



How To Facilitate a Small Group Session

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Nicholas Hartman, MD MPH
Lisa Moreno-Walton, MD MS MSCR
Jaime Jordan, MD
Michael Gottlieb, MD

Why Do It:

1. Promotes deep learning – analysis, evaluation, synthesis
2. Develops communication skills
3. Active learning
4. Application of ideas
5. Role modeling
6. Studies show learners respond well to this modality

When to Do It:

1. Subjects that involve reflection and integration
2. To practice communication skills: e.g. aspects of patient interviewing
 - a. Role play, aka “skill rehearsal”
3. In inter-professional settings when dialogue is valued
4. Examples:
 - a. Improving patient experience
 - b. Dealing with difficult patient or consultant situations in the ED
 - c. Improving wellness and preventing burn-out

Solutions to Common Problems:

1. *Someone talks too much:* directly engage other group members, re-direct their comments to other group members
2. *Someone talks too little:* allow more time for answers, address learner by name and invite comments
3. *Learners come unprepared:* assign group members tasks beforehand
4. *Silence:* provide a concrete example as starting point, direct questions to specific learners
5. *Incorrect information shared:* ask the group if they share that perception, invite other points of view

Behaviors of an Effective Small Group Leader

1. Displays enthusiasm(!)
2. Comes prepared, having planned the session and timed it appropriately
3. Synthesizes and summarizes effectively, both the entire session and key points made (whether or not he/she agrees with that point of view)
4. Encourages learners and stays positive
5. Asks thought-provoking questions of the group

Additional Resources:

Kitchen M. Facilitating small groups: how to encourage student learning. *The Clinical Teacher* 2012; 9: 3-8.

Muller J and Irby D. Practical teaching: how to lead effective small groups. *The Clinical Teacher* 2005; 2(1): 10-15.

Steinert Y. Twelve tips for effective small-group teachings in the health professions. *Medical Teacher* 1996; 18(3): 203-207.