

TIPS FOR GROUP LEADERS

Below are some ideas that are helpful for anyone contemplating starting a group for men or boys. The focus of these points is on **personal development & support groups** (rather than learning or task-focused groups) which have been established to offer support to Aboriginal men & boys in NSW. The analysis will utilise the concept of stages to examine the formation, working and endings of groups – and will aim to identify the central processes and dynamics that are essential for optimum functioning of the groups at each stage.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The facilitator

The main role in all groups is the facilitator (or facilitators). This person (people) takes responsibility for ensuring meeting times and locations are organised and adhered to (as far as possible), for keeping discussions on track, and for maintaining the group's guidelines (below).

The facilitator should focus not only on what is being discussed in the group, but by the overall feeling of the group. The facilitator must also ensure no one person or small group dominate the discussions – all members must have an equal opportunity to contribute to discussions.

The facilitator must model all the behaviours required by the guidelines to have credibility within the group.

The setting

Groups should have somewhere to meet that is **private**. **There should be no potential for interruptions, or opportunities for anyone to hear what is being discussed.**

Group guidelines – common rules for behaviour within groups.

1. **Commitment.** For the group to grow as a group, the regular attendance of every member is important. Members should not attend

under the influence of alcohol or drugs, nor use alcohol or drugs during meetings.

2. **Confidentiality.** Members and issues of the group should not be discussed with anyone outside the group.

3. **"I" Statements vs. "You" statements.** Each individual should take ownership for their feelings and opinions. For example, "I feel nervous when you laugh at me like that," will be more likely to generate a useful conversation than "You make me nervous!"

4. **Listen.** Attentive silence followed by non-judgmental acknowledgment--e.g., "Sounds like you're angry about it," vs. "Stop whingeing"!

5. **Focus on feelings.** How a person feel about an issue or event or person is more important than the logic. The group can help a person express feelings if each member lets it. Speak from the heart, not the head.

6. **Responsibility.** Each member is responsible for their own behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Blaming others for one's feelings or behaviour is avoiding responsibility ("She made me do it"). Each member should also be responsible for asking specifically for what they want from the group.

7. **Any member may choose to be silent** Anyone who is uncomfortable or unwilling to participate in a given conversation should be given the space to do so.

8. **Speak directly to one another.** Instead of saying to the group, "Matt's doing it tough," look Matt in the eye and say, "You seem to be having a rough time, Matt."

9. **Avoid judgment and advice.** Describe behaviour ("You're clenching your fists-are you angry?"). Don't judge or advise ("You don't have to get pissed off-why don't you take a few deep breaths?") Judgment and advice are OK if asked for explicitly ("How do you think I handled it? What would you suggest I do next time?")

10. **Be here now.** Members need to remain as much as possible in the present.

11. **Avoid questioning.** When tempted to ask a question ("Why are you looking at me like that?"), discover the personal statement behind it, and express that ("I get uncomfortable when you look at me like that.")
12. **Avoid competition.** Members should not try to "outdo" each other's stories.

BEGINNINGS

In new situations all people are nervous. The group facilitator has to manage his own and other's feelings, as well as start the group functioning.

WORKING

The aim of personal development groups is to assist the members to gain greater insights into their own feelings, thoughts & behaviours. This requires a careful balance between acceptance and confrontation from the other group members (and especially the facilitator).

ENDINGS

While some groups may continue for years, others may be a fixed time frame. If the group is scheduled to end, this can lead to very mixed feelings from members – sadness at the ending of the group, and happiness at having made connections to the other members. Some ritual is usually required to smooth the ending.

Some pointers on being a facilitator can be found in the accompanying article by Carl Rogers, click [here](#) for the article.