

# Peer Discussion Group Facilitator Guidelines

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES of facilitating peer-based self-help discussion groups.

- As Facilitators, we are not leaders, certainly not therapists, and not even guides. We are here to aid and enable and encourage others in helping themselves, not to take the lead role in another's recovery – this is peer-based self-help.
- Facilitators do NOT diagnose, suggest a course of treatment, or instruct. We do not do what the professionals do, and peer discussion groups are not a substitute for qualified professional care.
- Remember we are here to *assist*. Everything we do must be from this perspective, whether it's keeping time, or handling difficult problems.
- Discussion group guidelines are *principles*, not *rules*, and MUST be applied with understanding and compassion.

## A Discussion Group Facilitator:

- Is a PEER and DBSA chapter member.
- Attends meetings on a fairly regular basis.
- Arrives before the meeting starts.
- Is able to respond in an unbiased and non-judgmental way.

## BASIC GUIDELINES for Peer Discussion Groups

- **Share the Air**  
Everyone who wishes to share has an opportunity to do so. No one person should monopolize the group time.
- **One person speaks at a time**  
Each person should be allowed to speak free from interruption and side conversations.
- **What is said here stays here**  
This is the essential principle of confidentiality, and MUST be respected by all.
- **Differences of opinion are ok**  
We are ALL entitled to our own point of view.
- **We are all equal**  
Accept cultural, linguistic, social and racial differences and promote their acceptance.
- **Use "I" language**  
Because we do not participate in discussion groups as credentialed professionals, NO ONE CAN INSTRUCT. We however can share from our own personal experiences. As an example, we cannot say – "*you should do X.*" we should say: "*when I was faced with that problem, I...*" Always put things in the context of our own experiences.
- **It's OK not to share**  
People do not have to share if they do not wish to. Much can be gained by just listening.
- **It's everyone's responsibility to make the discussion groups a safe place to share.**  
Respect confidentiality, treat each other with respect and kindness, and show compassion.

- Is self-aware:
  - of their own situation, and how their personal disorder or the disorder of a loved one may color their responses
  - and in reasonable control of their own emotions
  - and able to know when they are having a bad day and should step aside from primary group facilitation
- Is open to peer review and suggestions from other facilitators and chapter leadership and Professional Advisor
- Is genuinely interested in aiding others.

## A Facilitator DOES:

- Open the discussion group, remind participants of the basic principles, and close the discussion.
- Monitor the time, giving each person who wants to share a chance to do so in the time allotted.
- Keep the discussion on track, on an appropriate subject matter, in an appropriate tone and behavior.
- Clarify and summarize member's statements when necessary to assure general understanding.
- Model appropriate behavior for group members.

## A Facilitator Does NOT:

- Dictate content.
- Dominate the discussion.
- Preach or lecture participants.
- Overtly inject personal opinion or values.
- Instruct any participant to try a particular course of treatment, medication, physical, or take a certain course of action.
- Attempt to run a "therapy session."
- Show surprise, hostility, or disgust to any participant.

## Facilitator Sensitivity:

A facilitator needs to be sensitive to a variety of things concerning the peer discussion group participants. A facilitator needs to be aware of when someone:

- Is hurting.
- Needs more time to talk.
- Is made uncomfortable by excessive talk on a certain subject or the attitudes or actions of others in the group.
- Needs a chance to talk one on one to someone.
- Is in critical need of professional help.
- Is suicidal or in crisis.

## Handling Problems:

We are people with or have family with mood disorders. We are not professional counselors. Don't expect to be able to deal effectively with every difficult situation that arises.

- If you become overwhelmed or things get out of hand, GET HELP - quietly ask another person in the group to go get one of the chapter leaders or another facilitator.
- Jot down problems and share them with other facilitators, bring them up when meeting with the Professional Advisor.

## What is Facilitator's Skill?

"Able to help others openly express themselves and work through barriers to communication."