



W · I · S · E
Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

FACILITATOR 101 WORKBOOK

W·I·S·E is a program of NorCal MHA funded by the California Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63)
and administered by the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD)



WELLNESS • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE





SELF-HELP FACILITATOR

You have volunteered to serve as a “Facilitator” for your group. The Facilitator is responsible for conducting (facilitating) your group’s meetings. You are there to facilitate, *not to lead*, your group. Appropriate and successful facilitation will call upon a number of communication skills which will be discussed and rehearsed in training.

As one family member put it, “The facilitator opens the meeting, closes the meeting, and tactfully keeps it going in between.”

Facilitators need to be people who strongly believe in family and consumer strength and capacity to grow. It is important that they have the ability to listen, to encourage others to talk, have a positive and practical outlook on coping with a psychiatric or emotional disability, do not feel the need to control or dominate a meeting, and do not feel a need to solve all problems or “save” everyone. This sounds like a tall order, but all of us have bits of these characteristics upon which we can draw as facilitators.

As the Facilitator, you will:

- Facilitate at each support group meeting
- Publicize the meeting
- Ensure that there is an appropriate meeting place
- Set up the meeting place prior to the meeting

The key attitudes and behaviors you will need while functioning as a SELF-HELP facilitator are:

- Keep the Focus – Keep the members’ focus on the group’s common task, problem, or issue.
- Be Positive – Serve as a positive force in the group, setting the tone so that the very best support can be accomplished.
- Encourage Participation – Encourage participation by all group members by monitoring excessive talkers and encouraging quieter members to participate. Confront other problem behaviors that interfere with the group’s process.
- Protect Family Members and Consumers – Always protect individuals and their ideas from attack by other group members.
- Suggest Methods – Suggest methods for the group to use in dealing with a specific situation or problem.
- Coordinate Details – Coordinate the pre-meeting logistics of selecting and setting up the meeting room and sending out publicity.



W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

WHAT A FACILITATOR IS (AND ISN'T)

President or Chairman	Facilitator	Group Member
Calls a meeting to order and adjourns meeting	Helps get started and reminds group of closing time	Participates in the opening and closing of the meeting
Enforces group bylaws	Helps create an environment where people can work positively together	Is active in creating an environment where everyone can work together
Oversees group members and their work	Has no authority over others	Believes in power of people sharing together in a group
Delegates responsibility	Agrees to handle certain tasks during the meeting	Makes commitment to be there for others
Is "elected" or chosen by the group	Volunteers and undergoes special training	Participates voluntarily; observes meeting guidelines
Organizes a hierarchy of leadership	Is "one of the group"	Is a group member
Leads group discussion	Encourages group members to share	Shares feelings openly
Solves problems	Encourages/participates use of problem-solving techniques	Participates in problem-solving



SUPPORT GROUP GUIDELINES

Creating ground rules that make it comfortable for everyone on the team during meetings. The below guidelines are based on what has worked well during support groups. Participants are invited to change the guidelines or add to them as they feel is needed.

Guidelines for Respectful Engagement

- Raise your hand to speak
- Step up, step back
- Don't interrupt – turn cell phones and pages "off" or on "vibrate"
- Speak from the "I"
- Right to not talk or to leave the room
- Right to call "ouch" or "time out"
- Respect the person, challenge the behavior

The following is a brief explanation of each of the guidelines:

- **Raise your hand to speak.** This allows quieter, more reserved, and less assertive people to speak without having to interject, while discouraging louder, more outgoing, and more assertive people from interrupting other speakers, and requires facilitator(s) to keep a "stack" or a running list of people who want to speak, calling on attendees in the order that they raised their hands.
- **Step up, step back.** Monitor your participation level – if you tend to be quiet and less assertive in conversations, you are encouraged to "step up" and be heard; if you are louder and more assertive, you are encouraged to "step back" and listen.
- **Refrain from interruptions – turn cell phones and pagers "off" or on "vibrate".** Raise your hand instead – this includes "burning desires" or things you feel an urgent need to discuss.
- **"I" statements encouraged.** When making comments based on your personal experience of a subject, use first-person language ("I believe", "I feel", "I experienced") rather than general or universal language ("we believe", "you feel", "they experienced") – this helps prevent hurt feelings that often result when one person speaks in general or universal terms and another attendee with a different point of view feels marginalized or silenced.
- **Right to not talk or to leave the room.** No one is required to participate or share and all may leave if and whenever they feel the need, with no questions asked. This helps prevent attendees from feeling "put on the spot" or humiliated.
- **Right to call "ouch" or "time out".** The one exception to the "don't interrupt" guideline – if anyone feels hurt or offended by another person's comment or behavior, they may call "ouch" or "time out" and they may have the floor and speak about the incident or issue.
- **Respect the person, challenge the behavior.** If you call "ouch" or "time out", refrain from making assumptions or accusations about the intentions or character of the person who has made a comment or acted in a way you feel is hurtful or offensive; instead, use first-person "I" language to respectfully discuss your objection to the person's words or behavior.



MEETING FORMAT AND GUIDELINES

Following the structure set out for the group is very important. A predictable, simple meeting format will create a sense of stability and instill confidence in group members. In times of crisis, it is reassuring to members to know that the group will meet and what to expect when they get there. Familiarity allows people to relax and provides comfort. Every meeting should follow the same format.

Specifics to pay attention to include:

- Starting on time
- Ending on time
- Following the meeting format
- Going over the format at the beginning of the meeting
- Meeting in the same place
- Meeting at the same time
- Meetings should last no longer than 1 ½ hours.
- Having written materials regularly available
- Developing a plan for holiday meetings/cancellations

Before the meeting begins, the facilitator will:

- Check the room for sufficient seating and arrange seating in circle configuration
- Place hand-outs on a table in the room along with a sign-in sheet (optional)
- Display meeting guidelines and stages of emotional response

At the beginning of every meeting the facilitator will:

- Identify self
- Introduce co-facilitator (or have co-facilitator introduce self)
- Remind group members about meeting guidelines (have group members to read aloud)
- Welcome newcomers. Ask for brief introduction.
- Call for introduction of other group members. (Be creative but firm in amount of time used by each member for introductions.)
- If a newcomer is present, ask someone in the group to share what the group has meant (or done) for them.
- Begin discussion and encourage group members to participate in discussion.
- Call for a short break (10 minutes) about 45 minutes into the meeting if the group is over an hour in length.
- Close the meeting (meeting should last no longer than 1 ½ hours) and make any announcements at the end of the meeting.

Continues to Next Page



W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

Additional Meeting guidelines

- Meetings begin and end on time.
- Members are encouraged to use first and last names. To use only first names, or insist on being anonymous, implies that there is a shame in mental illness.
- Discuss the “here and now.”
- What is said in the group stays in the group.
- Be an active listener.
- Talk on a feeling level.
- Admit to your fears before trying to help others.
- Remember that honesty facilitates understanding.
- Everyone is given the opportunity to speak as well as the right to decline to speak.
- Advice and guidance are given when requested.
- Regular attendance is not required. Members may come and go as their needs change.



ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Meeting Location/Time/Date

The arrangement of the group meeting room is important, because it sends a message to the group members. Arrange seating for group members so that members can see and hear one another. Ideally there will be enough room that members have adequate “personal space” to feel comfortable and not intruded on. The message a facilitator wants to communicate through the group space is, “We want you to be comfortable here and feel able to focus on the work of the group.”

Outreach/Encouraging Attendance

If we are to make this available to as many as need us, it will be necessary to take an organized approach to informing the public that support meetings are available. As the group facilitator, you need to ensure that *someone is delegated* to handle the public relations and notification of the general public regarding the time, date, and location of your meetings.

There are several fairly simple techniques which can be successful in spreading the word:

- Contact your local television and radio stations, and your local newspaper with a simple announcement about the meeting location, date, and time. Be sure if there is a regularly printed or announced “community calendar” offered by the media that you are included.
- Print flyers with the announcement you have used with the media and distribute at public and private mental health facilities and churches and synagogues. Many churches and synagogues will reprint your information in their bulletins.
- Use your community affiliations such as NorCal MHA to share these resources with our community members.
- Ask your local or regional Chamber of Commerce to include information about your meetings in any “newcomer” material that they publish.
- Provide information to your local or regional private and public mental health facilities. Many families dealing with serious mental illness for the first time try to access the private system. In other areas, the public system is accessed and families expect to get a referral to some type of support system. This is an excellent way to reach these new families.
- Some groups are providing brochures to police and sheriff departments.

Encouraging Attendance

Attendance at support group meeting should never be used as a measure of success. We do, however, want family members and consumers to know and remember that the support group is always there for them. We also want family members and consumers who are not in crisis to provide support to those who are. The following are suggestions from facilitators who are part of strong support groups:

- Give each family member/consumer a “job” (bring cookies, help set up room, provide transportation for someone else).
- Ask one or two participants to call all members prior to the meeting. A call works with new and established members.
- Send a postcard reminder.



W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

What to Do When You Must Miss a Meeting

It is impossible to expect you to attend and co-facilitate every support group meeting. You will have family commitments of your own during that time. You may very well also have a need to “take a breather” for one meeting to regain your perspective as a co-facilitator. No one wants you to neglect your own needs.

After participating in a properly facilitated support group for several meetings, your co-facilitator should be able to handle one meeting on their own. Be sure you give your co-facilitator advance notice so that they can plan ahead. If both of you must be absent you will need to make other arrangements with your group. You will have to give them a briefing and the meeting format guide to make them more comfortable in this role, but it can be done.

It is suggested that once you know you will have to miss a meeting, you should select the most likely group member to substitute for you. If it is possible, have them assist you in facilitating a meeting prior to the meeting you are going to miss. This should help them feel easier about facilitating on their own at a later meeting.

At a minimum, set a time prior to the meeting you will miss to meet with this person and provide them with the following:

- Meeting format (Review it and answer any questions. What has become second nature to you may feel strange to someone who has to facilitate for the first time.)
- Copy of the Meeting Guidelines. It might be helpful to review the Meeting Guidelines and give this person your own tips.
- If you anticipate any difficult situations during that meeting, you might review them with the person and make suggestions on how to handle them.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

What Does It Mean to Facilitate a Group?

The role of the group facilitator is both challenging and rewarding. In most simple terms, to “facilitate” something is to make it easier or to help it move along more smoothly. This would mean that a group facilitator helps to make the work of the group go along more easily and smoothly. Being the facilitator of a group is different from being the leader, or the president, or the chairman. These roles are assigned along with authority to exercise control over other group members or with an expectation to direct the outcome of the group’s work.

A facilitator empowers a group to do the work itself. One of the signs of a good facilitator is when the group “engages” to get its work accomplished and the facilitator is “just one of the group.” As a facilitator, you will not be asked to control other group members or to be responsible for whether or not they are helped by the group. You will be asked to do particular tasks and utilize certain skills that will allow the group to work more easily and smoothly in meeting its goals.

Group Norms

Over time groups develop a set of “norms” or ways of interacting. Norms are not as formal as rules and sometimes are never actually discussed. They are similar to customs. New members learn about the group norms by observation and/or are told by established group members. The following are types of behaviors that groups develop norms about:

- Whether it is okay to interrupt the speaker.
- How to enter the meeting already in session.
- How to leave a meeting before its conclusion.
- Whether or not refreshments are provided.
- Whether or not children are welcome.
- Whether or not smoking is permitted.

Basic Communication Skills

Good communication skills are important to a facilitator because they can aid the facilitator in empowering the group to do its own work.

Good facilitation requires good communication skills. The appropriate use of “I-Statements” and “reflective listening” are two key skills you can use in facilitation. It is worthwhile to review these vital concepts and expand your skills with some additional basic concepts. Communication takes practice on a regular basis. The more that you can integrate good communication techniques into your daily life the more familiar and relaxed you will be with them as a group facilitator.

Listening is our most frequently used communication skill. Although the major portion of our formal education is devoted to teaching us to read, speak and write, listening is the most frequently used skill.

Continues to Next Page



Basic Communication Skills (CONT'D)

Experts estimate that listening consumes about half of all our communication time. These same experts contend that we typically listen with about 25% of our abilities.

Listening effectively is an art. People listen differently in different situations. Think about what you would be listening for in the following situations:

- A debate (the argument, the facts that you can dispute to prove your own argument)
- An explanation (or excuse) from a spouse or child about why something wasn't done (or do we really listen?)
- Chatting with a friend (relaxed listening)
- Support group meeting (verbal and non-verbal cues for what the person needs, what the most pressing problem is, what emotional stage that person is in)

As a support group facilitator, listening is a critical skill. You cannot "relisten" to oral messages (you can reread a written message). If we are not good listeners in our group meeting, the result can be:

- You missing the key issue the speaker wants or needs to address and having the discussion head somewhere else.
- Someone else in the group changing the direction of the discussion from the main issue the speaker wishes to address.

Active listening is more than hearing someone else talk. It requires putting one's feelings aside while really trying to understand what the other person is saying. It really does require "empathy." We, as facilitators, need to listen with an ear to:

- Hear the emotions behind words.
- Learn something about the emotional state of the caregiver. (The parent whose daughter has gone off meds and feels a critical need to buy a box spring and mattress so the daughter won't have to sleep on the floor. This is a real clue to hypervigilance which needs to be handled carefully.)
- What the caregiver needs, not what you think they need.
- The time and the need to move on in the group meeting.

Guidelines to improving listening skills:

- Realize that listening consumes energy and is work.
- Prepare to listen, exert conscious listening effort, be attentive, and genuinely interested.
- Concentrate on areas of interest – the main idea, supportive ideas – and then filter the non-essentials.
- Focus on the content, not the speaker's appearance and delivery.
- Listen for the total meaning and anticipate what the speaker will say.

Continues to Next Page



Guidelines to improving listening skills (CONT'D):

- Explore what is spoken and unspoken. When appropriate, ask questions to clarify meanings and reinforce messages.
- Resist temptation to interrupt unnecessarily.
- Adapt decision-making procedures (problem-solving methods) to capitalize on your speed to summarize key ideas as time permits.
- Take notes sparingly if you can.
- Reevaluate to understand key word choice and usage.

The following tips are additional guidelines for you, as a self-help support group facilitator, to follow in your support group meetings:

- Work on setting boundaries within yourself and with your group members, so you do not become too emotionally involved in someone else's situation. This guideline will help you to be more empathetic while also being mindful of your own wellness and recovery.
- As a facilitator it is important to allow individuals to finish their thought, but at times individuals may ramble and monopolize. We must gently bring them to a close and allow others to share. If this becomes too difficult for the facilitator alone to accomplish, the co-facilitator should ask the individual (discreetly) to step outside with the individual to give them more one-on-one support.
- Maintain eye contact. Try leaning slightly forward.
- Avoid distractions (people coming in late, side conversations).
- Be respectful.
- Watch non-verbal cues (body language).
- Avoid communication potholes. Set a purpose for your own listening. Don't get sidetracked by non-essentials. Your purpose is to recognize or discover what is really upsetting the other person (a major part of the problem-solving technique).

Eye Contact

Looking at others while you are speaking or while they are speaking is extremely important. This lets others know that they are receiving your full attention and that you value this exchange. Eye contact should be done comfortably. No staring required! Just be certain to look at others in the eye and open your ears.

* Special note: In the group it is common for members to tend to talk "to" the leader (directing comments and eye contact). For new members, the facilitator may seem to be the safest person to address when they are nervous or unsure. The facilitator can discourage this behavior by looking around the group periodically and breaking eye contact with the speaker. The facilitator will use their judgment in determining when to encourage the new member to include the rest of the group (by looking at them) in their communication.

Continues to Next Page



Non-Verbal Communication

Many books have been written about the ways we human beings communicate without ever saying a word. How we carry ourselves, dress, our facial expressions, hand gestures, and other behaviors send messages to others. Tone of voice, volume, and inflection also “say” as much, or more, than the words we speak.

As a group facilitator, you may notice a group member’s non-verbal communication. Sometimes non-verbal messages conflict with verbal messages. (“I’m fine,” but arms are crossed, lips tight, voice controlled). Sometimes non-verbal messages enhance the words that are spoken. (“I really am angry” – hits fist on leg, face is red). In addition, non-verbal messages may exist when the group member is silent. You may “read” another’s behavioral (non-verbal) message and simply use it to better understand or empathize.

You are not here to do therapy. But if you sense or pick up on any of these behaviors, you might find this information helpful.

Whether you decide to take action or not will depend on the situation as you observe it. You need to assess how many group members are experiencing the observed feelings, the depth and possible duration of them, and their impact on the group’s process and goals.

In your judgment, if the situation warrants action, consider the alternative actions outlined here:

IF YOU HAVE OBSERVED

- Enthusiasm
- Interest
- Agreement

AND...

- Several group members display the behavior
- One group member displays the behavior

THEN...

- Continue, and make a mental note that the experience is well received.
- Involve this person more actively in the process.

IF YOU HAVE OBSERVED

- Boredom
- Fatigue
- Disinterest

AND...

- Several group members display the behavior
- One group member displays the behavior

THEN...

- Find a way to interrupt or bring closure to the discussion – introduce a new method or procedure or move to another person.
- Talk with that person privately.

Continues to Next Page



Non-Verbal Communication (CONT'D)

IF YOU HAVE OBSERVED

- Confusion
- Disagreement
- Suppression of feelings

AND...

- Several group members display the behavior
- One group member displays the behavior

THEN...

- As them about areas of confusion, or
- Give a new explanation.
- Ask this person about areas of confusion and provide clarification, or
- Take with the person privately.

I-Statements

Remember in I-Statements all we do is take responsibility for our own feelings and actions. I-Statements also signal that we are ready to state our needs.

I-Statements are useful in any type of communication and are encouraged as a part of group interaction. Facilitators may use I-Statements in their messages to other group members or in speaking about their own experiences.

Here are some examples of how a group facilitator may use this skill within the group:

Statement 1: *My son won't take his medicine even though he knows he has to and knows he will get sick. He isn't eating and I know he's drinking and smoking pot. I just don't know what to do to get him to listen to me.*

I-Statement Response *I have gone through this same thing with my son and I really felt frustrated and angry with him. I know I am frightened and scared that he will get hurt and I feel powerless to help him.*

Statement 2: *I'm worried about where I'm going to live when I get out of the hospital. I lost my independent living apartment at the Housing Authority. I could move in with friends, but I don't think that they'll want me to.*

I-Statement Response *You really have a situation on your hands. I've gone through a situation myself that sounds similar. I worried about my safety, deep down I was concerned I might end up homeless. I was afraid of ending up on the street.*

Continues to Next Page



Reflective Responses

Reflective responses are about validating other people's feelings and accepting them as legitimate. Using reflective responses means that we do not avoid the painful issues they are alluding to and we meet them on their stated emotional ground.

This is a way to help people stay with the emotional statements they are making. Responding in a reflective way means that we continue with the person's right to feel whatever they are feeling about a situation.

For a group facilitator, this is an important skill in making the group's work happen more easily. This encourages group members to listen for the feelings behind what people say as you utilize this skill in the group. When members hear the facilitator, or better yet the group, reflect back their feelings, they are more likely to talk and to risk sharing important material with the group.

Here are some examples of reflective responses that a facilitator might make:

Statement 1: *My son won't take his medicine even though he knows he has to and knows he will get sick. He isn't eating and I know he's drinking and smoking pot. I just don't know what to do to get him to listen to me.*

Reflective Response 1: *I hear how frustrated and tired you are with having to deal with this situation. (Has anyone else gone through something similar and wants to share with _____?)*

Statement 2: *I'm worried about where I'm going to live when I get out of the hospital. I lost my independent living apartment at the Housing Authority. I could move in with friends, but I don't think that they'll want me to.*

Reflective Response 2: *I can hear the worry about concern you are feeling.*

Statement 3: *Both _____ and _____ have talked about their living arrangements. We talk about this at every meeting and I'm tired of it. I've been working on the housing committee for some time now, ever since I needed housing and it's time that we demand that the mental health people do something for us. I need for those of you who need housing to help us get to our legislators.*

Reflective Response 3: *_____, I am hearing how frustrated you are at the lack of support from us on your housing work.*

Reflective responses require that we listen, and listen closely. They will not be effective, no matter how perfectly worded, if they are not genuine and sincere. If you don't feel it, it is better left unsaid.



FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

As with communication skills, good facilitation skills enable a facilitator to turn the work over to the group. Our contributions as a facilitator attest to your own journey and your willingness to share this with others.

Modeling

The way that a facilitator conducts her/himself will tell group members much about how they are to behave or participate in the group. What the facilitator does has far more impact than what she/he says. This may at times feel like a burden to the facilitator. **Remember that you do not need to be perfect!**

These are some behaviors that are important to consider in modeling:

- Be on time for group. Being there promptly suggests that the group is an important commitment you have made.
- Be there regularly. No one can guarantee attendance at every group. Even facilitators get sick and/or take vacation. However, your regular attendance emphasizes the importance of the group and the value you place in it.
- Treat others respectfully. By being honest, practicing good communication skills, and using compassion, you can help to set the tone for how members will treat one another (and themselves!)
- Show you are paying attention. Position yourself so you face all members of the group. Smile at individuals. Listen carefully when someone talks. Scan the group, making eye contact, when you are seeking response.

The concept of having co-facilitators will be enormously helpful. You will find that you and your co-facilitator “trade” roles throughout a support group meeting. You may be the “lead” facilitator for one discussion and your co-facilitator will take over the reins as a different issue surfaces. It is important that the person who is taking the co-facilitator role be especially attentive and attuned to what is going on. A “tuned-in” co-facilitator can model the “ideal” member, give the “ideal” response, and help move the group along.

Finding Common Ground

This technique allows a facilitator to use the group as the primary resource rather than being the “answer man.” As we discussed earlier, support groups develop around a common problem or concern. Within the group, however, there may be many differences in the extent, nature, or circumstances that individuals face. The facilitator can help members to find “common ground” where they can share their similarities. (“Has anyone in the group had a similar experience?” or “Mary, you are a mother. Did you feel the same way Sue does?”)

Continues to Next Page



Finding Common Ground (CONT'D)

Example: *There is a newcomer in the group and as he introduces himself, the man expresses questions about whether he will ever be able to forgive himself for not recognizing his son's/daughter's/own problems sooner. What might a facilitator say to help this individual find a common ground?*

Possible Response: *I have certainly heard that feeling discussed in our group before. Does anyone have something to share about that?*

Or

Every one of us has felt that way. All of us started out in denial. It's where we go to first for protection. Can someone in the group tell us about that time in their lives?

Self-Disclosure

Group facilitators may choose to share with the group, experiences from their own life that are relevant to the group's work. The facilitator should consider self-disclosure when s/he believes that the group, or individual, will benefit from hearing about this experience. You may self-disclose situations, feelings, coping strategies, and/or mistakes as a way of helping another. Do not feel as though you must have "been through" everything yourself.

Self-disclosure is one skill, but certainly not the only one for letting someone know you understand.

New facilitators often self-disclose more than is necessary. Try to decide whether or not this person would benefit from your sharing at this time. They may only need for you to listen. If you do choose to self-disclose, try to keep it short and to the point ("I felt like that when my son was diagnosed – so helpless." Or "I tried to ignore what was happening to me, but it wouldn't go away.")

Example: Mary has just told about a frustrating, infuriating conversation she had with her daughter's therapist. What type of self-disclosure might be appropriate here?

Possible Response: *I've had some of those conversations myself over the years. They really leave me tired and sad.* (NOTE: You could then move to finding common ground by asking if anyone has something they would like to share with Mary about this; you could move to problem-solving by asking if she is ready to hear from anyone about options.)

Continues to Next Page



Encouraging Feelings

At the heart of “support” is a sharing of feelings in a safe, caring environment. The facilitator may encourage the expression and awareness of feelings by using reflective listening or by asking the group about feelings (“Has anyone else in the group ever felt guilty like that?”). Facilitators should recognize that some group members are not in touch with their feelings and are genuinely unable to say how they feel. Group members should not be pushed to share feelings. Instead, the group can be seen as a place where it is safe to talk about feelings if someone chooses to do so.

Example: Gordon has spoken for several minutes about a situation during the week where he worked really hard to control everything, but nothing went his way. What might a facilitator say to encourage a discussion of feelings?

Possible Response: *Boy, that must have been frustrating! Does anyone else share this with Gordon?*

Or

How do the rest of us deal with frustration?

Encouraging Problem Solving

The facilitator can also promote the use of the problem-solving techniques. Reinforcing these skills may be done through self-disclosure or by asking questions of the group. (“We have talked awhile about what the problem is. Has anyone here had success dealing with this?”) It may take some group members more time to talk about the problem before they feel able or willing to consider problem-solving. Members should be encouraged to let the group know whether they are ready or interested in problem-solving.

Example: Mary has been sharing about the chaos in her house each morning as she tries to get everyone off to school, work, and the day treatment program. She has gone on for quite a bit and begins wondering what to do.

Possible Response: *Mary, are you interested in trying to tackle this by using our problem-solving technique?*

Or

What are some ways to approach this problem? Does anyone in the group have a suggestion?

Handling Disruptive Behavior

There may be times when a group member becomes a significant problem in the group. The facilitator will want to prepare for this conversation by thinking through and actually practicing what s/he plans to say. Feedback to the group member must be given tactfully, yet firmly. The facilitator will want to avoid judgmental language.



HANDLING COMMON GROUP CHALLENGES

Every group is different because it is a unique composition of individuals. There are, however, certain scenarios that occur with some frequency. Considering these scenarios and ways of dealing with them may be helpful as a guide in addressing a variety of situations that may occur in a group.

Some guidelines to follow in dealing with these situations are as follows:

- Revisit/Revise your Group Rules/Comfort Agreement
- The goal is to eliminate or minimize the behavior. The problem needs to be at least minimized so that the group can continue functioning.
- Maintain the self-esteem of the person causing the problem. You need to take care of the problem in a way that doesn't reduce the self-esteem of the individual exhibiting the problem behavior.
- Avoid further disruption of the group's process. You need to preserve a climate that is comfortable and conducive to the group process.

In addition, you might include:

- Keep a sense of empathy for even the most troublesome.
 - Consider unmet needs of the individual.
 - Don't label members as certain types they can and often do change.
-

HANDLING SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS

The Silent Group Member

It is not unusual to have a group member who rarely or never talks in the group. This person may be especially shy, particularly withdrawn, frightened, angry, or be a private individual.

Non-talkers should be invited, but not "forced" to talk. Avoid criticism or prying. It is acceptable to come and listen for as long as the individual chooses.

- Approach the individual before or after a group meeting and initiate one-on-one conversation. Perhaps ask them to help set up or help with refreshments.
- Ask the person if they have anything they would like to add to the discussion. "Mary, do you have any reactions to tonight's meeting?"
- Make eye contact with the person even if you do not speak directly. Be patient.

Continues to Next Page



The Negative Group Member

This group member may appear to be angry and/or critical. They may criticize or question the benefits of the group, be skeptical of the whole idea, or be a complainer. This may be a person who resists problem-solving and seems to prefer focusing on the problems. It is easy for a group to tire quickly of this type of individual and stop listening to them.

- Encourage the individual to give the group a chance, but acknowledge that will take time.
- “I know how I feel when it seems that nothing works. After all the frustration we’ve been through, it’s hard to trust any process. But we are not the system; we are families/consumers helping each other. I hope you can learn to trust us.”
- Use reflective responses to validate the person’s feelings. You can’t have to agree with or disagree with their interpretation of events/circumstances.
- See if you can turn needs into “goals.” Recommend that they become involved in an advocacy meeting or project.
- Acknowledge that this group may not be helpful to everyone and that it is up to the individual to determine whether or not this is the right place for them. Avoid “selling” the group.

The Dominating Group Member

Some people are more talkative than others. Problems occur when one group member seems to “take over” and dominate the group. They may take up a large part of the group’s time and/or spend time telling others what to do and how to do it. This person is likely to be controlling, may get easily offended, and is often a poor listener.

- Reinforce the group structure at the beginning of each meeting. Emphasize the norms about allowing everyone time to speak and being sensitive to how time is spent in the group.
- Interrupt with respect and tact. “Bill, I am sorry to interrupt you, but there are several people who haven’t had a chance to speak tonight and I would like to give them the opportunity.”
- Reinforce the meeting guidelines that advice is given only when requested. “Louise, we try in this group to talk about our own experiences rather than to give advice to others. Do you have a personal experience you would like to share about _____?”

The Person Who Diverts the Meeting Focus to Themselves

This is a person who appears to be providing input to the person getting support, but who manages to turn the discussion to themselves. They generally end up asking what can be done for them. It is critical for the well-being of the person who was initially talking to complete their “work.” Let the “interrupter” know you will get back to her and return the focus to the original support group member.

Continues to Next Page



W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

The “Side-Conversation” Member

This person is always starting conversations with neighbors while the main discussion is going on. If these side discussions are prolonged, it can be very distracting and disruptive to the rest of the group. It also often leads to the rest of the group dividing into “private” conversations with the facilitator having to refocus the group.

- Ask for the attention of everyone to the problem or situation being discussed, because they may have a valuable perspective or insight into the situation.
- Speak privately with the individual and ask if their needs are being met or if they feel they are being given appropriate time to speak.
- Avoid being drawn into side-conversations yourself.

The Source of Misinformation

This person is quick to offer advice and information and it is often erroneous.

It is necessary to let family members/consumers (especially new members) know that the information is incorrect. It may be less confrontation to acknowledge that there is more current information or to suggest that many family members aren’t sure that the information is correct. Whatever you do, don’t let the new member walk away with misinformation.



NEEDS INVENTORY

The following list of needs is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

CONNECTION

acceptance
affection
appreciation
belonging
cooperation
communication
closeness
community
companionship
compassion
consideration
consistency
empathy
inclusion
intimacy
love
mutuality
nurturing
respect/self-respect
safety
security
stability
support
to know and be known
to see and be seen
to understand and
be understood
trust
warmth

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

air
food
movement/exercise
rest/sleep
sexual expression
safety
shelter
touch
water

HONESTY

authenticity
integrity
presence

PLAY

joy
humor

PEACE

beauty
communion
ease
equality
harmony
inspiration
order

AUTONOMY

choice
freedom
independence
space
spontaneity

MEANING

awareness
celebration of life
challenge
clarity
competence
consciousness
contribution
creativity
discovery
efficacy
effectiveness
growth
hope
learning
mourning
participation
purpose
self-expression
stimulation
to matter
understanding



W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES INTRODUCTION

One of the best ways to help families and consumers deal with the overload and frustration of coping with a psychiatric or emotional disorder is to expose them to problem-solving techniques. Families/consumers enjoy this activity and always get a lot out of it.

You will need the following materials for this section:

- Problem Solving Worksheet
- An easel or big pad of paper
- Big markers, and
- Masking tape

To help you run your first problem solving session for your group, you will need to learn and practice the problem-solving steps yourself. What follows are directions for you to follow when you conduct the problem –solving workshop.

It is important to introduce problem-solving skills with a planned problem-solving session for your entire group. Ask them when they might like to devote a whole meeting to this activity in the near future. Then you can bring copies of the Problem Statement Worksheet to the meeting *before* the Problem-Solving Session is scheduled and give them to your group to fill out at home. (You will find the Problem Statement Worksheet form at the back of this section.)

Once you have your group grounded in the problem-solving steps, you can do “quick” problem-solving exercises whenever you wish. This is particularly effective when family members/consumers get stuck and feel at the end of their rope about their problems, claiming that they are “impossible to solve” or “nothing works.” In this case, ask the family member/consumer, and the group, if some time might be devoted to tackling the “impossible” problem. By putting the problem through the 2-step process, a group facilitator can focus complaints and get some relief for the distressed family member.



PROBLEM-SOLVING

Step I – DEFINING THE PROBLEM (Problem Statement Worksheet)

We must properly define the problem, and then we must generate a number of new options which may not have occurred to us as we struggle with our dilemma. You may be surprised to learn that it is actually more difficult to *define* a problem than it is to solve it! But this is absolutely true. If you don't take the time to define and specify your problem very clearly, you will not have the basic foundation you need to solve the problem effectively.

A. Picking One Problem

The first reason “nothing seems to work” is that families and consumers are overwhelmed by a number of serious, competing problems, *all at once*. We get bogged down trying to find solutions on too many fronts.

We often have multiple problems to consider, and the first rule of problem-solving comes into play: **WE MUST DECIDE WHICH IS THE SINGLE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM ON THE LIST.**

Pick only one problem at a time and pick the problem that is most pressing for you. If your present situation involves any sort of dangerous behavior, you need to solve that problem first.

Don't underestimate the difficulty of picking one problem and staying with it until it is resolved, especially when you have many other problems that seem just as difficult!

B. Be Specific

The second reason “nothing seems to work” is that we tend to define the problem too vaguely. Unless we state a problem specifically, we cannot clearly identify the important variables that we are dealing with.

Sometimes, the statement of the problem is not descriptive at all; it doesn't tell us anything about the specifics involved in the dilemma. One way to approach “getting specific” is to ask the same questions a good reporter asks to “get the story” – that is, Who, What, Where, and How. What other questions should we ask?

Refining vague statements of the problem is an important task. This process gives us the relevant facts and behaviors which are particularly critical to determining the options we might have to solve this problem.

Continues to Next Page



C. Have You Picked the Real Issue

There is a third reason that “nothing ever works.” In many cases, the problem we have defined is not the central, painful issue we’re dealing with inside. In other words, the problem statement “masks” the emotional issues and feelings that we don’t know how to bring to the surface.

Many times these personal issues are just as crucial for us to resolve as the trouble our relative is causing us. It is very important for us to examine our feelings: Our own emotional reactions are under our power. Even when we can’t do anything about our relative’s behavior, we can admit to the feelings we’re having, and take care of ourselves.

NOTE: Emotional Issues

Emotional issues in dealing with a psychiatric/emotional disability are so overwhelming that we often “bark up the wrong tree” in stating a problem. When we do this, we can’t get to the real feelings that are upsetting us. Task 3 in “Defining the Problem” makes us ask: What are the difficult feelings involved here? What personal emotional issues does it bring up for you?

When you stay with a problem and dig for the real issue, you will invariably get to the feelings you are having about it. This is what we call owning a problem – recognizing how the problem makes you feel. When you do this, the real problem “stands up,” can be properly defined, and properly solved.

This is why on your Problem Worksheet there is an opportunity to restate the problem after considering how it makes you feel. In other words, you are going through a process of “getting consensus with yourself” that you have picked the real issue that matters the most to you.

Step II – SOLVING THE PROBLEM (Problem Solving Worksheet)

There is a way we have found to help us when we are ready to take the next step and solve our “well-defined” problem. We call this second step “P.O.W.” and this is how it works:

- A. First, we will ask you about your **P**ast experience. What have you tried so far? What has and has not worked?
- B. Secondly, we will ask the group to help us generate new **O**ptions. When we “brainstorm” in this way, we have a rule that no one can make any negative judgmental comments about these suggestions.
- C. Finally, we will ask you to pick the one solution from the list that appeals to you the most, and also choose a backup option to try if your first choice doesn’t fly. (**WHAT IF** your main solution doesn’t work?)

Continues to Next Page



A. "P" FOR PAST EXPERIENCE:

- Ask the author what she/he has tried in the past to solve this problem.
LIST THESE ON A CLEAN SHEET OF PAPER/FLIP CHART
- Ask her/him to indicate the attempted that helped.
PUT A STAR BY THESE OPTIONS ON THE LIST
- Ask her/him to indicate the attempts that have not worked.
CROSS THESE OUT ON THE LIST, USING A BIG RED MARKER

*****Emphasize this point: Don't persist in doing what doesn't work.**

B. "O" FOR OPTIONS:

- Ask the rest of the group to come up with options.
- Keep encouraging them to think of options until you have at least eight.
WRITE THESE ON A NEW SHEET. MAKE SUGGESTIONS YOURSELF WHEN GROUP SLOWS DOWN.
- When you get very general options, try to make them more *specific* before adding them to the list.
Example: If a group member says, "One option is to set limits," ask, "How would you set limits?"
Example: If a group member says, "One option is to get others involved," ask, "Who might you try to involve?"

C. "W" FOR WHAT IF:

- When the list is complete, ask the author to pick the option with which she/he is most comfortable. *CIRCLE AND LABEL THE CHOSEN OPTION #1*
- Have the author pick a backup option from the list in case the first option does not work.
CIRCLE AND LABEL OPTION #2
- Tear off the NEW Options sheet and give it to the person experiencing the problem

FINAL NOTE:

In the Solving the Problem (P.O.W.) section, you will need to make sure that your "O for Options" list of eight or ten more new solutions is rich and varied. Here are some tips for ways you can "beef-up" the options list:

- 1) Make suggestions that break out of the system: Many families/consumers tend to think only about "system" resources and forget that other networks exist too – friends, other family members, people who the family might pay to do vital jobs, etc. The larger a family's/consumer's network is, the more help and respite they will have.

Continues to Next Page



W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

FINAL NOTE (CONT'D)

- 2) Add a suggestion that takes a completely different tack than those on the list: This technique gives families/consumers permission to consider the option of not solving the problem and getting on with their own lives.
- 3) Make suggestions that encourage “care for the caretaker”: Add an option to take it easy, take a break, go for professional assistance, etc. Families rarely consider caring for themselves as a “solution”! If no one has offered this option, be sure you do and get it on the list. Self-care is an essential part of problem-solving, so stress it here.
- 4) Make an outrageous or funny suggestion: “Take a 6 month trip around the world,” or “go to medical school so you can take over the local CMHC,” etc. These suggestions lighten up the proceeding and they convey a wonderful sense of how powerless we often are when dealing with the irrationalities of psychiatric disabilities.
- 5) Throw in a suggestion that the family member/consumer “let go” of the problem, or let someone else in the family take charge of the problem. Family members/consumers get attached to the idea that they themselves are the only ones to handle a problem, whereas other might actually be more effective.

A FINAL WORD TO THE WISE:

In the future, when you do a “quick” problem-solving with your group, be sure that you always start the problem-solving process with Step 1: Defining the Problem. If you begin the process with “O for Options,” you will get in the same muddle families do when they skip the first step. So take the time to go through the tasks of defining the problem you are working on, and you will be setting yourself up for success in solving it.



PROBLEM STATEMENT WORKSHEET

- 1) **PROBLEM STATEMENT**: Of all the problems you have right now, what is the ONE problem that is most pressing and most serious? Be sure this problem statement is properly defined – that is, it is the single most pressing problem, stated with enough specifics so we can readily “see” what’s going on.

- 2) **EMOTIONAL STATEMENT**: How does this problem make you feel? What personal issues does it bring up for you? Again, STATE YOUR EMOTIONAL REACTIONS AS SPECIFICALLY AS POSSIBLE.

- 3) Do your feelings change the nature of your problem statement in any way? IF SO, **REWRITE** YOUR PROBLEM STATEMENT BRIEFLY AND SPECIFICALLY IN THE SPACE BELOW.



W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK



PROBLEM SOLVING WORKSHEET

I. Past Experience:

A. Who has tried what, so far?

B. For each attempted solution, what has happened?

C. Stop trying solutions that haven't worked!

***Cross out any attempts listed above which have been totally unsuccessful.

II. Options

A. List all the ways you could imagine handling your problem.

B. Pick one option from this list to actually try. If the option involves other people, make sure you all agree to try this option.

C. Clarify WHO will do WHAT, WHEN.

***Circle the option you are willing to try first.



W · I · S · E

Workforce Integration Support and Education

a program of NorCal MHA

1908 O Street

Sacramento, CA 95811

P. 916.366.4600 | F. 916.855.5448

III. What If

- A. Pick one or more other options from the list, in case something happens to make your first choice impossible. Again, make sure everyone involved in the option agrees to try it.

- B. Again, clarify WHO will do WHAT WHEN in carrying out this (these) back-up options.

DON'T PERSIST IN TRYING SOLUTIONS THAT DON'T WORK!



THE FACILITATOR AS A PERSON

There may be no better advice than “practice what you preach.” Facilitators are people too, meaning that you have needs, problems, successes, and failures. It is essential that facilitators take good care of themselves.

Facilitators are not expected to be perfect. It is an important aspect of the group’s success that everyone there is struggling on a daily basis with the challenges of their life. You will have ups and downs, good times and not-so-good times. You must, however, be your first priority. Taking care of yourself is necessary if you hope to be of help to others.

Should you need assistance in fulfilling your group responsibilities, it is important to let someone know so that help may be provided. If you don’t feel up to the job, for whatever reason, you are doing yourself – AND THE GROUP – a tremendous favor by being honest. That is good modeling for the others in the group and reminds them of the importance of self-care.

Signs to look for that may suggest facilitator “burn out” include:

- Dreading the group meeting
- Forgetting the group meeting
- Feeling detached from others’ experience
- Feeling bored when others share
- Needing to control the group and make things happen
- Experiencing resentment about the work you do for the group
- Wondering whether the group really helps

*** These feelings and behaviors are merely warning signs. Talk with someone about your feelings and how to problem-solve your situation.

On a regular basis, you may want to consider these tips on keeping yourself “in shape” as a facilitator.

- Arrive at the meeting early. Have a few minutes to get settled in before start time.
- Get adequate sleep the night before. Feeling tired may make it more difficult to listen effectively.
- Reread your manual and training materials frequently to help stay focused and reinforce your skills.
- Allow for some winding down time after the group meeting. You may feel “geared up,” tired, or a combination of both after a meeting.
- Consider attending another meeting, when possible, where you are not a facilitator and can be a group member.

Keep your role in perspective. There is real power in bringing people with common problems together. Good things are bound to happen. You are simply there to help things along. Don’t push!