

Getting the Most out of Group

Adapted from the University of Oregon

Focus on the here-and-now, i.e., focus on what's happening in the group – or in your head – at this very moment. What is going on that makes you feel closer or more distant towards others? What is happening between the group members? Though it may be awkward, try to share these observations with the group, as it can provide the group members important information.

Express your feelings with the group. The expression of emotion will have far greater value than the expression of ideas or information. Try and take the risk to let yourself be emotionally available to and vulnerable with others.

Before giving advice... Sometimes we really want to offer advice to someone who is struggling, but often when we do, we fail to let that person feel heard. Make sure you have heard and fully understood the other person's feelings before offering advice. Also, notice what that other person's dilemma is triggering in you.

Learn to give feedback to others. Giving feedback is a skill few of us have learned to do well, yet it can be one of the most effective ways to deepen any relationship. Some tips for giving feedback:

- Be specific about what you're responding to (particular remark, gesture)
- Be direct and honest, and provide concrete examples if possible
- Share both positive and negative feedback
- Give feedback as soon as possible

Learn to receive feedback from others. Try to consider feedback as a gift from other group members. Some tips for receiving feedback:

- Acknowledge feedback when it's given (e.g., "Oh. I didn't realize I was smiling just then...")
- Seek clarification about the feedback if you need it
- Verify with other members if the feedback you've received matches their perceptions as well
- Beware of becoming defensive, but if you feel yourself becoming defensive, it's a good idea to share it
- Ask for feedback. Find out from others in the group how they perceive you

Get involved and try to be as open as possible. It's okay to not understand. You're not expected to come up with insightful interpretations for others. Your job in group is to try to be honest, even if it means admitting that you don't know what is going on.

Share with others what is going on in your mind, even if you don't think it's very pretty. If you don't know what is going on in your mind, tell the group that. It's okay to

be “messy” and let others know about the things that you normally keep hidden. Group doesn’t follow normal “social rule” and this allows for greater self-disclosure.

Remember that how people talk is as important as what they say. Pay attention to the non-verbal behaviors in the group – yours and those of other members. Talk about what you notice.

Try to be as direct as possible and try to be open to the responses of others. Telling a story is sometimes a way of being known, but it can also be a way of avoiding what’s happening right there in the room. Aim for dialogue and intimacy.

Focus on the relationships you have with the group, other group members, and the leader. Put a priority on noticing what is happening inside the group. What is going on that makes you feel closer or more distant towards others? Try and explore with the group what you notice.

Take note of your first impressions of other members. First impressions are powerful but not always accurate. You can learn about yourself by noting and being curious about your first impressions of others.

Try to suspend reacting to transactions in the group as “good or bad”, right or wrong and, instead, trying to understand what is going on in you and other members of the group.

Try not to assume what other people are thinking or feeling. Give them a chance to have their own reactions, and try to be open to finding out what these reactions are.

Don’t be reluctant to interrupt the group process when you feel that you have something to say. All members have the right to speak up when they wish to be heard.

Remember there are no innocent bystanders in a group. If you don’t like the way things are going, try taking the opportunity to make your feelings known and perhaps effect a change in the group.