

More detailed guidance for facilitators

– from *Hearts & Minds Prepared*

About facilitation

1. The facilitator's role

The *purpose* of having a facilitator is to help the group fulfil its objectives.

The *role* of the facilitator will change according to the needs and focus of the group.

For example, the needs of the group in worship sharing will be different from those of the group when acquiring information. However, although the role may change, the core elements of good facilitation remain the same.

These core elements are:

Supporting	preparation and practical details
Guiding	helping the group to function well
Leading	presenting and teaching

The table overleaf gives a fuller summary of how these three elements apply to [a series of learning sessions]; you will [generally] use a combination of all three elements in [any learning] session.

2. Developing your skills

Good facilitation is a constantly developing process consisting of two interconnected strands:

- Basic tools of the job, which can be learned
- Your own growing experience
- You may want to have a brief conversation with the group about your roles at the beginning of the first session to establish mutual understanding. Stress that you, as a facilitator, are also part of the group and that you will be learning as a facilitator as well as a participant.
- The facilitator is not expected to be an oracle and will look for ways of bringing in the various strengths of other group members. Don't be afraid to stop and ask for help if you feel things aren't going well. As confidence and co-operation grow in the group, your task is likely to become progressively easier and more enjoyable.
- As you work through [your series of learning sessions] ... , it is worth taking a few minutes after each session to reflect ... on what went well for you and the group, what went less well. What, if anything might you want to do differently next time, including how you split presentation and facilitation [with any co-facilitator]?
- Remember that as a facilitator you are providing a service, which is to help the group fulfil its objectives. But these are shared objectives, and the group as a whole shares responsibility for the outcome of a session.

The core elements of facilitation

Supporting

In advance

- Arranging practical details
- Anticipating problems
- Having strategies for late arrivals, absences, etc.

During the session

- Being gentle but firm and confident
- Building trust
- 'Holding' the group in times of tension
- Keeping to time

Leading to:

- the group feeling safe, secure and comfortable

Guiding

- Helping the group explore its differences
- Drawing on the experience of the group
- Not being overborne by weighty, expert, or more experienced participants
- Holding the balance between the quiet and verbose
- Knowing when to stop, move on, hold back, or to let the group fly
- Being flexible
- Developing strategies for the unexpected

Leading to:

- the smooth running of the session
- clarity of process

Leading

- Delivering introductory teaching [where relevant]
- Presenting starting points for activities
- Setting up and running activities
- Keeping the focus on the task in hand
- Bringing the task to a conclusion

Leading to:

- the group knowing the purpose and focus of each session

Preparing to facilitate

1. Making the most of the materials

- [Read through facilitator guidance and any session plan or activity guidance in advance.]... Some [sessions] have handouts: [check if you need to make photocopies of any handouts for participants.] [Some session plans] include worship and a 'coming together' activity, giving everyone time to settle in and leave distractions behind before starting work; [if these are not specified in a session plan, you may wish to include them]. Arrange seating in a circle except where activities specify other arrangements.
- It is important to be thoroughly familiar with [any] introduction to [a] session and each activity. You may want to make your own notes to speak from. If so, make sure that what you say gives everyone enough information to understand the point of the activities. Speak clearly, checking you can be heard and that everyone knows what to do.
- It is advisable to follow the given plan for each activity; they are structured to give participants maximum opportunity to contribute their own experience, thoughts and ideas, and to ensure variety. All activities have been chosen for their appropriateness to the topic.
- Some groups have strong preferences for working in particular ways – perhaps because the participants have always done so. Consider how best to lead Friends into new activities so that they will be open to enjoying the new experience.
- Notice who flourishes in each kind of activity and why. It will help you facilitate the group more sensitively.
- Descriptions of how to facilitate each kind of activity are [included in the *Ways of Working* section of *Being Friends Together*]

2. Timing and pacing

- Session timings are given as a guide only. They ...may need adjustment on occasions [to suit the needs of] your group.
- [Generally] sessions work well within the times given, but there may be situations where your particular group needs to do things differently. They provide a flexible framework that allows you to use your own judgement as a facilitator. Before departing significantly from the given framework check:
 - Are one or two people wanting to change things for their own reasons or will the whole group benefit from the change?
 - If it is a minority wanting a change, how can the group help you make a fair decision?
 - What will you gain by the change, and what will you lose?

- It is important to negotiate significant changes early in the session so that accidental overrunning doesn't compromise later activities.
- Always bear in mind your agreement on finishing on time.
- Pace your session with the well-being of participants in mind:
 - Slip in a mid-session stretch/loo break.
 - Offer the group optional social time afterwards with refreshments. This is particularly appreciated by people who enjoy an opportunity for discussion arising from the topics, especially after sessions in which discussion doesn't feature as an activity.

3. Accommodating particular needs

- People with sight or hearing difficulties:
These participants may require special arrangements for sessions involving audio-visual aids, handwriting, and printed material such as handouts. Ask tactfully what they need.
 - It may help a participant to do some preparation for sessions with another member of the group.
 - When reading aloud from handouts, it helps to ask people to read slowly and clearly and to leave short gaps between contributions. Provide large print handouts if required.
 - Some blind people have computer systems that can convert text to speech. If so, they may appreciate an offer of help with conversion and reminders of when handouts will be used in sessions.
 - For activities that involve participants writing and sharing their contributions, provide thick black pens and ensure a facilitator is available to help anyone who cannot see at all. Suggest that Friends read out their contributions when appropriate to the activity.
 - For a video, check that participants are seated to suit their particular needs.
 - Does anyone need to listen to a recording or watch a video on their own in advance, or with someone who can explain what is going on? Are you able to organise this? Blind people who have previously been sighted may be able to take in a lot from a soundtrack if someone also describes what is on the screen.
- Bending, reaching and kneeling
These actions are difficult for a surprising number of people:
 - Always provide a small table in the middle of the circle for activities that

involve reaching to pick something up. Keep the circle small to reduce reaching distance.

- Place anything participants need to examine or read on a standard height table.
- For activities that involve working round a table this should be at standard height with upright chairs.

4. Sharing written information with the group

- Display [any] session plans and focus questions where everyone can see. These need to be prepared in advance so as not to take up session time. You will soon discover what works best for you and the group. Possible ways include:
 - Use thick pen to write duplicate copies in large letters on two A4 sheets (or two half-sheets of flip-chart paper) and place on the floor or small table in the centre of the circle - in opposite directions so that everyone can read them (the method advised in the session texts).
 - Display on flip-chart sheets. This works well, but may feel intrusive in a small group or in an average living room.
N.B. For either of the above, use black pen as not everyone can read colours.
 - Type focus questions on individual slips of paper.

5. Dividing the group for paired or small group work

- Group size
 - *Pairs* usually feel safe at the start of a course or of an exercise that demands personal exposure, BUT can be very challenging for anyone paired with a person they are not comfortable with or don't trust. Watch out for signs of this in body language, such as turning the body away from a partner, sitting at a distance or not saying much. You may need to check this tactfully outside the session with the person concerned.
 - *Threes* are good in groups divisible by three, and a necessary option in addition to pairs whenever there is an odd number. Threes allow a wider range of inputs and may be less threatening than pairs for some people. Conversely, some find working in threes less comfortable, and they take more time than pairs.
 - *Fours* are a good number when you want some discussion with a chance for everyone to have a good input, and they make discussion easier than in the full group for shy or reticent people. All discussion needs good facilitation to curb dominant speakers.
 - It is usually helpful to encourage people to work with others they haven't worked with before where possible.
- Methods of dividing up
The method you use to divide the group depends on the activity and the time

available. Possibilities include:

- Ask people to get into groups with those sitting near them (quickest).
- For pairs, count people off to mix them up – e.g. for a group of eight, count round 1,2,3,4 and ask the 1s, 2s, 3s and 4s to get together.
- Ask people to form a group with people they haven't worked with before.
- Using an additional room for pairs/small group work
 - In most cases it is advisable to arrange access to a second room to allow each pair/group to work without distractions. A facilitator should be in each room.
 - If you decide to stay in the main room for a short activity, spread out e.g. into the four corners; though anyone with hearing difficulties might still need to be in another room away from other conversations going on around them.
 - Once people have left the main room, it is harder to get them back together. To bring the group back into the circle:
 - Ask pairs/groups to time themselves, but expect delays!
 - Bring your own group back in and ask the others to do the same.
- Bringing paired/small-group work to a close

You may prefer to speak separately to each pair/group. If you address the whole group, speak slightly louder than everyone else in the room to get their attention (but don't shout, which can feel aggressive), stand up expectantly, or perhaps ring a small bell. See what works best with your group, perhaps checking what they prefer.

6. Using audio-visual aids

- For a video: check you have a suitable room with good equipment and enough space for everyone to see. (Someone outside the group might be willing to offer space for the session if necessary. You need to make it clear that it would not be appropriate for them to be present.)
- Can you find someone in the group who is willing and able to take care of the technical aspects of video and audio sessions so that you can concentrate on facilitation? Get together in advance if possible and agree how you will run the session.
- Participants may ask to see/hear material again. Because of time implications this is not recommended, but you need to decide how to respond to or forestall this - perhaps by agreeing at the start to pause between audio tracks or at strategic points in a video to give people more time to take the material in.
- Some of the audiovisual material may be contentious. Always watch/listen to the material in advance. You may want to think beforehand about the personal issues these sessions raise for you. What is your own bias? How will it affect the way in which you facilitate the session? Consider which of the facilitators in your group is the best choice for this session.