



# Helpful Hints for Facilitators

## **What about supervision?**

Supervision is a form of self-care that allows you to discuss and explore, on a more personal level, some of the feelings and issues you have about your group. For example, you may be having difficulty relating to a particular group member or giving advice about a specific situation. Supervision is where you get support in your role as a facilitator. It is a place where you can deal with some of the intense feelings that come up as a result of facilitating the group. It is a place where you can process negative feelings related to the group and get perspective and ideas about how to manage your feelings.

As a group facilitator, your role is to serve as a tangible example of hope and support for other survivors, and your responsibility is first to take care of yourself. This means finding someone—a professional or a mentor—to sit down with on a regular basis and examine your feelings about your work with the peer support group. But, supervision is not therapy. If you are currently working with a therapist, I do not recommend using your therapeutic time for this purpose.

## **How do I address someone who is suddenly explosive in his or her disclosure of trauma?**

Sometimes when traumatized people are telling part of their story, they seem unable to stop. It can be overwhelming for the person speaking and for those around her/him. This is known as *flooding*. When someone is flooding, they often need help recognizing it. One of the best ways to intervene in an explosive or flooding situation is to convey how you are reacting to the other person's behavior. This is an example of using your observation skills as a tool for intervention, as we discussed earlier (The Process).

Ask if you can interrupt for a moment, and if you are ignored, just dive right in! “Can we stop for a minute? You seem scared and pressured. Are you feeling that way?”

Sometimes our stories are so powerful; they take over. I want you to feel like you can be present while telling your story. As you were talking, you seemed more pressured and less present to me. Did it feel that way to you? Did it feel that way to anyone else in the group?”

Checking in with the rest of the group helps to validate their feelings and also lets the person who is disclosing see the impact he or she has on others. It also provides a breathing space for everyone.

Telling a story in an overwhelmed state often leaves the listeners feeling overwhelmed. If the speaker is disconnected and anxious it may leave the group feeling disconnected and anxious. The group, in essence, is channeling the person’s feelings. Bring this issue into the open. Discuss the feelings that come up. Ask if others have had similar experiences of being unable to stop themselves when overwhelmed.

### What do I do if a group member tells the group he or she is suicidal?

If a group member expresses suicidal thoughts, stay real, put first things first. This can be scary and sad, and *you don’t have to pretend otherwise!* Don’t jump immediately to conclusions or solutions; sometimes just acknowledging the *feeling* of this person’s wanting to die, and the feelings it brings up in you, can be immensely relieving and validating. “Wow,

I care so much about you, it’s hard to hear you talk about wanting to die.”

First check in with yourself. The more nervous or frightened I feel in a situation, the more I want to distance myself from it and control it. I feel and talk more like a robot than a human being, which is not helpful to anyone, including me. Sometimes, in order not to do this, I simply acknowledge out loud to others that this is *not* what I want to do! “I feel anxious, and I don’t want to distance myself because of it.”

Next, consider checking in with the group. “What is everyone feeling right now, what’s going through your minds?” Let the group describe the feelings they are having in the moment, if they choose to. Ask the individual who is feeling suicidal how it feels to hear feedback from the group. This is all feeling-focused. No actions have yet been taken—or so it seems.

However, the discussion has shown each person in the group that there is room to sit and feel feelings, even in the midst of an alarming situation that seems to cry out for action. Discussion supports the idea that you can feel suicidal and not have to take action. You can sit and talk about how it feels. Talk about how it sucks to feel so tired and sad that you just want to go away. Acknowledge the things in this person’s life that have produced such powerful feelings. How often do we give someone permission to *feel* like ending it, to *feel* like giving up? We are more likely, initially, to tell them to *do* something or threaten them by saying we will do something.

A useful group discussion may arise out of this response, as well.

There are things you can do as a facilitator in this situation:

- Ask if the individual feels comfortable remaining in the group or prefers to step outside and speak individually with one of the group facilitators. If the person chooses to stay in group, does the group wish to continue with the original agenda or spend the rest of the time discussing the individual's issue?
- After group is over, assess the individual's needs and what options he or she has for meeting these needs: can the group member contact a therapist? go to the emergency room with a friend? stay with a friend with whom he or she feels safe? etc. You are not a family member or this person's therapist so you can do little more than explore options and empower this individual to choose a good one.
- Accept the limitations of your role. This is difficult but important. Peer support groups are not designed for individuals in crisis or as specialized therapeutic intervention. It is appropriate to acknowledge this with your group members and agree that it is okay for someone in crisis to stop participating in group in the event that more intense help is needed. People can always rejoin the group at a later time.
- Last, but certainly not least: *seek supervision!* Get some support for what you've gone through. Vent your feelings, and don't be afraid to process more of the situation the next time the group meets.

### **What do I do when a group member becomes too dominating in the group?**

When a group member dominates, take a risk and name the behavior. Again, use your tool of observation. Notice what you are observing about the person dominating, the feelings you are having, and how others appear to be responding. Everyone knows what is happening, including the person who is dominating, although he or she may not be fully aware of the effect this behavior has on others. That is the gift in naming it out loud: you let this individual know, through your observation, how their way of interacting is affecting you and the group. "It seems that the other people in the group don't have time to give you feedback on what you're saying."

You can disclose this information without being judgmental. This issue is not about a right or a wrong way of relating. Your purpose in bringing this up is to look at the deeper reasons behind the action of dominating the group discussions. Ask how this person feels when he or she is quiet and listening. Discuss some reasons why being quiet might make him or her feel uncomfortable or less in control. Let the group share their own examples in order to support the individual.

### **Where do I draw the line on self-disclosure as a facilitator?**

The amount that you disclose to the group about your life is your choice. That goes for everyone in the group. Self-awareness is essential in this decision. Consider these questions:

- Do I have peace about sharing this part of my life?
- Is there a part of me that is hesitant? (If so, ask yourself what reservations you have and honor them.)
- Am I disclosing to meet my own needs or the needs of the group?
- How will disclosing information about this part of my life affect the members of the group?
- How will this information about me help to promote hope in the lives of the group members?
- Am I feeling pressured to disclose? Does this feel like a choice?