



## **Video Transcript: Safe and Supported: Tips for Creating a Positive and Inclusive Group Climate**

**Mallory (00:00):** I want the young people I work with to show up completely as themselves, and to be able to fully participate in our group session.

**Speaker 1 (00:08):** Caring for Yourself and Your Participants: Techniques for Effective Group Facilitation video series.

**Mallory (00:15):** Safe and Supported: Tips for Creating a Positive and Inclusive Group Climate. Climate building is important for developing rapport and creating a safe space where all participants, inclusive of all identities and lived experiences, feel safe and comfortable, regardless of the topic being taught. Creating a safe learning environment for all adolescents in sexual and reproductive health programs is especially important. This video explores practical strategies for facilitators to ensure a supportive, safe, and inclusive group session.

**Mallory (00:49):** This video is part of a series on caring for yourself and others as a group facilitator. Group climate is the tone and quality of group interaction based on shared expectations and experiences. It's important to plan ahead for the environment, room arrangements, and logistics that contribute to a safe and supportive group climate. Make sure the implementation site is comfortable and accessible for all youth. Confirm the space is the right size for the number of participants you expect, and the types of activities you will be implementing, such as paired group work, small group work, or roleplays. If it's not comfortable, accessible, or the right size for your group session, talk with your project director or implementation partners to explore other options. Make sure youth have the opportunity to share their pronouns or gender identity before the session begins. Some young people may be hesitant to say their pronouns or gender identity out loud in a group, so it's always a good idea to add a section to any pre-program paperwork where they can write down this information and anything else they want you to know. Find a spot to stand in the room where you can welcome participants as they enter the room at the start of your group session. Establish group agreements at the start of the group session to create a sense of structure, respect, and collaboration within your space. Group agreements are a vital part of creating safe and supportive environments, especially when facilitating sessions on sensitive topics related to sexual and reproductive health. Start by asking your group what agreements they want. This brainstorming activity will help participants feel included and make sure that their voices are heard.

**Mallory (02:37):** If participants don't bring them up, this is a good opportunity for you to add important group agreements like: keep the discussion confidential— what's shared in this group stays in this room, respect others in the group, raise your hand before talking, use people's pronouns, when a conversation goes off topic or goes on too long, it's okay to say "ELMO," "enough, let's move on," or other group agreements that may be required by your program or curriculum. Once the list is complete, reiterate that the group agreements are for the whole group, participants and facilitators. Ask everyone to agree with the agreements and note that they will guide your time together. As a group, establish a clear consequence system for people who don't follow the group agreements. Make sure that the system you set up aligns with your program and implementation site requirements. If participants decide on the consequences themselves, they will be more invested in their group's success. This may sound like okay, so we decided if someone isn't following our group agreements, I will give them one reminder. If they don't follow the group agreements more than once, they can choose between two alternate activities.

**Mallory (03:51):** If they consistently don't follow the group agreements, they may need to step out of their room for a few minutes to talk with my co-facilitator. Confidentiality is another crucial aspect of creating a safe space. Young people need to know that what they share in the group will remain confidential, unless there's a risk of harm to themselves or others. Talk with your project director about your program's policies related to confidentiality and any requirements for mandated reporting. Avoid using the term Vegas Rule— what happens here, stays here, since Las Vegas can be seen as an unsafe space. Building trust with participants is essential and can take time. When they know they can confide in you without fear of judgment or repercussions, they're more likely to engage in meaningful discussions. One way to build trust is by using an anonymous question box. This shows you that they can ask any question and you will answer it. Inclusion is the practice of making sure people feel like they belong and their input is valued by the whole group. It's about building a group climate that's accessible to all youth participants. Here are a few tips for creating an inclusive group climate. Make sure the program space and curriculum reflect diverse cultures, body types, names, sexual and gender identities, and abilities. Set clear expectations of respect. Reject all forms of discrimination. Provide opportunities for peer support. Understand the cultural and historical context youth bring to the topics you are discussing. Use gender-inclusive or gender-neutral language and use images, materials, and language that reflect the diversity of your participants' races, ethnicities, genders, family structures, and cultures. Representation matters! In diverse communities, it's important to make sure each participant sees a part of their identity in your program. It will help to build a safe and supportive space.

**Mallory (06:00):** All of the tips in this video align with the core principles of a trauma-informed approach: safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, voice, and choice, and cultural and historical awareness. These principles are foundational to all interactions with youth. Remember, creating a positive and inclusive group climate is an ongoing process. Check in with your participants regularly, be open to feedback, and be prepared to address any concerns that may arise. Developed by the Reproductive Health National Training Center, RHNTC, and Fact Forward.