



## How to Ensure Effective Communication

*It is through effective communication skills that a group can work harmoniously, effectively and productively. With effective communication group members are able to interact amicably, and engage in constructive debate, contributing to meetings and committees.*

*Communication is being able to pass a message from one person to another and having that message understood as intended. Many aspects can interfere with this mutual understanding. Some of these aspects are body language, attitude and knowledge of both participants. Even background noises play a role. Because of this it is important to ensure all that can be done to assist effective communication.*

### **Body language**

- *Consider your body position. What is it saying about how you feel.*
- *Have you closed your body off, crossed arms, legs etc.*
- *Are you open for the discussion, looking at the person with whom you are interacting.*
- *Are you showing that you are listening through eye contact, and facial expressions and the odd nod of agreement etc.*
- *Personal space is important don't be too close or too far away.*
- *Your tone needs to reflect who you are talking to and the purpose of the discussion.*

### **Environment**

- *Is the environment conducive to communicating? For example the seating is comfortable and arranged so that all can be involved in the discussion. There are not too many interruptions or a high level of background noise.*
- *Is everyone aware of any knowledge needed to fully understand the discussion?*
- *Provide opportunities to check that the message has been understood as it was intended. One method is to rephrase.*
- *Provide opportunities for people to gain a deeper understanding through the use of charts, models or activities such as role playing.*

### **Confidentiality**

- *Within self help groups, feelings and experiences are shared. These need to be dealt with in complete confidentiality, and this should be clearly stated within the general guidelines for the group. Confidentiality is breached when anything is mentioned about group members outside the group meetings. Ground rules need to be developed on how to deal with such an event.*      **Continued . . .**

# INFORMATION SHEET

## **Confidentiality (con't)**

- *Consider writing a brief letter of introduction to your new members outlining appropriate behaviour and the need for confidentiality.*
- *Prospective members need to understand that their feelings and experiences will be understood and treated with respect, and that they need to reciprocate these behaviours.*

## **Decision making**

- *Allow everyone to take part in the decision-making process and encourage them to provide ideas and to talk over any concerns.*
- *Implement a system to ensure concerns and ideas are acted on.*
- *Setting time limits for each member to talk, gives each member a chance to speak*
- *Groups often find having a policy book with the group agreements on how things are to be done offers guidelines on managing decisions.*

## **Team work**

- *Promote the team rather than competition among individuals.*
- *Encourage the team to work together and freely share ideas. This may help to prevent power struggles, it is important to acknowledge the work of the group members whilst discussing the distribution of roles and tasks amongst the other members.*
- *Be consistent and fair in the treatment of all.*
- *We all have different skills and different ways to achieve our goals.*
- *Remember that diversity helps to make a team strong and flexible.*
- *It is important to establish an agreed set of protocols or ground rules for the way to interact within the group.*
- *Allow time for group members to get to know each other through socialising on a more informal basis. Conversation flows more freely over a cup of coffee or a shared meal.*

## **Boundaries**

- *It is important to establish the boundaries of your group. For example, Self Help groups should not confuse their role with counselling or therapy.*
- *Members of groups may suffer from burnout if boundaries are not in place to protect against this.*

## **Emergency**

- *Develop a basic communications plan so that everyone knows who to call in an emergency and the importance of relaying accurate information quickly to a central point.*

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