and inferences
2. Share all relevant information
3. Focus on interests, not positions
4. Be specific--use examples
5. Agree on what important words mean
6. Explain the reasons behind one's statements, questions, and actions
7. Disagree openly with any member of the group
8. Make statements, then invite questions and comments
9. Jointly design ways to test disagreements and solutions
10. Discuss undiscussable issues
11. Keep the discussion focused
12. Do not take cheap shots or otherwise distract the group
13. All members are expected to participate in all phases of the process
14. Exchange relevant information with nongroup members
15. Make decisions by consensus
16. Do self-critiques

Hints for facilitators**

Beginning the meeting

1. Make introductions
2. Check for outcomes and concerns
3. Agree on the agenda and time allocation
4. Agree on the process, including ground rules
5. Define roles

Ending the meeting

1. Review decisions and plans for action
2. Schedule the next meeting and agenda
3. Do a self-critique

Types of Interventions (during a meeting)**

- Exploring
- Seeking specifics
- Emphasizing process
- Diagnosing
- Confronting and other feedback
- Managing group process and structure
- Making content suggestions
- Teaching concepts and methods
- Reframing

**Schwarz, Roger M., *The Skilled Facilitator*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE GROUPS***

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| Climate • | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Open and supportive communication• Concern for individuals• Commitment to group performance |
| Participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All members listen to one another• No one is afraid of putting forth a creative thought• All ideas given a fair hearing |
| Conflict Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conflict and controversy are viewed as positive and essential to the problem solving process• Disagreements may be frequent and candid, but are also relatively comfortable• There is little evidence of personal attack; criticism is constructive and even supportive in nature• Conflict is not competitively directed but creatively turned to discovering new alternatives |
| Leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All members feel responsible for contributing to the group• Different members, because of their knowledge or abilities, act as "resource expert" at different times, thus the leadership roles change as the tasks and needs of the team change |
| Individual Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time and effort are directed to developing strong interpersonal relationships and building individual problem-solving skills• Self-actualization is encouraged through achievement of group goals |

***Adapted from Gmelch, W.H. & Miskin, V.D., *Productivity Teams: Beyond Quality Circles*, New York: Wiley Press, 1984, 13