

Leading An Inclusive Support Circle

A COMPLETE FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Carving out space for authentic conversations designed to drive connection and empathy can ultimately foster a culture of inclusion, while bolstering team cohesion and increased resiliency. This facilitation guide has everything you need to hold space for your team in both the good times and challenging ones.

SESSION STRUCTURE

*** When: Carve out ample time.**

Being vulnerable is tough, so providing sufficient time for conversation is an important component to creating safety for folks to open up. We recommend putting aside at least an hour for small groups and up to 1.5 hours for groups between 8 and 15 people.



Where: In person or virtual.

These sessions can be successfully run virtually via a video platform like Zoom or in person.



Who: Groups that benefit from connection and cohesion.

While these spaces can be great for any group, they're especially helpful for teams and cross-functional working groups.



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FACILITATOR'S ROLE

The facilitator's main goal is to help support a brave environment that encourages open, honest dialogue. You can do that by modeling empathetic, inclusive behaviors like these...

Invite all perspectives.

Remember that all participants have something to offer no matter their background, identity, or lived experiences. Refrain from judgmental statements or body language, like crossed arms or eye rolling.

Make sure people feel heard.

You can do this by listening actively, with genuine interest. Active listening includes reflecting back what folks are saying (e.g., "I'm hearing that..."), asking questions, and using affirming body language like nodding and direct eye contact.

Help the group uphold the agreed upon group norms.

When you witness folks not adhering to agreed upon norms (for instance, not interrupting or honoring confidentiality), the facilitator can play a key role in reminding participants of the norms and re-centering them for the group.

FOSTERING OPEN DIALOGUE

When encouraging people to open up about topics that they may be unaccustomed to sharing about in a workplace setting, it's important to set the right tone from the start. To do this, consider...



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Setting the container.

Creating a shared set of group norms at the outset of a conversation can build confidence and psychological safety that encourages openness. See below for how we like to “set the container” at Collective.

Creating different ways to share.

Some people may be more comfortable than others sharing in a group setting. Try offering different modes of participation by breaking folks out into pairs or having folks share in the chat or via sticky notes if in person.

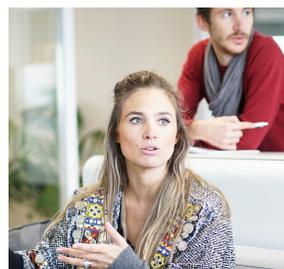
Modeling vulnerability.

Leading by example can instill a sense of psychological safety. Don't ask folks to share anything you yourself wouldn't be willing to share. If folks seem hesitant to open up, try breaking the ice by modeling the answer yourself before asking others for contributions.

Asking questions.

Asking questions not only shows active listening, it can also be a way to deepen the conversation. To encourage sharing, try asking clarifying or open-ended questions. Some examples include:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- What stood out to you about...?
- I'm curious about what shaped that perspective for you?



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MANAGING CONFLICT THAT ARISES

Inevitably, participants will have different perspectives on topics that arise. That's completely okay and can actually create a great opportunity for learning and empathy-building. Try using the following types of questions to encourage self-reflection and curiosity, rather than judgment.

- What might shape someone's perspective in this way?
- What's valuable or interesting about this perspective?
- What's difficult for you about this perspective?
- What is at stake for you in this moment or conversation?

Another great way to enable productive dialogue is to have people reflect back what others shared to check for accuracy in their own understanding before sharing their perspective. They can start that by saying, "What I think I'm hearing is..." and checking for clarity, by asking, "Did I get that right? Did I miss anything?"

SUGGESTED FLOW

* Intros & Icebreakers

It can be tempting to hop right in, but taking time to make sure everyone knows who is on the call and "priming the pump" by giving everyone an opportunity to contribute at the outset is a helpful way to amp up participation throughout.

Start out by having everyone go around and share their name, pronouns, and any



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other relevant info (like what team they are on). You can also engage in a short icebreaker activity, like asking a thought-provoking or self-reflective question. Some examples that we like to use include...

- What is most important for you to get out of this conversation?
- Use one word to describe your state of mind right now.
- What is one way you want to show up during this conversation today?

* **Setting the Container**

Setting the container, in short, is aligning on group norms. In our experience facilitating DEI conversations, we have found the following norms to be helpful. You can use these or come up with your own:

- Be For Each Other - People rarely learn or grow from being shamed. Position feedback as a gift and celebrate one another's growth by calling people in, not out.
- Listen Deeply - Listen to learn, rather than to judge. When you find yourself being judgmental, reposition your reaction as a question. What can I learn from this? Remember, this experience is an opportunity to grow. Lean into that.
- Step Up, Step Back - Be mindful of who is dominating the conversation. If you find yourself sharing a lot, consider letting others take the floor. If you often find yourself sitting out, try making an effort to contribute to the conversation.

* **Conversation Prompts**

In moments of crisis and uncertainty, sometimes the content matters less than the simple act of holding space. When considering your support circle, try to be flexible with where the conversation wants to go. That being said, here are some conversation starters that can help you get started.



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- How have you seen your identity (including role or team) impact your experience of this moment in time (e.g., COVID-19, an org-wide change/crisis, etc.)?
- When you have faced challenges in your past, what have you tapped into in those moments to help you get through them? What about your past has shaped your current state of resilience?
- What is striking you most about what's happening locally, nationally, or globally?
- In tough moments, how have others shown up with you that you've found most helpful? How can your colleagues support you through this moment? How do you feel you can help them?
- What about how the organization (or your team or even you personally) is handling this moment makes you most proud? What is one thing you would add to make it even better?

* Wrapping Up

Be intentional about wrapping up. Make sure to set aside dedicated time by ending the conversation about 10 minutes early. This will allow people to wrap up their thoughts and give you an opportunity to create a sense of completion. Try asking a closing question to the group that allows folks to process what's been shared throughout and create a forward-thinking mindset. Go around the group to make sure everyone has opportunity to share. Some questions we love include...

- What's one insight you are walking away with?
- What's one thing you've heard today that will shape how you show up moving forward?
- Who would you like to acknowledge in this conversation?
- What is one thing you're going to give yourself permission to do, say, not do, create time for, etc... today?

