



## Circle Group Process - Facilitator Guide

### Overview

- Successful group facilitation is not the easiest or most intuitive process for many people. Those that do it well have often developed their skills over years of facilitating many types of groups. However, there are some basics that will help make your group facilitation opportunities successful ones.



### The facilitator

- Facilitator vs. leader. Think of yourself as a ship carrying a cargo rather than the captain steering the ship. While groups need a certain amount of direction and guidance, the main goal is to make sure the discussion (the cargo) is respected for what it is and kept safe within the group (the ship). While steps should be taken to insure the discussion doesn't meander aimlessly, we need to remember the Holy Spirit captains the ship.
- One of the best skills a facilitator can have is that of a listener. Listening well accomplishes two goals - it affirms the value of what the speaker has to say and demonstrates the humility and interest of the listener. We often become so focused on helping people find their voice in a group that we forget to encourage others to practice good listening skills. The facilitator also sets the example of good listening skills for the other members of the group.
- Facilitators are not there to serve as counselor or confessor. The goal of the facilitator should be to encourage the discussion, not analyze it or solve what are perceived or actual problems.
- Avoid the "Why" questions. Questions that begin with "Why..." (i.e. "Why did you do that?") often convey a negative or judgmental connotation to the listener.

### The group

- For any group to be successful the participants need to "buy into" the process. This comes in the form of agreement to the ground rules, commitment to respect, and an understanding that the facilitator is the soul arbiter and guide of the discussion.

### The topic

- The starting point for discussion. This is often in the form of a question or "tickler". Topics may also be determined by circumstances, especially if the group has been formed to facilitate a restorative justice or other healing/analysis process.
- Topics can either be agreed upon by the group as a whole, presented by the facilitator, or raised up based on need. Once a topic has been identified it is the facilitator's role to insure the group remains engaged with the topic.

### Staying on task

- It is easy for groups to wander away from the primary topic. Keeping the discussion on track can be difficult at times. The facilitator should not be afraid to break in or re-

align the focus of the group if it has wandered to far afield of the original topic. Staying on task will help all the participants better appreciate the benefits of group discussion.

## Ground Rules

- Every group needs "Ground Rules" established prior to discussion. These may include:
  - *Respect*. Each group member has a right to their opinion and a right to share it. Disagreement or varying opinions should be encouraged, but always framed by respect and charitable discussion. Ad hominem attacks and arguments are not to be tolerated.
  - *Privacy*. In order to instill trust in groups participants need to feel what they may share within the group discussion is held in confidence and may not be shared by other participants with family, friends, acquaintances, through social media, etc.
  - *Nonjudgmental*. Participants need to feel they won't be judged for what they say, feel or may have done. That is not the purpose of a small group process. Participants that feel they will be judged or criticized will not feel empowered to share with the group.
  - *Quiet*. Sometimes we feel it necessary to fill silence with words and discussion. Often in group discussions there needs to be times of silence for ideas and thoughts to sink and and be considered. We shouldn't feel compelled to fill these moments with more words and ideas.
  - *Play*. Not everything is deadly serious. Groups that laugh together, play together - whether via 'icebreakers', 'warmers' or other means - tend to build trust quickly. Laughter should be encouraged and will help all group participants feel more at ease.



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## Conclusion

The ultimate success of the group will depend on the management of the discussion. Circle discussion groups can be sources of compassion, understanding and healing. Care must be taken to see they don't become opportunities for arguments and derision. The value of circle group discussions has been proven over centuries in many varied cultures. Trust in the Holy Spirit to do the "heavy lifting" in the discussion!