

# Building Facilitator Skills for Dynamic Support Groups



# Objectives

Gain skills to recognize and deal with potential red flags during both the intake interview and during group sessions

Take away ideas to improve group retention



# Groups We Are Addressing

- Closed - not ongoing
- Psychoeducational



# Psycho-Educational Support Groups (definition)



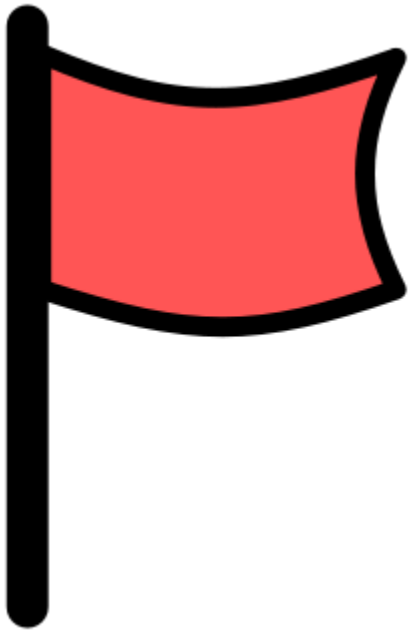
The primary focus is to provide support, information and education to increase knowledge and coping skills.

# Goals & Foundations of Effective Group Facilitation

- Information exchange
- Mutual support
- Group cohesion
- Coping and self-efficacy
- Reduction of social isolation
- Stress reduction
- Safety



# Red Flags



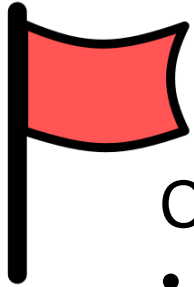
A red flag doesn't always mean that someone needs to be screened **out** of participating in a support group.

A red flag means there is something more to pay attention to, based on our past experience/training as group facilitators. We need to make sure we are screening people **in** to the best possible avenue for support.



What are some red flags that come up during the intake interview?

(please use the chat option)



# Recent History of Suicide Attempt

## Concerns

- Triggering for participant and other members
- One-on-one framework may be more appropriate

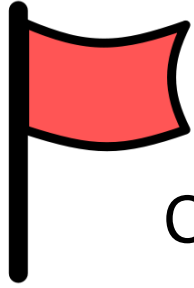
## Suggestions:

- Be honest and validate their honesty and struggle
- Assess and offer support
- Discuss future participation in group

## To Consider

- Policies
- Other programming





# SA Occurred Very Recently

## Concerns

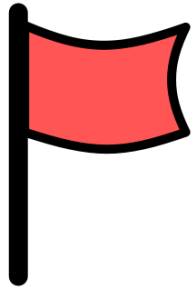
- Group discussions may trigger raw feelings
- Curriculum may not be as useful

## Suggestions:

- Be honest and validate their experience
- Rely on policy
- Assess and offer support
- Discuss future participation in group

## To Consider

- Policies
- Other programming



# Participant clearly needs significant space to talk/process her feelings

## Concerns

- Participant may not be in a place to respond to redirection or listen to others

## Suggestions:

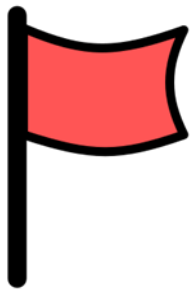
- Be honest and validate their need to share/process
- Explain the group process
- Assess and offer support
- Discuss future participation in group

## To Consider

- Other programming



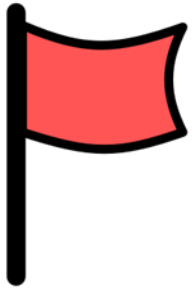
What are some red flags that come up group sessions?



## It's week 3 and no one is sharing

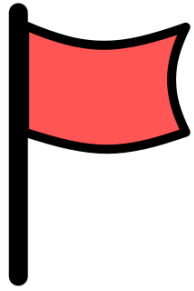
- Silence is sometimes uncomfortable AND okay
- Try changing things up
- “Who would like to share first? rather than “Would anyone like to share?”
- “Who’s next?” rather than “Anyone else?”
- You can talk about the silence





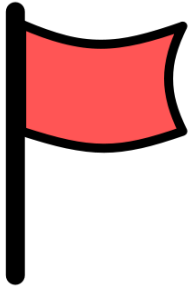
# One person is over-sharing – and not respecting other’s personal boundaries

- Don’t wait to address it
- Guidelines
- Gentle nudges and redirection
- If you need to be more direct, lead with genuine validation



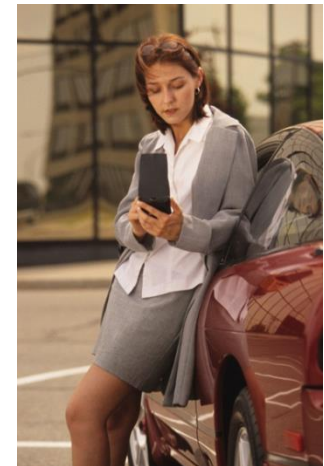
## Group members clash and others are uncomfortable/distracted by it

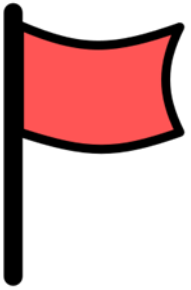
- Don't wait to address it
- Try to identify common ground or help group members agree to disagree
- Do the guidelines address any of the behavior by either member
- Take a break if you think the group needs it
- This is the one time something may need to be dealt with outside of the larger group. You may need a supervisor's support.



## Group goes “off the rails” and the agenda is lost

- Make sure you at least do *some* “on-topic” work/discussion
- Honor the discussion that feels more urgent but offer choice to the group as a whole.





## Group members just drop out

- Sometimes group members make healthy decisions that they are not ready for group
- There are a couple of things we have found increase retention
  - Encouraging notes to the next group
  - Weekly snail mail
  - Closing with “why I’ll be back”
  - Thoughtful reaching out



# Encouraging Notes to the Next Group . . .

Dear survivor,

**“Don’t be afraid  
of your survivor  
journey.”**

“Coming  
to group  
will  
change  
your  
world.”

“Be  
brave.  
It’ll be  
worth it.”

“You’re  
already  
doing it!”

# Weekly Snail Mail . . .

(not for domestic violence groups)

- Quotes
- Words of Encouragement
- Affirmations

*Important: always ask at intake whether the participant is comfortable receiving mail at the listed address.*



# Closing with A brag and “Why I’ll be back”

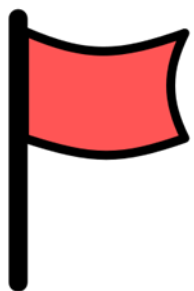
- Closes group on a positive note
- Encourages participants to return
- Reminds participants that what they are doing has value



# Thoughtfully reaching out

- With permission
- No pressure
- Finding the best avenue for support
- Group will still be an option later on

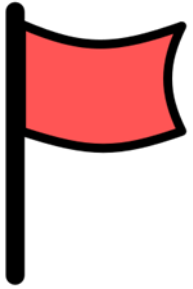




# Group is ending and members feel you are taking away their only support

- Plan a brainstorming or calendaring activity for the last or second to last meeting
- Are there other things happening at your agency where group members might connect?
- Are members able to repeat group in the future?





# Facilitators clash

- Don't wait to address it
- Bring in a supervisor if you need help sorting things out
- Changing facilitators mid group should be a last resort



# Guidelines Help Frame Facilitation



Group created guidelines are a safety net for everyone. Don't be afraid to revisit them together.

Group members are looking to you to keep the group safe, on topic and meaningful.

# Questions!





# Save the Date (we can't wait)!



We will dive deeper into  
Group Facilitation Skills  
at an all-day training  
in Clark County (Vancouver)  
On Friday, August 18<sup>th</sup>

Watch for an announcement  
from WCSAP!

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