



# Facilitator Tips

Answering the What-ifs

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## **...it's uncomfortable?**

### **Getting Comfortable with Facilitation**

1. Comfort comes from practice.
2. What stage of change are you in about doing classes?
  - Contemplation—just thinking about it?
  - Preparation—making plans to do it?
  - Action—looking for tips on how to do it?
3. Make an outline or list of questions. Your session is a conversation and can't be scripted but you may be more comfortable with an outline.
4. Ask for help. Another staff person joining your group may help your confidence.
5. Start with a familiar group or topic. Move to other topics and groups as you get more comfortable and develop your skills.
6. Always remember the discussion is for your participants. Make your session a conversation and really listen.
7. Practice, practice, practice.

### **Ideas for comfortable groups**

1. Set up chairs in a circle if possible.
2. Choose a seat in the circle. If you seat yourself so that you are "in charge" of the circle, your group will relate to you rather than with each other. Think carefully about where you will sit. Remember: you are the coach, not the "star of the show!"
3. Tell the group this is *their* time to share and connect. You serve as a guide. Let the group know how long the session will last (and make sure to finish on time.)
4. Offer children books, colors, or quiet toys in the middle of the circle. Maybe another staff person plays with or reads to the children in a corner of the room.
5. An uncomfortable group may be reflecting your discomfort. Your words and body language may put the group at ease - smile, thank them for coming, etc.

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## ... the conversation stops or no one participates?

### Getting Participation

1. Share expectations: this is *their* discussion group, not yours but you'll guide *their discussion about* what they know about the topic.
2. Ask for participation *early*. Your group is more likely and the more *often they'll* participate for the whole session.
3. Stick with questions that are open-ended. Have some back up questions ready.
4. Start off in twos and have each pair discuss your topic. Ask pairs to share what they discussed with the group. Once they talk to a partner, it's easier to talk to the group.
5. Asking for examples is a powerful way to get conversations going. It's easier to share how it is - our experience or story (of what their child does, for instance) rather than how something might be.
6. Describe a common situation in personal terms, like "*Mary has a busy schedule and struggles to find time to cook meals at home..*" Then ask, "*From your experience, what would help Mary with this?*" Get several ideas from the group.
7. Share a nutrition handout and ask for examples from their own experience relate to what it says.
8. Ask a question and ask people to raise their hands if they have an opinion about it. Most people have opinions to share.
9. Always say "thank you" for responses to your direct questions. Make sure the first few speakers are warmly thanked and feel "well-protected." The group is watching how others are treated. Your warm responses set an atmosphere of trust.
10. Are you giving the participants a chance to contribute to the conversation?
  - Ask open-ended questions.
  - Ask only one question at a time. Allow adequate time to respond.
11. Be okay with silence – wait a moment. Give participants the chance to fill short silences.

## ...I get stuck?

### Keeping it Moving

1. Ask the group their feelings, opinions or experiences on the topic.
  1. Brainstorm with the group to come up with lots of ideas in a short amount of time. Remember to catch all ideas whether or not they are *good* ideas. Sometimes the wildest ideas start the best conversations.
  2. Ask the group to share the ideas that worked for them.
  3. If all else fails and you feel stuck, ask the group to suggest a new topic. "Seems like we're stuck. Is there a nutrition topic you'd like to discuss?"

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## **...someone talks too much?**

### **Overly Talkative Participants**

1. The most important rule is to be tactful.
2. Interrupt with a smile (always with a smile) and say something like: “Betty, I’m sorry to interrupt, but it’s time to go on to my next question, which is...” Or “Betty, thanks for starting us down this path. Since we are getting short on time and I want to make sure we all get to share” Or “I’m noticing others are wanting to talk.” (Acknowledge, and look toward others).
3. Going around in a circle is a strategy for give others a chance to speak. Only use if someone’s taking over the group. Offer “Let’s go around the circle so everyone who wants to gets a chance to speak—you can say ‘I pass’ if you choose...” With large groups, ask for very short responses, but give everyone a chance to speak.

## **...someone doesn’t talk at all?**

### **Encouraging All to Participate**

1. Watch body language or facial expressions showing a quiet person wants to speak. Invite them to speak by saying, “*You look like you might be about to say something?*” or “*Was there something you wanted to share?*”
2. If a quiet person makes a move to talk, but someone else jumps in first, say, “Let’s go one at a time. Rita (quiet person), what would you like to share?”
3. Respond to nonverbal signals saying someone wants to speak. For silent members with blank looks, or heads down. Move on. No one wants to be put on the spot - don’t force them to speak

Reasons people stay quiet:

- Overly talkative speakers intimidate them.
- They may like to think before they share.
- They may not see a natural opening to say what they want to.
- They don’t want to be seen as too pushy.
- They want to check out the group before opening up.
- They feel their ideas are not worth sharing.
- The anxiety of speaking up may be too high to overcome without help.
- They just want the group to end.

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## **...the topic goes way off track or there are side conversations?**

### **Keeping Everyone Focused**

1. Tell the group they've veered off track, and summarize the information discussed so far.
2. Ask another question about the original topic, or an open-ended question steering them back to a related topic.
3. Take care not to embarrass anyone by drawing attention to them.
4. For distracting side conversations call the talking member by name and ask a question to draw them back in. Like, "*Nicole, how did your family grow to enjoy whole grains?*" or "*Patty, what vegetables do you like to have a dinner?*"

## **...there is misinformation shared?**

### **Handling Misinformation:**

1. Decide which minor points to ignore. Be tactful so participants are willing speak up again, and others aren't afraid to "say something wrong," too.
2. Show respect and first ask for a different point of view from the group or if none is given, offer one yourself. Ask, "*What do the rest of you think about that?*" Lots of times, the group will offer up alternatives and correct the misinformation.
3. Another guideline is to only address misinformation you will lose sleep over without correcting it. Most misinformation that comes up does not fit into this category.

Here are some approaches others have used to correct misinformation or misconceptions without embarrassing the participant:

- "*You've brought up an interesting issue. Has anyone had a different experience or different information?*"
- "*I am glad that worked for you. Other people have found that xyz worked better for them. Has anyone tried xyz?*"
- "*I wonder...would you have done anything differently if you had had the information we have talked about today?*"

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## **...I do not know the answer?**

### **Finding the Answer**

1. Stay calm
2. Keep from rambling or making something up
3. Stay away from giving misinformation or outdated information
4. Be honest, acknowledge that you do not know the answer
5. Offer to find the answer
6. Don't ignore the question

Sample responses:

*“That is a great question I’ve never been asked before. I want to make sure that you get the correct answer, so would it be okay if we go to my office (or check with other staff) after the group to find the answer?” (And make sure to follow-up).*

*“There has been some new information/research on that topic and I want to make sure you get the correct answer. Can I look into that over the next week and share what I find out next week?”*

*“One of my co-workers has much more experience with this and would be able to answer your question. She is here today. Would it be okay if, after the group, we talk to her about this?”*

## **...someone wants specific nutrition advice?**

### **Keeping Information General**

1. Respectfully acknowledge the question and show you understand its importance.
2. Share that you can provide general nutrition information.
3. Encourage the participant to connect with her health care provider or personal dietitian.
4. Redirect the conversation back to the main topic. Ask another question about the original topic, or an open-ended question steering them back to a related topic.