



Video Transcript: Group Management: Creating an Optimal Learning Environment

Brittany (00:00): We set the tone for learning, but often need reinforcements to keep our group sailing smoothly.

[music]

Audio Description (00:06): Bringing Content to Life: Techniques for Effective Group Facilitation Video Series. A name tag lists the name Brittany.

Brittany (00:13): Group Management: Creating an Optimal Learning Environment. Classroom or group management is about both creating a positive group environment and responding to group conflict. Together, these approaches contribute to an optimal learning environment for participants. This video provides strategies that facilitators of group sessions can use to create an optimal learning environment. This video is part of a series on: Facilitating and Managing Groups.

An optimal learning environment begins with a facilitator who enjoys interacting with participants, encourages trust, is an active listener, recognizes their own biases, and acts in a neutral way. There are many techniques that facilitators can use to build positive group behavior and create an optimal space for learning. The key to all these techniques is communication. Here are some tips for building positive group behavior: Model positive behavior and practices.

If your participants see you and your co-facilitator behaving in a positive way, they will be more than likely to behave in a positive way too. Teach the group positive behavior qualities. Give participants opportunities to build skills that reflect positive group behaviors. Facilitation techniques like role-plays and partnering activities are two ways you can give youth opportunities to practice skills like: Cooperation, Communication, Emotional expression, Ownership, Appreciation for diversity, and Conflict resolution. Establish clear expectations. Group rules have been replaced with agreements, which are statements that everyone agrees to follow.

Audio Description (01:53): Scene changes to a teacher facilitating a session with students.

Speaker 1 (01:57): So I'm gonna go around the room, we're going to ask each person to give basically a classroom rule that everyone should be able to abide by, okay. Yes.

Speaker 2 (02:05): I would say respect.

Speaker 1 (02:07): So respect is major. We want to respect everybody, alright. As we get into content, respect is going to be a major thing, okay. If you have something to say, just kind of raise your hand, I'll call you out. Make sure that you get your opinion or your comment out, okay.

Audio Description (02:21): Scene returns to Brittany as she speaks to the audience.

Brittany (02:25): These agreements guide Communication, Behavior, and Consequences. When planning a session, determine how you will handle group agreements. When and where will you share these with participants? Will you have the same agreements for all sessions? Will you have each group create its own agreements, or a hybrid? Set the climate. Show participants that you are trustworthy and neutral. This will reinforce positive behavior and create a safe space in which participants feel comfortable learning and expressing their opinions.

Audio Description (02:56): Scene changes back to the teacher speaking to his students.

Speaker 1 (03:00): Some of the content will bring out different opinions. It's important to respect everyone's opinion, even if you don't agree with it. At some point we can agree to disagree.

Brittany (03:10): Manage Session time.

Audio Description (03:11): Scene returns to Brittany as she speaks to the audience.

Brittany (03:14): Share the plan agenda with participants to increase trust and help everyone stay on track. This also can include giving detailed instructions with time allocations for activities. Take breaks. Plan for breaks throughout your session, even those under an hour. This will help break up any monotony and content. Include energizers during break times, if the agenda allows to increase group energy, or refocus after a particularly challenging topic or discussion. Lastly, Gather feedback. Have a plan to obtain feedback from participants and your co-facilitator.

This can be written or verbal, to collect feedback in real time about what's working well or what could be improved, use a parking lot, a bike rack or a suggestion box. Even with thoughtful planning, communication, and climate setting, there will be times when you need to address disruptive participant behaviors or group conflict. Here are some tips for managing group behaviors. Listen. Ask the participants involved, "What is going on?" Actively listen to them and help them explore and express their feelings in a productive way. Preserve self-control. Even if you feel stressed, stay calm, to avoid escalating the situation. Ignore harmless disruptions. As long as the behavior isn't distracting the larger group and doesn't conflict with the group agreement, it's okay to ignore it. Redirect negative behavior.

For actions that conflict with the group agreement, remind the participant of your group agreements and the consequences for breaking them. This can be done in the larger group or by taking the participant aside to gain more insight on why the behavior is occurring. If you have a co-facilitator, lean on them if you're having trouble managing behaviors. Give choices. Offer individual participants and the group choices whenever possible, both before and after negative behavior occurs. This gives participants a sense of ownership and responsibility. Weigh group versus individual needs.

When dealing with difficult behaviors, try to keep in mind what will be best for the participant, as well as what will be best for the group. For example, avoid responding in a way that is good for the participant, but not for the group and vice versa. Remember, an optimal learning environment starts with you. Use these strategies to promote a positive group environment and manage group conflict so that your participants can get the most out of each session. Developed by the Reproductive Health National Training Center, RHNTC, and Fact Forward.