

Facilitation Skills¹

To facilitate is to make easier, to guide through a process, experience, or conversation. Facilitators can be many things to a group: moderator, process consultant, model, resource.

Principles of Facilitation

*Facilitating **IS** creating a SAFE environment by:*

- Enabling and encouraging people to fully contribute their ideas
- Acknowledging contributions
- Listening
- Focusing equally on group content (*what* is being discussed) and process (*how* the group is operating)
- Presenting directions for exercises clearly and enthusiastically
- Setting expectations but not forcing participation

*Facilitating **IS NOT** creating an UNSAFE environment by:*

- Interrupting
- Being impatient
- Completing people's sentences for them
- Attacking those who disagree
- Sending negative non-verbal messages
- Lecturing or "testing" them

Basic Elements of Facilitation

- Allow the group to decide whether or not to proceed with a particular process; ownership of the group belongs to the group itself.
- Confront your own attitudes and stereotypes.
- Instead of trying to "save" the group, let them take responsibility for their own successes and challenges.
- Respect the opinions of group members.
- Remember it's okay to not have all the answers; you don't have to be the expert.
- Help them feel comfortable taking risks without pressuring anyone to take risks.
- Accept all responses as valid instead of looking for a "right" answer.
- Encourage group members to respect themselves and others.
- Trust your intuition and always have the group's best interests at heart.
- Have fun and build a healthy relationship with the group.

¹ Based on article from Ball State University: www.bsu.edu/soa/resources/facilitation

Basic Facilitation Skills

Each of the following skills is an important part of the overall whole. Become familiar with the techniques, visualize a situation in which you might use them, and trust your instincts.

- **Listen actively:**
 - **Nonverbal** – Eye contact, nonverbals consistent with listening.
 - **Paraphrase** – Clarify or summarize the content of someone’s statement.
 - **Mirror feelings** – “You seem upset/happy/surprised.”
- **Give recognition:** Use names, thank them, share what you’ve learned from them.
- **Make process observations** – Describe what’s going on in the group; e.g., “I notice one or two people are doing most of the talking. How might we engage more of you in the conversation?”
- **Honor differences** – Reinforce differences of opinion; acknowledge how differences add to the richness of the discussion.
- **Involve everyone** – Ask open-ended questions and respond to questions by giving them back to the group before offering your perspective.
 - **Closed question** – invites yes/no or one-word answers: “Do you agree?”
 - **Open question** – invites conversation: “Tell us your thoughts about ...”
- **Transfer leadership** – Periodically encourage group members to facilitate their own discussions.