

# Facilitation tips

## Why we're there

Remember, we're involved to help the group of people listen to each other and to work together.

We're not there to offer opinions or to solve problems for people. The presumption that our opinion is relevant, or that we have more expertise about the unique situation that this group of people face than they do themselves would be disempowering and disrespectful.

What we bring into the room is our belief that positive outcomes are possible, that problems can often be solved with enough work, that ordinary life issues can be tackled by ordinary people, and most importantly that the focus person is a unique, interesting, valuable, equal human being with a place in the world.

## Use open questions

We'll learn much more if we ask "what is important to you?" instead of "do you like travel?" Asking open questions puts the person back in charge. We can be firm about keeping a conversation on target, for instance ensuring that it's about dreams not nightmares – but however difficult people find it to think we don't provide suggestions. What we can do is to give them space to think, ask the same question in many different ways, help to encourage their imagination, and we can ask for suggestions from other participants (so long as we remember that these are only suggestions).

Open questions can't be answered 'yes' or 'no'. Examples of open questions are:

- What are you passionate about?
- What are you good at?
- What would you like your future to look like?

Open questions encourage the person to talk – and we can also help by asking...

- Tell me more...?

And it can help to ask elaboration questions, like:

- What was it about [the thing you said earlier] that is important?
- What was [the thing you said earlier] like?

## Avoid judgement

Less experienced facilitators may not realise what they intend as politeness or encouragement actually judges what the person has said. Instead of saying "that must have been hard for you", or "you've clearly done really well" or "I'm so sorry to hear that happened" or "really... train spotting... that's not so popular nowadays" say things like:

- Would it be useful to say what that was like for you?
- Great, you've said some powerful things there.
- Tell me more about that.
- OK, what is it about train spotting which works for you?

## Keep building up a rich picture

It's important to keep asking for detail so that you can help the focus person to think through what they are saying, and so that those listening can get a full picture. Remember:

- the 5 W's - Who, What, When, Where, How
- the 3 S's - Sights, Sounds, Smells
- And don't forget feelings.

## Keep it alive

The facilitator needs to be thinking ahead about what they will be asking next so that the conversation stays lively. But be careful that you don't stop listening to the person.

If the conversation seems sluggish then you may be asking the wrong questions or perhaps the person doesn't want to tell you any more. Facilitators have to walk the line between not asking enough - so the person doesn't tell you anything because you don't sound interested - and asking too much - so they feel you are being pushy, nosy, inconsiderate or rude.

## Value silence

Remember silence isn't necessarily uncomfortable for the participants, even if it scares you. Be comfortable with it. Learn to use it as a tool.

## Show respect

It isn't an exercise or procedure when we ask people about their dreams, their identity, or their gifts. We're involved in a deeply personal conversation - one which it's a privilege to be allowed to have with someone. Such a conversation must be approached with an attitude of deep respect for the person. You must demonstrate 'unconditional positive regard'.

## Mind the body language

Your body language on its own tells the person what you think of them. If you look bored, the person will feel that they aren't interesting. If you look surprised, the person may feel they are being criticised. If you look relaxed, the person may feel you aren't concentrating. If you aren't excited by their dream they may feel their dream isn't exciting.

Simply to encourage someone to talk you will need to show you are listening intently. You will need to show you are interested (just being interested may not be enough). You will need to show you are prepared to accept what they say without judgement.

Mirror their body language to show you are listening. When they sound a bit excited look excited. When they want to talk about something difficult make yourself sit still and quietly. If you want to lead them to be more excited or more serious lead them their with your own body language. A good facilitator can switch easily and appropriately between sitting still and quiet listening intently to one person, or even kneeling on the floor to look small, to standing and moving in an animated manner leading a more active discussion.

## Do graphic recording carefully

Graphic facilitation is intended to help the person think about what they want to say. It also shows you are interested and listening. If there are other people involved it helps to co-ordinate their thinking. Essentially, the main things to remember are:

**Use people's actual words** – usually the focus person's or their closest allies. Don't write what you think they meant.

**Record key phrases.** This is the simplest, quickest, and most accurate method of capturing what was said.

**Make it look good.** What the graphic looks like affects the process. Be neat, use colour. Even using just two colours when writing a simple list will make it easier to read. A neat and colourful record of someone's dreams will help them to feel that their dreams are exciting and interesting.

**Fill the space available.** Don't be afraid to use large letters. Write neatly. If you leave empty space the person will feel they haven't said much of interest.

**Use lower case** – not capitals, since these are easier to read.

**Add or use images** appropriately. Even a few star-people can liven up your work. Images can sometimes be incredibly useful and powerful - but words can be too. Don't miss big details because you can't think of a picture or because images slow you down.

**Keep up.** Conversation shouldn't have to wait for the graphic facilitator (other than in some specific circumstances).

**Show respect.** Remember that the person may be talking about very personal issues. Demonstrate your respect as you work.