

# Challenges in Group

## Sharing the talking space

Example: a group member continues to use the majority of shared talking time

Suggestions:

1. Ask for contributions from other people who haven't spoken
2. Refer to the comfort agreement/group guidelines – step up step back
3. Ask the individual to let others speak
4. Have the group check in around how they feel about the way the talking space is being used
5. Set time limits on contributions at the start of group
6. Create a speakers list
7. Give group member time (5 mins?) at the beginning or end of group to speak
8. Use a talking piece
9. Give everyone a sound making instrument, like maracas, to shake when the speaker's time is finished

## Staying on track

Example: the group has a lot to discuss but keeps getting sidetracked

Suggestions:

1. Assess the conversation, if it is meaningful and/or relates to topic in some way and if there is flexibility in the schedule no need to intervene
2. If there is no flexibility thank group members for their contributions and redirect them back to the topic at hand
3. Invite a group member to play time keeper
4. Use a "parking lot" for new topics to cover at the end of the session or workshop
5. Revisit the group's agenda and priorities to see if the group wants to make changes
6. Prepare a more structured agenda with the group ahead of time, with time limits

## Avoiding Cyclical Discussion

Example: group members continue on a topic that keeps going in circles with no learning, insights or conclusions.  
Causes: not enough or the right kind of info available or members have a strong emotional reaction to the topic.

Suggestions:

1. Gently bring people back to the original topic
2. Ask the group members what they need to move on
3. Suggest to the group that we don't have all the information and we can continue the conversation when we know more
4. Remind group members of the comfort agreement/group guidelines - agree to disagree
5. Ask and acknowledge how the group members are feeling
6. Do a mindful moment with the group
7. Speak to group members individually and ask how you can be supportive

## Reducing Cross talk

Example: a group member interrupts others as they are speaking

Suggestions:

1. Refer to the comfort agreement/group guidelines – avoid cross talk
2. Ask people to count to 10 before sharing their comments
3. Ask people to write down their comments first so they can share them later

## Reducing Side conversations

Example: several members of the group are having private conversations while someone is speaking

Suggestions:

1. Assess whether to address it before intervening: is it constant or brief?
2. If constant, refer to the comfort agreement /group guidelines – avoid cross talk

3. If the conversation is not about the topic being discussed, check if the group needs a break or a stretch
4. If the conversation is about the topic being discussed, ask if they want to share their insights or feedback with the group
5. Remind everyone that there will be time for discussion during break or after the group
6. Invite the group to talk about how they feel about side conversations and adjust the comfort agreement as needed
7. Be transparent and share how you feel about the side conversations. Be assertive and use strengths-based language

### Attention & Focus

Example: group members are busy using their phones, rattling papers, having side conversations, etc.

Suggestions:

1. Wait a few minutes in silence to allow the group to get settled
2. Refer to the comfort agreement/group guidelines on how the group would like to handle cell phone use.
3. If the guideline no longer fits, create a new guideline that everyone agrees on.
4. Ask the group how they would like to move forward with the agenda and time limits

### Respecting others' time

Example: group members repeatedly arrive late to the group or when returning from breaks

Suggestions:

1. Ask the group how they feel about members arriving late
2. Remind group members of the comfort agreement/group guidelines or add a guideline around arriving late
3. Speak to group members individually and ask what supports they need to arrive on time

### Cultivating a Non-Judgemental Space

Example: a group member is using labels and judgements when expressing themselves

Suggestions:

1. Ask what they mean by the label/judgement, try to evoke what the label means to them
2. Refer to the comfort agreement/group guidelines – use strengths-based language
3. Follow up with a reflection and re-frame their language using strengths-based language (model behaviour that supports the comfort agreement)
4. Reflection: A statement or paraphrase that involves listening carefully, then making a reasonable guess about what the other person is saying. E.g. “It sounds like \_\_\_\_” or “I get the sense that \_\_\_\_” or “So on the one hand it \_\_\_\_ And, yet on the other hand \_\_\_\_ . Is that right?”

## Participation

Example: group members are not participating or speaking very much in group

Suggestions:

1. Remind group members of the comfort agreement/group guidelines - step up step back
2. Encourage participation through check-ins and check-outs at each meeting
3. Draw people into the discussion by asking for their opinion of issues discussed
4. Include activities that may accommodate those less comfortable speaking in a group E.g. Break into pairs or groups of 3 where everyone shares
5. Make sure group members know it is okay not to speak
6. Ask members individually if there is anything you can do to support them and their experience in the group

## Relieving Tension

Example: the group is showing tension from any of the above challenges or from unresolved previous conflicts

Suggestions:

1. Call attention to the tension and the importance of not ignoring it
2. Discuss stages of group dynamics and normalize tension and conflict
3. Reassure the group that following the comfort agreement/group guidelines will help the group work through difficult challenges – agree to disagree. If the group guidelines aren't adequate, create new ones that everyone agrees on.
4. Do a mindfulness and self-compassion practice
5. Ask group members to use their wellness tools to take care of themselves in this challenging time
6. Take a short break