

Facilitating skills for groups

Non-verbal communication

Eye contact

This can be used in a variety of ways. It can signal to the other person that you are listening or that you have finished listening. You can also use eye contact to direct the other person to where you want them to look. Eye contact can be used in conjunction with other non-verbal communications such as hand or body movements.

For example, in a group if you want the group to move their listening to a particular person you can move your eye contact, body and hand movements in the direction of the person and stop when you have reached your destination.

Eye contact can be confirming, supportive and show interest.

Gestures

Gestures can be useful to a facilitator. They can be used to direct the group, lower the volume of the group or help control a group where there is more than one person speaking.

Lowering the arm and hands may indicate to the group that the speaking needs to reduce or stop.

If there is more than one person speaking, it may be possible to use one hand to lower the volume of the group while using the other hand to direct the group to where they should be listening. The angle of the hand is important as, if used vertically it may appear threatening and used totally flat it may not have the impact the signaller intends. The most effective angle of the hand is about a 45 degree angle.

Hand signals such as these need to be used sensitively as they should appear smooth and directional but not patronising or authoritarian.

It may be that they are used in some instances together with verbal communication.

Factors for consideration by the listener

Think about how attentive you appear to the speaker. This links to containment as a group facilitator. By showing that you are being attentive with the intention of taking in, feeling the quality of what is being said and processing it the listener you can provide a containing experience. The

speaker may then feel that you are making yourself available to think about what it is they are trying to communicate.

Your attentiveness will also be demonstrated in how in tune you are with the speaker and this may be shown by you following the steps of the Dance of Reciprocity. There may be times where you become out of tune, it is how you repair the situation and the relationship that will be the most important aspect of the communication.

To be an effective listener it is important for you to recognise how you are feeling so that you can regulate your arousal levels to enable you to communicate effectively. Too little and you may appear uninterested, too much and you may be unable to prepare yourself to be available to listen.

Verbal communication

- As a facilitator you will need to use a range of verbal communications. The tone, inflections, loudness, quietness and clarity of your voice are all important. The combination of these factors can either make a boring subject sound exciting or an interesting subject uninteresting. Verbal communication does not exist in isolation and is closely linked to other aspects of communications such as non-verbal behaviours.
- Being in tune with your own feelings, emotions and arousal levels. When you are the facilitator you may be feeling stressed or overwhelmed yourself. Your body language is important. How you are sitting, standing, moving around the room, open gestures, closed gestures, mirroring; these are all aspects of body language that you need to think about as a facilitator.
- Any change in the rhythm of your communication may signal something to the speaker. You can use this in many ways. Increasing the pace or varying the rhythm at particular parts of the day.

Learning styles

There are three main types of identified learning styles. We all learn through a combination of styles, with one style as a preferred style.

Visual learners: learn through seeing...

These learners learn best through seeing things. Visual learners need to see the teacher, their body language and facial expression to fully comprehend what they are being taught. The best place for a visual learner is the position where their view is not obstructed. Their thinking and memory will be best supported by the use of diagrams, images and visual displays such as PowerPoints.

These learners need to see the teacher's body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. They tend to prefer sitting at the front of the classroom to avoid visual obstructions (e.g. people's heads). They may

think in pictures and learn best from visual displays including: diagrams, illustrated text books, DVDs, flipcharts and handouts. During a lecture or classroom discussion, visual learners often prefer to take detailed notes to absorb the information.

Auditory learners: learn through listening...

Auditory learners learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say. Auditory learners interpret the underlying meanings of speech through listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed and other nuances. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud and using a voice recorder.

Tactile/kinaesthetic: learning through touch/hands-on...

Tactile/kinaesthetic learners learn best through a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration.

Things to think about when you are running a course

- Body language – as discussed above
- Eye contact – as discussed above
- Listening – containment, active listening, peripheral listening (what is being said around you but not directly to you, especially in group work)
- Manner – how you are presenting to the group; calm, rushed, anxious, direct, caring, sincere, available/unavailable to listen
- Quality and volume of your voice
- Varying your teaching methods – use of visual aids
- Feeling the energy in the room - too high (anxious, chaotic, disorganised, disruptive), too low (depressed, unmotivated, distracted)
- Rhythm and pace of the day - especially coming back from breaks or after lunch
- Time setting and pacing - if you are aware that you have difficulty pacing your timing ask your co-facilitator to discretely bring to your attention when you are running over and vice versa if your co-facilitator has difficulty. If there needs to be an adjustment in the day it may be appropriate to involve the group in the decision making.
- Use of silence and focusing - be comfortable to wait for group to think/look away. Not feeling you always have to fill the silences, waiting a few more seconds may allow the group to begin to voice their thoughts.

- Outside concerns - holding the group when there are outside issues influencing their ability to contain their emotions and capacity to think and learn, for example, unsettled working environment, worries about job security, concerns about changes, being told to come to the training without sufficient explanation or negotiation by a manager.
- Developing a rhythm and reciprocal relationship with your co-facilitator - make contact with your co-facilitator prior to the group starting and discuss how you will work together and run the activities.
- **Being clear with instructions for group work**
 - ☐ Think about how you divide the delegates into groups. You may divide the group simply by numbers or use other criteria e.g. everyone in the same professional group, or everyone who works in the same team etc.
 - ☐ Move the delegates into groups telling them that you will explain the activity when they are in their groups (a common feature in group work is that delegates often forget what they have been asked to do by the time they have moved to where they will carry out the group activity).
 - ☐ Sensitively use hand movements to direct each group to their new seating area
 - ☐ Once the group is settled go to each group if possible and explain the activity. If this is not possible ensure you have everyone's attention. Think about the volume of your voice, be clear but don't shout.
 - ☐ If you are able to arrange seating for group activities, move chairs into a circle with an opening for the facilitators to join the group if necessary. Ensure that the seating is not against the wall, this allows you to move around the whole group.
 - ☐ Ask the group if the instructions for the activity are clear. If anyone appears to be unsure ask the other groups who are clear to continue with the activity. Then explain the task again to the group or individuals that are unclear. If you think the person or group is still unclear ask the group to repeat back to you what they understand of the task. This will help you assess if they have understood or how you need to rephrase the instructions to make the task clear.
 - ☐ If there is writing involved ask the group to choose someone to complete the writing at this stage. It will cut down on time if you facilitate this aspect of the group work.
 - ☐ Give the group a few minutes and then circulate and ask the groups how they are progressing. There may be some groups who are struggling or on the wrong track. Watch out for disruptive or unfocused groups. You may need to spend more time with them.

- ☐ When joining a group go down to their level. This may involve crouching or sitting with them. It is best to avoid standing over the group as this may feel uncomfortable and intimidating.
- ☐ A few minutes before the end of the task go round to each group and tell them that there are x minutes left and ask if that is enough. If they say no, tell them they can have a few extra minutes (if your timetable allows!).

By the time you have toured the groups it will be time to end the activity. If possible go to each group and ask them to come back as a whole group and if necessary move to their original seating areas. If you choose to address the group as a whole, be careful to use a clear voice and not to shout!