

Facilitating Discussion

The following list identifies helpful hints for facilitating discussion within your small group:

- Create a *collaborative* environment
- Do an initial assessment of the *learners' levels of readiness* and acknowledge any preparations they made for the session
- Initiate the interchange with an engaging, relevant challenge and use mainly *open-ended questions* and comments
- *Encourage* learners to participate
 - Allow enough “wait time” when questions are asked
 - Listen actively and non-judgmentally and encourage learners to do likewise
 - Keep the conversation from being dominated by a subset of learners
 - Build what learners said into the discussion
 - Make clear that your statements are open to being challenged
- Help learners communicate *clearly*
 - Ask for clarification and encourage learners to do likewise
 - Help learners reframe their ideas and comments, when needed
 - Help learners focus or expand their ideas, as needed
- Help learners be aware of and *examine their understandings, assumptions and values*
- Encourage *active listening*
 - Ask learners to paraphrase
 - Identify barriers to hearing others
- *Foster dialogue* among the learners
- Help learners *consider multiple points of view*
- Create an environment in which the learners feel they can *take risks*
 - Model risk taking
 - Support learners who take risks
 - Help learners be critical of ideas, not people

- Probe the learners' understandings and foster higher-level thinking and discussion
- Invite the learners to elaborate, make connections, and think together
- Help the learners digest what they are hearing
- Acknowledge the learners' feelings and your feelings
- Monitor and facilitate the flow of the session
- Help the group reach satisfactory closure, as needed

Westberg, J., Jason, H. (1996) *Fostering Learning in Small Groups: A Practical Guide*. Springer Publishing Company, N.Y., N.Y.