



How to Facilitate Support Groups

NOTE: You need only to reference these "talking points" in the first group meeting. Just reference this one step at a time. In subsequent group meetings, you need only to reference the much smaller "Quick Reference" and "Session Management Form" accessible below.

Purpose

It is not enough to merely get people together and discuss the virus. Those groups don't last. Instead, each group member needs individual time in a meeting to get help, including to be empowered to take realistic actions between meetings. This document includes the best practices for a long-lasting group.

These Talking Points are used to facilitate meetings of a support group in which members support each other during this pandemic crisis. You are not expected to be an expert trainer, coach or facilitator to use the Points.

Schedule two hours for your first meeting (as compared to the upcoming 90-minute meetings). That allows time for the introductions and first-time explanations.

The Points assume that each member has the [Peer Coaching Group Quick Reference](#) and a [Peer Coaching Group Session Management Form](#), which are also available at that website.

Consider These Tips for Meeting Virtually

During the pandemic, you all should be meeting virtually, whether over the phone or the Internet. Before you facilitate your group meetings, review the tips in the following document. They can readily be integrated into the Points throughout this overall document.

[Tips for Facilitating Virtual Peer Coaching Meetings](#)

How to Prepare for Facilitation

- While you are using the Points in your meetings, make sure that each of you has your *Peer Coaching Group Quick Reference* available.
- You should read these Points in advance to get comfortable with the content. You do not have to use the following exact words. Make them your own – in your own style and voice.
- Especially in the first meeting, you will use these Points to get the members comfortable with each other, the tools and the process. You might share the Points with your members, so you all can share the tasks in facilitation.
- The Points under the upcoming section “Setup in the First Group Meeting” will only be used during the first meeting, while you are training during your members' first experience.
- The Points under the remaining three sections, each starting with “Agenda...”, can also be used in following meetings, if you think they are helpful.
- While facilitating through each step, show your *Quick Reference* to your members, so they can see which step you are on now – and so they quickly learn the agenda and the tool.

Setup in the First Group Meeting

- Explain to members that they will use the *Peer Coaching Group Quick Reference* tool for all aspects of their group meetings and facilitation, including this first meeting. Mention that you are providing explanations during this first meeting – but that they’ll learn the process as they do it.
- Give a broad, general description of the peer coaching group process, including:
 1. Each person gets equal time in the group to get help from others to address a current priority, whether it is a problem or an exciting goal.
 - A priority does not have to have a very carefully and rationally described background, or have a rational plan – it’s what is important right now.
 - Each person’s time is called a “time slot”, usually 20 minutes long for support groups. The member who has that time is the “presenter.”
 - Mention that members learn not only during their time slots, but also when coaching others in the meeting, so they don’t have to be concerned if 20 minutes seems like a short time slot.
 2. Members help each other by coaching, which in the context of these support groups is sharing questions, advice, materials and also support and accountability to address each member’s priority.
 - Mention that coaching is successful if it is continually focused on the presenter and tries to help him/her in whatever way the presenter prefers. Coaching does not have to “solve a problem” to be successful.
 3. Each member selects relevant and realistic actions to take to address their own coaching priority before the next group meeting.
 - Mention members learn a great deal from reflecting on their actions during and between meetings, and also from the help they get in each meeting.
 - Taking actions and reflecting on those actions have been proven to provide ongoing impact and sense of empowerment for individuals.
- If the members do not already know each other well, this would be a good time for them to introduce themselves to the other members. Encourage the members to share what brought them to the group as well as something fun or personal about themselves. Be sure to introduce yourself as well.

Agenda – Opening

- **Read Values and Ground Rules out loud.**
 - Read the “Values” and “Ground Rules” next to the Agenda on the *Quick Reference*.
 - At the ground rule “confidentiality,” assert that they never share names of people in their group or what each person is working on.
- **Select priority – complete 1st part of *Session Management Form*.**
 - Clarify that there is no “perfect priority” – that it’s up to each member as to what is the best priority for them today.
 - Give them a quiet two minutes as each of them answers questions 1-4 on the *Session Management Form*.
- **Do a quick check-in.**
 - In roundtable fashion, each person takes 10-15 seconds to name the nature of his/her priority, e.g., “I would like help to better manage my time. I am struggling to juggle home-schooling with home-working. I’d like to know what you all do.” Depending on the nature of the group, you might also invite them to mention how they are feeling or showing up today. NOTE: Don’t let the group start coaching during the check-in.
 - The total time for check-in is 1-2 minutes at most for the entire group.
 - If someone hasn’t selected a priority yet, then have him/her get the last time slot during the coaching section of the meeting.
- **Review guidelines for Getting Coached and Coaching Others.**
 - Remind them of the definition of “coaching” in this support group. Reassure them that they can do the basic, or “core,” coaching needed in a group.
 - Read the guidelines in the section “Getting Coached.” Add that each member is encouraged to follow these guidelines during the first 2-3 minutes of his time slot.
 - Remind the group that the members, other than the one getting coached, are all coaches now and that the member who is facilitating can coach, too.
 - Read the guidelines in “Coaching Others.”
- **Direct them to the Coaching page of the *Quick Reference*.**
 - Point out the guidelines for “Useful Questions to Support Members” on the Coaching page of the *Quick Reference*.
 - Direct them to the “Sample Questions..” underneath those guidelines.
 - Point out a couple of the questions in each of the subsections numbered 1 through 4, as a way to select questions based on the timing when coaching a member, e.g., mention:
 - “During the first few minutes, you might use questions from paragraph 1, then later on from paragraph 2, etc.”
 - Point out that their natural curiosity and concern for their group members may lead to other questions. They don’t have to use the sample questions – they are provided as an optional aid in coming up with useful questions.
 - As long as their questions are “Curious, Caring and Concise”, they will be fine.

Agenda – Coaching Time Slots

☐ Set the stage.

- Mention that now the members will get to experience the coaching in the groups. Assure them that they don't need special, advanced skills to be helpful to each other.
- Add that you'll be facilitating during the time slots, by doing the activities listed in the "Facilitation Tasks" in the *Quick Reference*, again holding up that tool and pointing to that section as you explain that.
- Explain that "successful facilitation" is doing those activities and ensuring people stick to the guidelines. Mention that "successful facilitation" is not solving each person's problem.
- Mention how long the time slots will be and that you'll be watching the clock for them.

☐ Start the time slots.

- Ask for a volunteer to be coached first.
 - If no one volunteers, then pick the person whose first name starts with a letter that is closest to the letter A (explaining this technique to the group). If that person really seems to balk at being coached, then move on to another volunteer.
- During the coaching:
 - Attend to each of the bullets in the subsection, "Facilitation Tasks." (This is very important during the time slots!)
 - Remind members about guidelines and sample questions on the Coaching page of the *Quick Reference*.
 - If the coaching is on the phone without video, remind each member to say his/her name when he/she poses a question or comments.
- Watch the clock! Remind the presenter when they are about halfway through their time slot and when they have about 2 minutes left. Then wind the time slot up on time.
- After the first volunteer has been coached, then, in random fashion, call on each of the remaining members to be coached, so that each member does not know when he/she will be called on. That's to avoid the last member "spacing out" in the meeting.
- After each time slot, consider taking 2 minutes to debrief the time slot during the first meeting only, e.g., by converting bullets in "Facilitation Tasks" to questions, and perhaps the following:
 - Did you notice how coaching is different than a typical conversation?
 - Did you notice you don't have to know a lot about the presenter to be helpful?
 - Did you feel kind of overwhelmed at first, like it was your responsibility to solve the presenter's problem or achieve his/her goal? Remember that you only have to be there for the presenter – it's up to him/her to accept whatever help is most useful to him/her.
 - Can you see how this process can be very useful, especially in ongoing meetings?
 - Anything else that you'd like to do to enrich the process?
- When the time slots are done, remind the group that what you were doing was attending to each of the bullets in the subsection, "Facilitation Tasks."

Agenda – Closing

- **Capture actions and learnings – complete 2nd part of *Session Management Form*.**
 - Mention that the *Form* asks specifically about the activities during the Agenda, not about the introductions or descriptions of the peer coaching process during this first meeting.
- **Share learnings out loud.**
 - Ask the group if anyone wants to share what he/she wrote as an answer to question 8 about what he/she learned. NOTE: Don't have members start sharing information about what worked and what didn't in the meeting so far – reserve that information for the next step in the agenda, about evaluating the meeting.
- **Evaluate the meeting out loud.**
 - Ask each member to rate the quality of the group meeting, starting with the activities in the Opening, on a scale from 1 to 5 where 5 is very high. If members are meeting face-to-face, have each member write the number down on a piece of paper.
 - Remind them that successful coaching does not mean solving the presenter's "problem."
 - Then in roundtable fashion, have each member:
 1. Say or show his/her rating,
 2. Why he/she chose that rating.
 3. What he/she could have done *in the meeting* to make the rating a 5 now.
- **Confirm the next session's date, time, location and host.**
 - Be sure that all members agree on this information.