

GROUP AGREEMENTS

CREATING BOUNDARIES AND HEALTHY COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

GROUP AGREEMENTS CAN BE ESTABLISHED BY BOTH PEER WORKER AND MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS

BOUNDARIES

Maintaining boundaries for yourself and the group is a vital part of group facilitation. But why do we need to set boundaries?

Different people do not always have the same understanding and values of certain topics or issues. Some participants may even be expecting therapy or advice. For this reason, it is important to create a group agreement *before* the learning and activities start.

In what way can we establish group boundaries?

One of the most effective tools in communicating group boundaries is through a 'group agreement'. The making of a group agreement is a collaborative experience between you and your participants that sets out to identify:

- what one can expect from this group
- What is expected of the participants
- And what the group can expect from their facilitators.

How is the group agreement established?

If we explore the foundations of any group agreement, your group boundaries will be based on your organisation's policies and procedures such as the Flourish Australia's Code of Conduct. (You can access the most up to date Code of Conduct agreement in Chirp). The foundations of your group boundaries will also take into consideration your role, your values, the values of others, and finally individuals comforts and discomforts.

Putting together your group agreement

Your group agreement works best when you *and* your participants are involved in its creation. This will help provide a sense of ownership rather than being given a set of rules simply enforced upon the group.

See an example of a group agreement on the following page. This can be created in 2 to 5 minutes at the commencement of your group and should be on display for everyone to see. It could be done on a large piece of paper or up on a white board. You might like to start with some items from the Flourish Australia Code of Conduct and then get collaborative with your group to add the remaining items. See an example below:

Uphold Confidentiality - Right to privacy

Come back to core topic
if going off track

respect others opinions

Listen

Leave out triggering,
traumatic details



Strength based
language

It's OK to have fun
& Laugh

Respect & celebrate
Diversity
(opinions, morals & religions)

Focus on Learning Aims
& Outcomes

It is important that when you are creating the group agreement you invite participants to raise if they have any questions and make sure they fully understand each item discussed. Elaborating and providing examples of each point verbally and written is important.

Understanding the purpose of your group

Understanding the purpose of your group can make a big difference to the confidence you feel heading into your session and creating the 'Group Agreement'. Depending on what type of group you are running, you may have already been provided with learning aims and objectives. However, there are other things to consider; No two groups are alike. The dynamics of a group from day to day are often the result of the individuals' beliefs, their current state in mental and physical health and the environment you are in. Taking all this into account is important when implementing the group agreement and making changes to how you may run your group.

Part of understanding your group is also the ability to maintain the importance of the learning aims and outcomes. As is often common in any group discussion, a topic may begin to steer away from the main purpose. Here you must bring people back to the core subject of the session.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

As a facilitator it is important to build on your people skills and understand that the act of simply listening can outweigh the importance of talking. By listening and validating a person's view or story will go a long way in establishing a healthy and supportive environment.

When we look at barriers to language, it is key that you avoid complicated language as well as adopting a person-centered approach to communication rather than the use of clinical language.

Ultimately your lived experience (if you are a Peer Worker) and *how* you tell this story and validate other's stories will be one your most important communication tools. You will be able to accommodate an individual's diagnosis in a way that takes on a 'recovery' approach. The conversation can validate acceptance and finding therapeutic ways to manage life or goals rather than trying to *change* things.