

PPRI Group Mentor/Facilitator Training

Topics:*

- Structure of group mentoring program and sessions
- Communication
- Balancing curriculum and unstructured group sharing
- Guidelines for behavior
- Challenging situations

Communication

GOOD LISTENING

Part of being a good listener involves giving feedback to the sender.

Attribute	Behavior
Attends closely	Good eye contact
	Blocks distractions
	Accepting expression
	Asks questions
	Nods or otherwise acknowledges speaker
Attempts to understand	Blinks frequently
	Lets speaker finish ideas
	Doesn't interrupt
	Watches for nonverbal signs
	Attends to the facts in the statements
Keeps personal biases out	Avoids jumping to conclusions
	Postpones judgments
	Focuses on facts presented
Provides feedback	Paraphrases what was heard
	Answers direct questions

* Parts of this curriculum were adapted from:

- *Mentoring Tactics* © 2006 Center for Applied Research Solutions.
- *PPRI Ex-Prisoner Mentoring Manual* © 2007 Public/Private ventures/US Department of Labor.

FEEDBACK

Evaluation VS Description

There is a difference between evaluation (judgmental) and description (open to possibilities). Evaluation can imply that someone has failed and the sender of the message is the judge of that failure, resulting in defensive response. Descriptive language describes.

Messages with “YOU” attached at the beginning of a message are usually in an accusing tone of voice and are viewed as judgmental.

Example YOU: “You shouldn’t have done it that way. You really screwed up.”
“You’re making me mad. You don’t care about anybody else.”

Being able to describe the affect of another’s actions without accusing results in a message that contains “I” rather than “YOU.”

Example I: “I might have handled it differently. What would you do different next time?”
“I don’t feel safe when I hear... Next time, could you try...?”

Before you send a message, spend a moment to ask yourself, “What response do I really want?” You will be more likely to get what you want if your message is clear and non-threatening.

Certainty VS Openness

We have all dealt with people who are certain they are right, and we have all dealt with people who are willing to listen and try alternatives. That is the difference between certainty and openness. When we communicate with someone who is certain they are right, we want to prove they are wrong. Any energy we would have spent solving a problem, enjoying ourselves, or discussing options is instead directed to defense and communication stops.

Problem Solving, Group Sharing, and Peer Suggestions

It is very important that participants get a chance to talk about what has been happening in their lives. In order to offer some sense of balance, we’ll talk about both bad and good things, or “**Hurdles and Joys or Achievements.**” Start with hurdles so that each person ends on a positive note. It may also be appropriate to ask a participant after sharing a hurdle if s/he can think of anything positive that has or could come from experiencing the hurdle. (Depending on what they share, it may not be appropriate.)

Mentor/Facilitators should begin by discussing their recent hurdles and joys, and it is critical that this be done without going too deeply into their own issues. Going too deeply takes the focus off the participants and can also make a participant think, “This person is so messed up, I should be mentoring them.” In addition, avoid celebrating huge successes. For example, a mentor who comments, “I just made \$50,000 on a real estate deal,” will be reminding participants how far removed they are from this type of lifestyle. However, this is an opportunity to show participants that we are all human and we all continue to be faced with challenges and must rely on each other for support and inspiration.

As participants share recent problems, mentors should be careful not to go into “advice-giving mode,” as this creates a parent-child power relationship. Instead, start by trying to get the participant to talk more about their problem. It is much more empowering to solve one’s own problems. If they come up with positive strategies, reinforce them. If they come up with a questionable plan of action, redirect them by asking more questions until they get on track. Another strategy is to ask for feedback from the group. Both strategies are outlined below.

Self Problem Solving Model

When a participant is facing an obstacle or having a problem, consider saying:

1. Tell me more about it.
2. What have you done so far? How has it worked?
3. Do you have any ideas about how to solve this? What are several options?
4. What do you think you should do?
5. What do you want ideally? What steps can you take to move in that direction?

Group Problem Solving Model

When a participant is facing an obstacle, consider saying to the group:

1. Has anyone else experienced something similar?
2. Does anyone have any suggestions for how to solve this problem?

The Vibe

As the facilitator, it is vital that you are cognizant of the group “vibe.” Before giving advice or asking the group for advice, **ask the person sharing if they want to receive feedback from you and/or from the group.** If their answer is no, treat it as a reasonable response so that they may feel safer sharing more next time.

Deep Breaths

If things start to feel intense or oppressive, **ask everyone to take a few deep breaths**, or consider taking a short break.

Time

Also remain aware of time. If it seems like a person’s sharing may push the group over the time limit for the session, ask their permission to go over and make sure everyone has time to share!

Balancing Structure and Un-structure

The frame of the group mentoring sessions will allow for both structure and un-structure. A class may last up to an hour but not longer (better that people want more and have an incentive to return the next time). About five to ten minutes can be spent on an icebreaker or fun activity to start the evening. About 20 minutes may be spent on structured curriculum including a speaker or topic presentation and an exercise that solicits participation, action, and group interaction. About 25 minutes should be reserved for group sharing of Hurdles and Joys/Achievements. If there are six people in the group and each has five minutes to share, that's 30 minutes. Some may take less, some more. Always give a reminder at the start of the sharing that each person has X amount of time and please be respectful. At the same time if someone really wants to brainstorm some ways to work with a challenge, they can ask to take more time and receive group feedback.

Another way to incorporate sharing is to have the sharing exercise relate directly to the curriculum or topic. Examples:

Topic: Financial Management. Sharing Prompt: share a financial hurdle you are dealing with and a new strategy you will try to address it.

Topic: Conflict Resolution. Sharing Prompt: share *briefly* a conflict you are having with someone and a new method of communication you will use to resolve the conflict.

In this way, participants interact with the curriculum, hear many ways of applying the new knowledge and skills, identify a way they will incorporate it into their own lives, and still have time to talk about their concerns.

Note: Allow at least one session topic per series to be chosen by the participants. At the third class ask them to suggest topics and vote, or they can elect to have an open class to talk about Hurdles and Joys and receive group feedback in depth.

Guidelines for Behavior in Group Sessions

As the facilitator it is your responsibility to help create a safe space for group participation. Participants will be more invested in positive behavior if they create the guidelines for group participation themselves. This is usually easier to achieve than it might seem. Start by saying something like, “Now we need to decide how we are going to interact as a group. Let’s create some guidelines. Let’s go in a circle and each say how we want this group to work.” On a big piece of paper record their suggestions. Always hang it up where everyone can see it during each session. Add some if they miss anything key.

At the end ask “Can we all agree on these?” You can give them some examples from the following sample list:

- Respect everyone’s opinions
- Don’t push or force ideas
- Don’t interrupt
- Totally non-judgmental
- Think about what you are saying before you say it and how you feel if someone said it to you
- Be aware that everyone has their own truth
- Complete confidentiality of group sharing
- Treat everyone equally
- Share the time with everyone

You can also ask the group how they want to deal with certain situations. For example, try asking, “What should we do if someone gets really upset or angry? What do you think?”

If participants suggest negative methods of dealing with a situation, redirect by asking, “How would you respond to that? What *would* you respond to positively?”

If participants are reluctant to suggest, you can say, “Alright. This is what I suggest. What do you think about that? If you want to add or change anything, let us know.”

You can also enlist the assistance of the group in maintaining appropriate behavior. When you create the guidelines tell them, “You can all help each other by reminding the group to remember the guidelines we created. Try not to single anyone out, but say, ‘I’d like to return to the guidelines for a minute.’”

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is vital in a group setting. At the first session, discuss what confidentiality means and include it on the list of guidelines the group creates.

Confidentiality means that no one will share anything that they heard someone else say in the group with anyone once they leave the group session.

Everything said stays in the room. This is for everyone’s safety and comfort. The group sessions are a SAFE SPACE for sharing the challenges and successes of life in transition.

Limits of Confidentiality

The group facilitators/mentors must tell staff if they hear anything that leads them to believe or suspect that someone is being abused or neglected, or has or is going to re-offend. Be honest with the group about this when you explain confidentiality.

What is shared in group can be shared with PPRI staff if it implies that someone is being abused or neglected, or has or is going to re-offend.

Challenging Situations

Considering the personal nature of sharing that may occur in these groups, it is possible that challenges will arise. Here are some tips for dealing with common challenges:

Stealing the Show

If someone is constantly drawing attention to themselves you can:

- Restructure the activity by saying that everyone will share in a circle. Give a time limit for sharing/participation.
- Ask the group to take a moment to read back over the guidelines they created and to each help make sure that everyone gets equal time and treatment.
- Enlist the show stealer's help. Talk to this person aside from the group after the session. Try saying: "It's great that you feel so comfortable sharing and talking in a group. That's an incredible skill to have! Since you are so good at it, I wanted to ask if you would help out the group and some of the people who are more quiet and less comfortable sharing. If you could help pay extra attention to them and make sure they get enough time to share, that would be really great, and you would set a great example for them. What do you think?"

Reclusive

If someone is reluctant to share it may be because of the Show Stealer. Try the above suggestions to give each person a fair chance. If a person is still hesitant to expose themselves, you can:

- Restructure the activity by saying that everyone will share in a circle. Give a time limit for sharing/participation.
- Say: "You can think about it for a few minutes and we'll come back to you at the end."
- Ask the person aside from the group after a session, "I've noticed that you seem hesitant to open up to the group. I wanted to know if there's anything we can do to help you feel more comfortable so that you might get more out of this."

Outbursts

You will have to judge for yourself if a situation is severe enough to warrant emergency action. Most situations can be de-escalated by using some methods:

- Ask the whole group to pause and take several deep breaths. You can say, "This is starting to get a little heavy. Let's all stop for a minute and take some deep breaths." Demonstrate and watch the time for at least one whole minute.

- Ask the person acting out to sit quietly for a moment and think about what they want to receive from the group.
- Mirror the person. Say, “So what I’m hearing is... Is that what you’re saying?”
- If the situation continues to escalate, you can ask the person to take a break and come back when they are ready to abide by the group’s guidelines.
- You can ask the person to leave for the night. Follow up by talking with the Volunteer Coordinator or the PPRI case manager about the person’s behavior and whether or not they should return to the group.

If anyone is in immediate danger, call 911.