

# Toolkit of Behavioral Change Facilitation Skills

Techniques That Help People Discover  
the Ability To Change Within Themselves



**Virginia Cooperative Extension**

Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

# Toolkit of Behavioral Change Facilitation Skills

## Techniques That Help People Discover the Ability To Change Within Themselves

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## Introduction

One of the most important sets of skills for educators of behavior change programs and group leaders is facilitation skills. These are the process skills we use to guide individuals and groups to apply program information to their lives. Participants in group education benefit from someone guiding the process of working together, goal setting, and self-evaluation so that the objectives of the program are realized by each individual and the group as a whole. This is the person we call the “facilitator.”

Facilitation has three basic principles:

1. A facilitator is a guide to help people move through a process together. This facilitator is not the one with all the answers. A facilitator’s role is to draw out opinions, ideas, and experiences of group members.
2. Facilitation focuses on **how** people participate in the process of learning or planning, not just on **what** gets achieved.
3. A facilitator is neutral, meaning that he or she does not take a particular position in the discussion.

This toolkit contains general guidelines for managing individuals within a group as well as the group as a whole. The toolkit also provides instructions and resources for specific facilitation skills and techniques that you can apply to a range of behavior change programs.

## Setting the Stage

A good facilitator is concerned with the outcomes of a program as well as the process. You want to make sure that everyone is engaged and the process is the best it can be for the participants. To achieve this, make plans in three areas:

1. Climate and environment.
2. Logistics and room arrangements.
3. Ground rules.

## Climate and Environment

The environment and general climate of a program sets an important tone for participation. Consider the following when deciding on the location for your meetings.

- ✓ Is the location familiar to your participants? Will participants feel comfortable there? An unfamiliar location where people feel out of their environment can stifle participation and decrease participant retention. Use group feedback and community stakeholder input for the location. For example, hosting within a particular faith-based organization's facilities may be acceptable to one community and not another. Use participant feedback **before** you begin hosting.
- ✓ Is the site accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities? If not, what are options for reducing transportation barriers? People will feel valued if they see that you have gone the extra mile to make it easy for them to attend.
- ✓ Is the meeting space the right size? You want to have a room that is just the right size for your group. An oversized room will inhibit a group feeling like they are part of a team whose members support each other in a common goal. A room that is too small leads to disruption as people move around, which can cause a break in meeting flow. Also, limiting the size of the group allows all group members to interact with each other.

## Logistics and Room Arrangements

How people sit, whether they can hear, and if they are hungry can all impact your group meeting process. Some things to consider include:

- Chair arrangements. Having chairs in a circle or around a table creates an environment of equality and familiarity and promotes inclusion and open conversation. All members of the group, including the facilitator, are on an equal level. A circle or semicircle also allows for eye contact and greater connectivity among group members. Avoid lecture-style seating.
- Places to hang easel pads or other board space to use during discussion facilitation.
- Table for sign-in sheets and program material distribution.
- Private location for weigh-ins for weight-based programs.
- Location for refreshments that is accessible but will not disrupt the meeting.
- Appropriate space for any hands-on demonstrations that are part of your program, where everyone can see what you are demonstrating.

## Ground Rules

To build a safe and comfortable environment that promotes group trust and open dialogue, a good facilitator considers how they will manage participants so that everyone feels that their opinions and ideas are valued. It takes skill to manage participants who tend to dominate the conversation in order to give time to those who are more reluctant to talk, while still making everyone feel good. Setting ground rules at the outset of your program can help. The following section describes how to lead the group in setting its own ground rules for the way participants will engage with each other across the program period.

## Facilitator Instructions

Setting basic ground rules for how people in a group will engage with one another helps create an environment for open communication. Ground rules provide boundaries for people to operate within and help with the flow and pace of the discussions. They help the participants value one another and be more comfortable sharing personal behaviors and challenges to change. Ground rules can be particularly useful for groups that meet over an extended period of time and where group support and dynamics are important to success. Ground rules may not be appropriate for every program, such as short, one-time events, so use your judgement.

The process for developing ground rules generally is as follows:

- 1. Discuss:** Talk to the group about the goals of the program. Discuss the importance of support for one another as everyone tries to implement the behaviors they will be learning about.
- 2. Describe:** Talk about the importance of everyone's contribution to group discussions and how setting some simple ground rules can ensure that everyone feels they can participate.
- 3. Review a short list of ground rules:** Post a large sheet of paper on the wall with the title "Ground Rules." Have a short list of ground rules written on the paper. Modify this list as needed to align with the purpose of the group. Go through each rule one at a time; ask the group if they agree with the rule and if they would like to make any changes to it. Make the changes on the paper.
- 4. Add additional ground rules:** After reviewing the short list, ask the group if there are any additional rules they think would help encourage open and honest participation. Write down each recommended rule and discuss among the group. It's usually most effective to check in with the whole group before you write an idea (ex: "Bill suggested raising our hands if we have something to say. Is that O.K. with everyone?"). Once you have added five or six good rules, check to see if anyone else has other suggestions.
- 5. Finalize the ground rules:** Once you have finished, ask the group if they agree with these ground rules and are willing to follow them. Make sure you get folks to actually say "yes" out loud. It makes a difference! Create a final list of the ground rules and provide a copy to each group member as a document, or you can post the ground rules during your meetings.

## Participant Handout: Ground Rules

During the next weeks we will be working together as a group to learn about [insert topic area] and to make some changes to apply this information to our lives. Listening to what others in the group are doing to make these changes and discussing the challenges and how to address them is an important part of the program. Setting some basic ground rules for how we will engage with one another in our group discussions is important. These give boundaries for people to operate within. They help with the flow and pace of the discussions. They help us value one another and help people to be more comfortable sharing their personal experiences.

The following is a short list of some basic principles that our group can follow to help our work together. You may think of other rules that should apply to the group.

**Be transparent:** We're going to encourage everyone to share from their personal experience — to let their walls down so we can know each other better. This takes trust, which will come easier for some than for others. Having said that, we will respect everyone's boundaries.

**Keep group discussions confidential:** What is shared in the group stays in the group. We will hold things shared in the group confidential unless given permission to share these things with people outside the group.

**Show respect:** Listening to each other and considering each other's ideas and opinions is an important part of this program. Let's value one another by really listening to what is being shared with an open mind.

**No cross-talk:** Be considerate of others as they are sharing. Do not have side conversations.

**Offer advice without trying to fix:** Sharing what has worked for us is very valuable. We will recognize when offering advice that what has worked for one person might not be the best fit for someone else.

## Tips for Getting Off to a Good Start

There are a few basic steps you can take to establish good rapport with and between the people attending your program right from the start.

- **Start the meeting on time.** Starting your meetings on time shows respect for those who made it on time and prevents them from feeling cheated for their effort. Don't stop your process when latecomers arrive. Wait until you take a break to review content they may have missed.
- **Welcome everyone.** Be sure to welcome everyone and thank them for coming. Avoid commenting on a low group turnout, as this devalues those who did come.
- **Make introductions.** There are a lot of ways for people to introduce themselves. The kind of introduction you choose will depend on the kind of program you are starting, the size of the group, and what information would be useful to share. Several examples are given below.

## Facilitator Instructions: Introductions and Icebreakers

- Have participants introduce themselves and answer a question relevant to the purpose of the group (ex: What comes to mind when you think about losing weight? Why did you register for this class? etc.).
- Have participants break into pairs and provide three facts about themselves to each other. Then have the pairs introduce each other to the group.
- Have each participant write two true statements and one false statement about themselves. Each participant reads their statements and the group guesses which statement is false.
- Create a scavenger list of personal characteristics and experiences (ex: speaks a second language, has traveled to Asia, plants a vegetable garden, etc.). Give the group a defined period of time to mingle and find people in the group with each characteristic. Provide a prize to the person who finds the most.
- If you want to increase physical activity and reduce sedentary time, most of these icebreakers can be done actively. For example:
  - Have all members stand in a circle for active/standing musical chairs. Have one empty space ("chair") in the circle. The facilitator introduces a topic such as, "Why did you join the class?" One person starts in the middle, "I joined this class to learn more about financial health," or "I joined this class because I hate vegetables as much as my kids do." Anyone standing around the circle who joined for the same reason has to find a new spot in the circle. As there is only one open spot, people will have to scramble for empty spaces as they become available. The last person to move will not have a spot and has to go in the middle to answer a new topic. **All ages** enjoy this activity if the facilitator introduces it with enthusiasm. Likely the group will diverge from the topic and make statements such as "I am wearing gold jewelry" or "I love to garden." This is encouraged in a group-dynamics-based intervention as you are getting to know people **outside** of the topic area.

## Strategies for Building Self-Efficacy

To establish new behaviors successfully, it is important that individuals believe that they can do those behaviors. This is called “self-efficacy.” Put another way, self-efficacy is confidence in the ability to exert control over one’s motivation, behavior, and social environment. Education programs generally provide the information and tools that a person needs to conduct a behavior, but a good facilitator will go a step further and help the participant apply these tools consistently and effectively. This can be accomplished through a process of **goal setting**, **action planning**, and **positive thinking**.

### Goal Setting and Action Planning\*

#### Facilitator Instructions: Goal Setting and Action Planning

Introduction: One of the most important skills for behavior change is goal setting. Without a goal, most people are not able to see and get to where they want to be. Goals usually need to be broken into achievable action steps or they feel overwhelming. Action planning helps to create these manageable steps.

1. **Identify a realistic goal.** Have participants identify an important and realistic behavior goal that they can accomplish in six months. Have them write it on the Action Plan Tool. Be sure it is realistic and **something they** want to accomplish.
2. **Make a plan.** Identify three actions they can take over the next week that will help them move toward their goal.
  - Ask the person, “What will you do this week?” It is important that the activity come from the participant and not from you as the facilitator. This activity does not have to be something covered today or in a particular workshop — just something that the participant wants to do to change behavior. Each person should verbalize the behavior they conduct, starting with, “I will ... .” Do not let anyone say, “I will try ... .” If they do, instruct them to choose a behavior that they have confidence they will be able to do, and rephrase the statement.
  - Suggest that they not try to accomplish too much at once. Small successful steps are important to changing a behavior or set routine. Have participants write the three actions on the Action Plan Tool.
  - This is the most difficult and important part of making an action plan. Deciding what to accomplish is worthless without making a plan. The plan should contain all of the following specific elements and answer the following questions on the Action Plan Tool for the three specific actions.
    - **What you will do?** Exactly what is the participant going to do (ex: how far will you walk? how will you eat less? what relaxation techniques will you practice?)? Make sure this is an action and not the result of an action (ex: deep breathing exercises).
    - **Where will you do it?** Be specific as to where you will do this action step (ex: in bed).
    - **When will you do this?** Again, this must be specific (ex: before lunch, in the shower, when I come home from work, or right after turning off the light).
    - **How long will you do it?** (ex: 10 minutes).
    - **How often will the activity be done?** For example, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Many people tend to say every day. In making an action plan, the most important thing is to succeed. Therefore, it is better to commit to do something four times a week and exceed the commitment by actually doing it five times than to commit to do something every day and fail by only doing it six days. To ensure success, we usually encourage people to commit to do something three to five days a week. Remember that success and self-efficacy are as important as doing the behavior.
    - **Confidence level.** Ask participants, “On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 = no confidence and 10 = total confidence, how confident are you that you will complete the entire action plan?” If their confidence is below a 7, they might want to look at the barriers and consider reworking their action plan so that it is something they are confident they can accomplish. Small steps with success are very important.

\* Adapted with permission from the “Prevent T2 Lifestyle Change Program” – Lifestyle Coach Training and Participant Guides (Gruss et al. 2016), and the “Stanford Diabetes Self-Management Program Master Trainer’s Manual” (Stanford Patient Education Research Center 2012).

- 3. Check the action plan.** Once the action plan is complete, ask the participant, “On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all confident and 10 being totally confident, how confident or how sure are you that you will [repeat the participant’s action plan verbatim]?”

If the answer is 7 or above, this is probably a realistic action plan. If the answer is below 7, the action plan should be reassessed. Ask the participant, “What makes you uncertain? What barriers do you have?” Then discuss the problems. Ask other participants to offer solutions. As facilitator, **you** should offer solutions **last**. Ask the person to listen to but not remark on the suggestions. Once the problem-solving is completed, have the participant restate the action plan and return to step 3, checking the action plan.

**NOTE:** This planning process may seem cumbersome and time-consuming; however, it does work and is well worth the effort.

The first time you make action plans with a group, plan two to three minutes per person. Making an action plan is a learned skill.

Your participant will soon be saying, “I will \_\_\_\_\_ four times this week before lunch, and I have a confidence level of 8 that I can do this.” Thus, after two or three sessions, making an action plan should take less than a minute per participant.

- 4. Follow up on the action plan.** Equally important to developing an action plan to reach behavior goals is to assess the participant’s success at implementing the action plan and its effectiveness at moving them toward their goal. Designate a time during which participants review and evaluate their action plans. For group programs, engaging the group in a discussion of member challenges to solicit support and suggestions can be helpful and builds group cohesion. Have participants revise their action plans to experience success and build self-efficacy.

### **Facilitator Script: Goal Setting and Action Planning**

Each of you will develop an Action Plan to help you stay on track in reaching your goals.

1. Think about a goal that you would like to accomplish in the next six months to improve your health and/or make you feel better (ex: sleep more restfully)?
  - It should be something YOU want to achieve — not what someone else wants you to do or that you think you should do.
  - It should be achievable — something you feel you can do in six months.
2. Write three actions you can take over the next week to move toward your goal.

#### **REMEMBER:**

- **Be realistic.** Plan actions that are realistic for you.
- **Make it doable.** Plan small changes. Over time, these changes will add up.
- **Be specific.** Plan your actions in detail. Answer the following questions on the template for 3 specific actions:
  - What you will do (ex: deep breathing exercises).
  - Where you will do it (ex: in bed).
  - When you will do it (ex: right after turning off the light).
  - How long you will do it (ex: 10 minutes).
  - How often you will do it (ex: M, W, F).

— Ask yourself, “On a scale of 0 = no confidence to 10 = total confidence, how confident am I that I will complete the entire action plan?” If you rate your confidence below a 7, you might want to look at the barriers and consider reworking your action plan so that it is something you are confident you can accomplish. Small steps with success are very important.

- **Be flexible.** Review your action plan often. Look for ways to cope with challenges. If your action plan isn't working for you, revise it.
- **Focus on behaviors.** For example instance, you can sleep more restfully by focusing on your actions, such as limiting light-stimulating screens before bedtime, doing meditation or deep breathing exercises to rest your body and mind, and limiting tobacco, alcohol, and/or caffeine.
- **Make it enjoyable.** Change doesn't have to be painful. Find activities and healthy foods you enjoy.



## Participant Handout: Action Plan Tool

- Identify and write a behavior change goal that you want to accomplish in the next six months.
- Make an action plan to help you achieve your goal. Write three actions you will take to reach it. Then check off each action you complete.

My long-term goal is to: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Action 1

Done

What I will do \_\_\_\_\_

Where I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

When I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

How long I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

How often I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

My confidence level (0 = no confidence to 10 = very confident) \_\_\_\_\_

Challenges I might face \_\_\_\_\_

Ways to cope with these challenges \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Action 2**

**Done**

What I will do \_\_\_\_\_

Where I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

When I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

How long I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

How often I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

My confidence level (0 = no confidence to 10 = very confident) \_\_\_\_\_

Challenges I might face \_\_\_\_\_

Ways to cope with these challenges \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Action 3**

**Done**

What I will do \_\_\_\_\_

Where I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

When I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

How long I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

How often I will do it \_\_\_\_\_

My confidence level (0 = no confidence to 10 = very confident) \_\_\_\_\_

Challenges I might face \_\_\_\_\_

Ways to cope with these challenges \_\_\_\_\_

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## Positive Thinking\*

**Introduction:** For people to make changes in their behavior, they must believe that they can make the change. For some people, negative “self-talk” is a real barrier to believing that change is possible. This negative thinking can be changed by making people aware of their negative thought processes and practice changing these into positives.

### Facilitator Instructions

Script for describing the steps toward positive thinking:

#### 1. Introduction to be discussed with participants.

- All of us, whether we realize it or not, have things we habitually say to ourselves. Sometimes, we may even say these thoughts out loud.
- We also know that our mind can have a powerful effect on the way we feel. Therefore, when our thoughts are overly negative, they can lead us to feel and act negatively.
- We can develop a negative attitude or outlook that can create low self-esteem, depression, and inactivity. These feelings make us want to give up and can make our symptoms and health worse. For example, if the first thing we think about when we start to increase our physical activity is how bad it’s going to be, then every step is going to feel like a challenge and will be hard to do.
- Learning to change this negative thinking to more positive thinking is an important tool for managing our health and related problems, both on a daily basis and over the long run.
- Here are some examples of the same message presented in a negative way and then in a more positive way:
  - **Negative:** “I just can’t exercise regularly. I don’t have time, and it’s boring.”
  - **Positive:** “I care about my health, and it is important to me that I achieve a healthy weight. I will make small changes like taking a walk during my lunch break and asking a friend to go with me. If a friend is not available, I can listen to my favorite music.”
  - **Negative:** “I can’t lose weight. I’ve tried before, and it didn’t work out.”
  - **Positive:** “Losing weight is an important goal for me. I will take small steps every day to move toward that goal. I will ask my family and friends for their support and will use some new tools and techniques this time.”
- Learning to replace or change our negative thoughts and attitudes for more positive ones can help us to better manage our health condition and lives.

#### 2. Instructions for group discussion/practice.

- Ask participants for two or three examples of negative things they say to themselves or hear others say about themselves.
- **Be prepared to give personal examples, if needed, or use the following examples to get started.** List these on a flip chart or white board.

\* Adapted with permission from “Stanford Diabetes Self-Management Program Master Trainer’s Manual” (Stanford Patient Education Research Center 2012).

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- Examples of negative thoughts. **Use only if none are offered by participants.**
  - “I’m too tired to exercise.”
  - “Doing a food diary is too difficult. I am too busy to do that.”
  - “Eating healthy doesn’t taste good.”
  - “I’ll never be able to quit smoking. It wouldn’t make any difference at my age.”
- Next, referring to the list, ask participants to give some suggestions for changing or replacing the negative statements with positive ones.
- **Be prepared to give personal examples, if needed, or use the following examples to get started.**
- Examples of positive thoughts. **Use only if none are offered by participants.**
  - “I must have gotten a lot done yesterday if I’m tired today.”
  - “I can take a couple of minutes after each meal to track my food/snack intake. I can use an app to make it easier on the go.”
  - “I can try new things and be satisfied.”
  - “I can cut down on eating sweets a little bit each day.”
- **Steps toward positive thinking:** Briefly outline the steps for developing positive thinking.
  - **Write down self-defeating thoughts** (or irrational beliefs).
  - **Change them to rational and helpful thoughts about yourself.**
  - **Rehearse** (mentally).
  - **Practice** (in real situations).
  - **Use positive reinforcements** (like humor to help make situations less stressful or surround yourself with positive people who support you and can provide balanced feedback and positive support).
  - **Be patient** (it takes time for new patterns of thinking to become automatic).

### 3. Debrief/summarize with participants.

- Sometimes, especially at the beginning, it is difficult to change or directly translate these negative thoughts into positive ones. If this happens, it is helpful to have some ready-made positive statements or affirmations on hand to use, especially for those times we are really down.
- **For example**, have something good to say about yourself or the situation like,
  - “I am an able person.”
  - “I feel better about myself every day.”
  - “Life is an adventure; there is always something new around the corner.”
- Changing the way we think is like changing **any habit**. At first, we must be deliberate and pay close attention. With practice, though, both positive thinking and a more positive outlook on life will become automatic responses, like learning to dance or drive a car. **Be patient.**
- If after rehearsing and practicing for a number of weeks, positive thinking still doesn’t seem to be working for you, don’t worry. Try another technique from this workshop or consult with any member of your healthcare team; there may be better options for you.
- For homework, watch for negative thoughts this next week (either in yourselves or others). Report back on how you did in changing these to more positive thoughts.

**Participant Handout: Steps to Positive Thinking**

1. Write down thoughts that are self-defeating as they relate to your behavior goal.

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2. Change the self-defeating thoughts to rational and helpful thoughts.

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3. Now, rehearse the new thoughts in your mind.

4. Practice: Think of specific situations where you will be able to practice the new thoughts.

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5. Use positive reinforcements: Identify ways you can reinforce your new way of thinking (actions, people, etc.).

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6. Be patient as you establish these new thinking habits.

## Facilitation Techniques

Effective individual and group facilitation that results in lasting behavior change requires skill at drawing out information from the personal experiences and perspectives of program participants. Guiding individuals to evaluate their barriers and facilitators to behavior change and managing the group such that they are able to help each other in this process is an art. There are several facilitation techniques that, if mastered, can increase a facilitator's ability to accomplish this, including **motivational interviewing**, **brainstorming**, and **problem-solving**.

### Motivational Interviewing

#### Facilitator Instructions

Motivational interviewing is a technique for addressing the common problem of indecision about change. It has been used with a variety of populations and behavior change issues and can be applied to individuals and groups. MI is a person-centered approach designed to increase motivation and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting the individual's own reasons for change. It is grounded in three principles:

1. **Autonomy** – Individuals have the right and ability to make their own choices. Facilitators relinquish the role of expert and actively involve the individual/group in cooperative problem-solving.
2. **Collaboration** – It is a collaborative, person-centered partnership between the facilitator and individual. The process honors a person's right and ability to determine his or her own behavior and downplays the expert-pupil paradigm.
3. **Evocation** – MI seeks to call forth a person's own motivation, inner resources, expertise, and commitment. The individual is guided to look inward to understand what is going on and the resources they have to change.

Guiding individuals and groups from indecision to action during programs designed to affect behavior change involves **four sequential processes** that utilize MI techniques. This series of processes may be repeated several times during programs that involve multiple changes to reach an end goal, like weight loss programs.

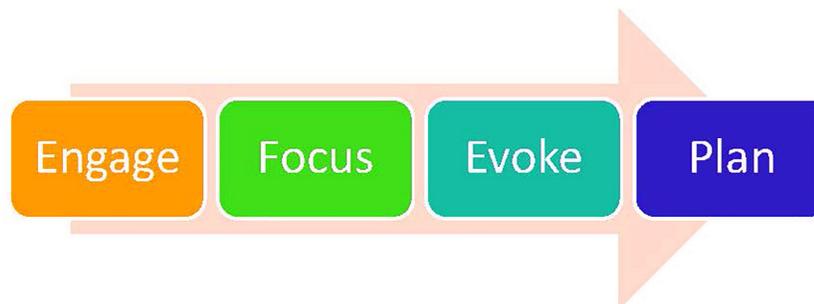


Figure 1 shows a diagram of the motivational interviewing process.

1. **Engage** to establish an atmosphere of trust. An atmosphere of trust is important to the collaborative process of moving toward behavior change. Setting the stage for your group programs by selecting a comfortable and accessible location, making participants feel welcome, providing refreshments, and setting ground rules is an important first step to establishing trust. In addition, participants need to feel that they are understood. To accomplish this, facilitators need to lead discussions that encourage open conversation, listen attentively, and be able to accurately reflect back the thoughts and feelings expressed by the individual or group.

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2. **Focus** the direction of the program or desired behavior change. Focusing involves setting the direction for the behavior change that takes into consideration the goals and priorities of the individuals as well as the facilitator. This process allows the individuals to explore and identify their feelings about changing their behavior and sets the stage for setting goals and action plans.
3. **Evoke** the participant's own motivation to make a behavior change. The facilitator can actively elicit what is known as "change talk." This is speech that favors movement in the direction of change. (Examples of change talk: "I want ...," "I can ...," "I will ...," "The reasons are ...") Facilitators should reinforce change talk, because the more a person uses change talk, the more he or she reinforces the behavior. Examples of questions that facilitators can use to encourage change talk include:
  - Why do you want to make a change?
  - What are the reasons to change?
  - What would some of the benefits be?
  - How might you go about making a change?
4. **Plan** for the change. After engaging participants in a trusting relationship, focusing on a particular change topic, and eliciting change talk that discusses reasons for the change and ways to make the change, the stage is set to develop a change plan. The plan should be something the participant generates, agrees to, and is willing to do. It should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timed.

Four motivational interviewing skills known as OARS (open questions, affirmation, reflection, summaries) are used during these processes. These skills can be learned and improved with practice:

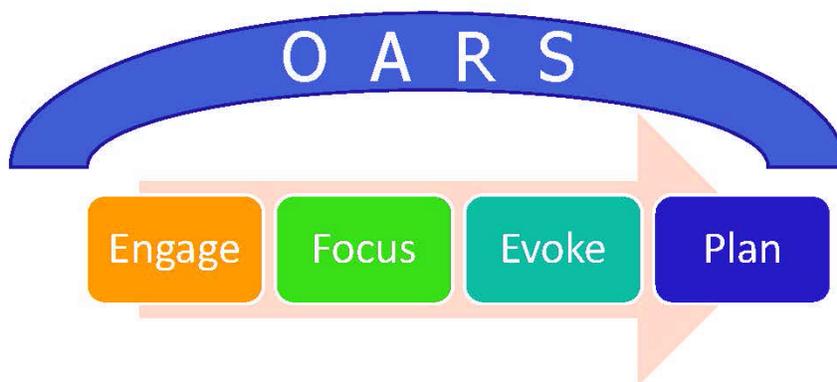


Figure 2 shows a diagram of the interviewing skills used in the interviewing process: open questions, affirmation, reflection, summaries (OARS).

### Skill 1: Open questions

Motivational interviewing requires open conversations. The way you phrase your questions as a facilitator can either encourage or discourage conversation. As a general rule, use open-ended questions and avoid close-ended questions to stimulate people to express their thoughts and ideas and to gain an understanding of their knowledge and readiness to make changes.

#### Close-Ended Question

- Do you want to start exercising?
- Have you dieted before?
- Do you know how to make a budget?
- Are you open to using organic gardening techniques?

#### Open-Ended Alternative

- How do you feel about exercise?
- What has been your experience with diets?
- What do you do to control your spending?
- What are your thoughts about organic gardening?

## Skill 2: Affirmation

Affirmations are statements about anything positive that the facilitator notices about the participant. These statements can be in regard to attempts at change, past successes or accomplishments, or anything that highlights positive actions or thoughts. The affirmative statements give participants a sense of acceptance and increase self-confidence, which helps move the person toward behavior change. Use them often to acknowledge the efforts people are making and to maintain a sense of optimism within the individual and group.

Examples of affirmations:

- You really want to increase your physical activity.
- You have been very successful in the past at losing weight.
- It took a lot of effort to come to today's meeting, even though you knew you had not reached your goal.

## Skill 3: Reflection

Reflective listening is a very important skill in MI. Reflection is simply understanding what a participant is thinking and feeling, and then saying it back to them. This requires **active listening** on the part of the facilitator. Active listening involves having focused attention on what is being said, demonstrating attentive expressions and body language, and asking probing questions to assure accurate understanding. We use reflections to convey empathy and understanding and to allow people to hear and reflect on their own thoughts and statements.

Reflections are statements, not questions. Here are some examples:

<b>Participant statement</b>	<b>Facilitator reflection</b>
I've tried to exercise before and I don't have the time.	So you would like to exercise, but don't feel that you have enough time.
I know that I eat too much sugar, but I really like something sweet in the afternoon.	It seems that you think you should decrease the amount of sugar you eat, but it is hard because you like to eat sweets in the afternoon.
I know that using organic insecticides is better for the environment, but I heard they don't do a good job.	You recognize that organic methods for controlling pests is better for the environment, but you think they will not stop pest damage to your plants.

## Skill 4: Summaries

Summaries are long, reflective statements about more than one statement made by the group or individual. After a period of discussion about a topic, the facilitator summarizes the various ideas that have been expressed. This is the opportunity for the facilitator to become strategic and guide the individual or group toward behavior change by selectively summarizing the individual's/group's own reasons for change. It also affords the opportunity for clarification and ensures that the information was understood appropriately. A well-developed summary can set the individuals and groups up for developing goals and action plans.

## Brainstorming

### Facilitator Instructions

Brainstorming is a way to generate ideas and explore solutions to problems by holding a group discussion and collecting ideas that are arrived at through **unrestrained and spontaneous** participation in discussion. In addition to being a tool to get people to think outside the box, brainstorming brings people together into the creative process and increases the social nature of the program. If done well, it can be a bonding experience that can get people thinking and communicating with each other about topics relevant to the next weeks or months that they will be together.

A productive brainstorming session will not happen without facilitation. It is an active process that needs to be thoughtfully executed. Good facilitation requires good listening skills, sharp group awareness, and the ability to help people express their ideas. The facilitator needs to manage documenting the ideas as people express them, prevent one individual or group of individuals from dominating, ensure that everyone participates and has the chance to express their ideas, and come up with a useful summary of all the ideas at the end.

Three common problems facilitators should look out for during brainstorming are (1) a tendency to focus on the first couple of ideas expressed by a group, (2) inhibiting the expression of ideas by participants by overemphasizing “good” ideas, and (3) allowing only a few people to do most of the talking (called “anchoring”). Brainstorming can take place one-on-one, in small or large groups, as a single event, or as a small part of a larger program. Following are descriptions of several ways to conduct a brainstorming session and tips for facilitating an effective session.

### Types of Brainstorming Sessions

1. **Group brainstorming:** This is the most common way to conduct a brainstorming session. Attendees are together in a comfortable room with the facilitator who introduces the topic, leads the discussion, and documents the ideas on a white board or by other means.
2. **Brain writing:** In this technique, the facilitator shares the topic and asks participants to write down their ideas individually. This avoids the anchoring problem and ensures that everyone provides information.
3. **Rapid ideation:** This is a time-limited brainstorming technique. The facilitator introduces the topic and then gives participants a specific amount of time to write down as many thoughts around the topic as they can within that time. Participants can write on paper, sticky notes, a white board, or other medium that works for the situation.
4. **Round robin brainstorming:** Have the group form a circle. Go around the circle one by one, and each person provides an idea. No discussion of ideas occurs until everyone has shared.

### Tips for Facilitators of Brainstorming Sessions

- ✓ Clearly define the subject of the brainstorming for participants at the outset.
- ✓ Go for quantity over quality. Let everyone know that all ideas are needed and that they do not need to be fully developed.
- ✓ Do not comment or allow anyone else to comment on the ideas (positively or negatively). The person considering the ideas needs to be the judge of what will work for them on any given day and also knows what else they have tried.
- ✓ Clarification and discussion of ideas should not be obtained until after the brainstorming session to avoid anchoring.
- ✓ Give equal time for participation to everyone in the group.
- ✓ If there is silence, W ... A ... I ... T!
- ✓ Do not call on people.
- ✓ Write down the ideas in the contributor’s words. If you want to shorten or rephrase them, ask permission first.

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## Problem-Solving\*

People who are setting goals and making action plans to change their behavior will often experience problems completing their plans and reaching their behavior goals. Learning to effectively identify and address these problems is important to changing behaviors. Problem-solving is a behavioral process that identifies a variety of responses for dealing with the problem and the selection of the most effective response for the particular individual. Individuals who learn to problem-solve are able to effectively respond to challenges to their behavior goals.

### Facilitator Instructions

Coping with challenges and problem-solving steps script:

- 1. Introduction:** Explain that this activity allows participants to share their experiences with their peers, helping them to identify possible solutions to problems and identify ways to cope with challenges they may encounter, as well as to monitor their progress in meeting their weekly action plans and long-term goals.
  - 2. Instructions for action plan progress reporting and problem-solving support:** Ask for a volunteer who would like to review his or her action plan from the past week. Explain that each person will be asked to do these three things in two to three minutes:
    - a. First, state his or her action plan for the past week.
    - b. Second, describe the extent to which the action plan was accomplished.
    - c. Third, describe any problems that prevented them from completing the action plan. If there were no problems, this step can be skipped.
- If someone met obstacles and adjusted their action plan successfully, they should be complimented for being a good problem-solver. (Do not problem-solve with them, but move on to the next person.)
  - If there were problems, first check if the individual has any ideas for how to solve them. Did he or she try a solution?
  - Ask the individual if he or she would like to hear suggestions from the group on how to solve the problem. If that person declines, move to the next. Otherwise, follow the instructions below.
  - Ask by show of hands if anyone else in the group ever had a similar problem (not necessarily related to their action plan).
  - Ask the group to **brainstorm possible solutions**.
  - Write these on the board or flip chart or suggest that the person with the problem write them down.
  - The group leaders can also offer suggestions, but **not until** others in the group have participated. (Remind the group that brainstorming behavior change suggestions for someone else to consider should be given without comment or discussion.)

*\*Adapted with permission from "Stanford Diabetes Self-Management Program Master Trainer's Manual" (Stanford Patient Education Research Center 2012).*

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- Ask the original participant if he or she could use any of the strategies or ways to cope that were suggested, and if so, which one(s).
- Recommend that the participant make a note of the helpful suggestion. If no suggestions seem workable, move on and address the problem with the individual during the break. **Do not spend a lot of time on any one person. After three “yes, buts,” go on to the next person.**

### **3. Review of handout: Coping With Challenges and Problem-Solving Steps.**

- Problem-solving is one of the most important tools in self-management, behavior change, and in life, so let’s take a look at the steps we can use to help solve problems.
- Refer back to one of the problems just discussed or that participants mentioned when they shared what they learned about their eating habits.
- If no one had a problem, use an example of your own as you go through the steps on the participant handout.

**Participant Handout: Coping With Challenges and Problem-Solving Steps\***

**1. Identify the problem or challenge.** This is the most difficult and most important step. For example:

Challenge: I do not feel capable of eating healthy at social gatherings.

**2. List ideas** to solve the problem or ways to cope with the challenge. You might get additional ideas from others through brainstorming. For example:

- a. Plan social outings that don't involve food and eating, maybe go walking with friends instead.
- b. Bring your own food to a social gathering.
- c. Choose the healthiest choices of food at the buffet and then move away from the table.
- d. Eat before going so you are not hungry and won't eat too much.

**3. Select one idea** or coping strategy to try. For example, plan to go walking with friends instead of going to lunch. This way you are socializing and getting some physical activity without having to worry about being tempted to eat too much.

**4. Assess the results.** Try the strategy for a period of time. If the problem is solved — great! If not ...

**5. Substitute another idea.** Review your original list of ideas or think of others based on your experience. Try that strategy and continue assessing the results and substituting ideas until you've used all the ideas on your list. If the problem still isn't solved ...

**6. Utilize other resources.** Ask friends, family, and professionals for ideas if your solutions did not work, then go back to No. 3, and continue until you have used all the items on your new list. If your problem is still not solved ...

**7. Accept that the problem or challenge may not be solvable now.** You can revisit it at another time. Do not use so much energy on a tough problem that you do not have enough energy to address problems that have solutions.

**Table 1 provides a list of examples for coping with diet and exercise challenges.**

Challenge	Ways to cope
<b>Eating a Healthy Diet</b>	
<b>Eating healthy costs too much.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Use coupons. <input type="checkbox"/> Buy in bulk. <input type="checkbox"/> Buy frozen veggies and fruits. <input type="checkbox"/> Buy veggies and fruits in season. <input type="checkbox"/> Other ideas _____

*\*Adapted with permission from "Stanford Diabetes Self-Management Program Master Trainer's Manual" (Stanford Patient Education Research Center 2012).*

**Table 1 provides a list of examples for coping with diet and exercise challenges. (cont.)**

<p><b>Cooking meals takes too much time.</b></p>	<p>___ Get organized by planning meals.          ___ Shop on the weekend.          ___ Cook meals on the weekend and freeze for later.          ___ Use a shopping list to make sure you get everything you need.          ___ Buy healthy convenience items like prewashed salad.          ___ Use recipes for fast, healthy meals.          ___ Learn to use a crockpot.          ___ Other ideas _____</p>
<p><b>I don't like the taste of healthy food.</b></p>	<p>___ Change favorite dishes to make them healthier.          ___ Look up new recipes with your favorite foods.          ___ Experiment with herbs and spices to find flavors you like, and use them when you cook.          ___ Try new cooking styles that reduce calories but add flavor, like grilling, roasting, broiling.          ___ Other ideas _____</p>
<p><b>Being More Physically Active</b></p>	
<p><b>I don't have time.</b></p>	<p>___ Break the 150 minutes into smaller chunks.          ___ Take the stairs instead of the elevator.          ___ Do household chores briskly (sweeping, washing car, etc.).          ___ Walk during your lunch break.          ___ Join an exercise program.          ___ Join a gym that's nearby or on your way home from work.          ___ Other ideas _____</p>
<p><b>I don't have child care.</b></p>	<p>___ Be active with your kids.          ___ Use the gym's child care.          ___ Ask friends or family to help.          ___ Other ideas _____</p>
<p><b>My area is not safe.</b></p>	<p>___ Work out in your home.          ___ Join a gym or community center.          ___ Other ideas _____</p>
<p><b>It costs too much.</b></p>	<p>___ Do free activities like walking.          ___ Use public facilities like a school track, tennis courts, etc.          ___ Look for free or low-cost classes at the city library or community center.          ___ Other ideas _____</p>
<p><b>I feel embarrassed.</b></p>	<p>___ Work out with a friend.          ___ Participate in a program specifically for people like you.          ___ Work out in your home.          ___ Other ideas _____</p>

## Group Dynamics

Many behavior change programs are delivered to a group of people. The individuals in the group may never have the opportunity to get to know each other if the program is delivered lecture style, where people are being “talked at” rather than engaging with the facilitator and each other. Small group interventions conducted using a group-dynamics-based approach purposefully encourage group interaction in recognition that “the group” can influence individual-level behavior (e.g., through social support, friendly competition, and creating coping strategies). Another major benefit of a group-dynamics-based approach is that you can change social norms around the targeted behavior.

If you are working in a particular community, worksite, or family (i.e., “existing social ecology”), individuals who participate in the program might still know each other and can continue to support each other in their journey to health. Working with an existing social ecology is based on the Social Ecological Model, which recognizes that individuals live within families and larger communities that influence their behavior.

## Applying Principles of Group Dynamics

Principles of group dynamics can be applied in four areas to influence the way the group works together and their ability to support individual behavior change and behavioral norms. These include group structure, group environment, group processes, and group cohesion.

### Group Structure

Purposefully creating a structure for the group can set the stage for group cohesion.

- **Roles** – Group members can be assigned explicit roles in the group, such as attendance tracker, scribe for goal setting and conversation, or being responsible for a healthy snack, etc. Roles can also be more organic like “class clown” or a “natural leader” who tends to step up when you need a volunteer.
- **Norms** – As stated earlier in the Ground Rules discussion section, it is important for the group to be involved in determining norms for how the group operates. These norms can also include being on time, setting up the room, and grabbing equipment. It is always best when these norms are discussed for clarity.
- **Status** – Individuals have status within the forming group. Some members may have more longevity or some may be new to the group — this longevity, or lack thereof, creates a status within the group. As the facilitator, consider how this plays a role in someone’s engagement in discussion or activities (their confidence and comfort).
- **Proximity** – This principle is related to how close members are both geographically and physically. Do people sit in a specific location? Are sessions virtual or in person? Do group members live and work near each other? Consider how to structure these factors to encourage group engagement.

### Group Environment

- **Distinctiveness** – The idea behind group distinctiveness is that you are establishing a team/group. This can be accomplished by having a team name or T-shirt color while in class — representation that we are “a group.”
- **Group size** – Consider group size when recruiting for your program. What resources do you need to allocate? What is the best size to allow equal opportunity for discussion? Perhaps you have a group of 20 people and divide them into five standing teams.

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- **Location** – Considerations for location were discussed in the “Climate and Environment” section of this toolkit. These considerations are similar in a group-dynamics-based intervention.

## Group Processes

- **Collective goals** – This is one of the most important principles of group-dynamics-based programs. There are a number of ways to set group goals. You can combine each individual’s goal and create a “team” goal (summative) or discuss similarities and differences between individual goals and create a related but separate team goal (complementary). Examples include:
  - **Summative:** In a team with five members, each individual aims to increase aerobic activity by 10 minutes each week for the eight-week program. The team goal is for each individual to meet their goal for a total increase of 400 minutes of aerobic activity by the end of the program.
  - **Complementary:** The team goal is for members to meet every week for a 1-mile walk in the park. This way each participant works toward his or her individual exercise goal, but the team members have a complementary activity goal that unites them.
  - **Cooperation and competition:** Friendly competition is the strongest predictor of group cohesion. You can engage the group in friendly competition using feedback loops (leaderboards for successes), as well as relays and small-group challenges.
  - **Interaction and communication:** Most of the strategies for group cohesion involve *interacting*, but this principle concentrates on group members discussing their goals and successes as well as coming up with strategies to overcome barriers (as described in action planning and problem-solving). It is recommended that facilitators create opportunities for social engagement as well, such as time to talk before or after program (perhaps over coffee, snacks, etc.). Groups that feel that they have more in common than the behavior change program are more likely to attend and succeed.
  - **Collective-efficacy:** We learned earlier that self-efficacy is a person’s confidence that they can engage in a particular behavior. Here, we aim to facilitate positive perceptions that the group can achieve their tasks and goals.

## Group Cohesion

This is the sense that the group can stay together and remain united in pursuit of its common goal. This usually results when people feel connected around the actual task (behavior change) as well as connected socially. Groups with greater cohesion have greater program adherence (attendance) and stronger long-term outcomes. The principles of structure, environment, and appropriately employed processes ultimately lead to a sense of cohesion.

The guide that follows (table 2) provides specific activities and strategies that align with these principles. These examples are specific from a community-based exercise program but can be adapted for a number of behavior change interventions.

**Table 2. Group dynamics session by session guide.**

Activity	Strategy Example	WHY?	Suggested group activity from the PA leadership team
Introduction to program and group members	Facilitate/guide interaction and communication	Everyone may or may not know each other. The game acts as an ice-breaker and incorporates PA.	<p>A. Name game: Active name game where each person goes in a circle saying their name and a corresponding exercise (ex: Jumping Jack Jane), everyone repeats while doing exercise and then the next person goes.</p> <p>B. Same concept but if the group is too large, have each individual introduce themselves with a corresponding exercise, and then have the next person go (without repeating).</p>
Introduce group members again and come up with a group name	Facilitate/guide interaction, communication, group distinctiveness	Establish positive group standards: The class communicates and supports one another for good class attendance. Encourages members to feel as if they belong to the group.	<p>A. Phone tree: Ask people to share their name and best contact method with the person next to them. If that person misses a class, the other is responsible for reaching out (accountability and reliability of class attendance).</p> <p>B. Group name: (ex: Aged to Perfection) or colored t-shirts on different days.</p>
Collaborative group goal setting	Establish group standards that contribute to team performance	Provide opportunities for group social interactions (offers time and space for group interaction)	<p>A. Group goal: 80% attendance for 90% of the class or “walk VA” (30 minutes of exercise, in and out of the session, is the equivalent to 1 mile).</p> <p>B. Group goal: Accumulate ____ minutes of additional PA as a group.</p>
Motivators of healthy lifestyle choices	Encourage a positive group environment that may influence attendance	Participants learn about each other on a more personal level	<p>A. Activity timeline: Discuss activities they remember doing as a youth; share some of their motivators to PA.</p> <p>B. Talk about fruits and vegetables they enjoy growing or eating in certain seasons.</p>
Plans for coping with physical activity barriers	Provide opportunities to share challenges and barriers to gain collective similarity and support	Helps participants learn relapse prevention. How can they make healthy habits the ‘norm?’	<p>A. Example: Share methods for coping with barriers (such as establishing routines, getting to bed earlier, etc.).</p> <p>B. Name of a list of barriers that people face.</p> <p>C. How have they overcome barriers in the past?</p>

**Table 2. Group dynamics session by session guide. (cont.)**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategy example</b>	<b>WHY?</b>	<b>Suggested group activity from the PA leadership team</b>
Share resources for physical activity such as community facilities, friends, etc.	Set up a relay in small groups; this encourages team building	Creates a supportive atmosphere where participants are interacting through active facilitation	<p>A. Open discussion: Discuss different ways participants utilize community resources to get PA.</p> <p>B. List examples of exercises that can be done in community parks: (ex: use picnic tables for seated knee extensions, balance for leg curls and wide-leg squats, etc.).</p>
Show how dietary behaviors influence physical activity participation	Provision of group role and incorporation of problem-solving	Educational component for the importance of a healthy diet and PA	<p>A. Voluntary sharing of favorite foods among group members while exercising.</p> <p>B. Provide examples of pre-workout snacks to “fuel” the body.</p> <p>C. Pass out the MyPlate handout for older adults (provided in manual).</p>
Social integration and interaction outside of “exercise”	Structured social interactions within and outside of the formal class	Rewards and acknowledges healthy behaviors (class attendance, positive attitudes, etc.)	<p>A. Potluck: Midway point success potluck with healthy snacks.</p> <p>B. If participants are coming from work or have obligations after class, another option is for instructor to provide a healthy snack for participants, along with the recipe.</p> <p>C. Ask participants to bring a healthy recipe for a recipe exchange; discuss favorite healthy recipes during exercises. Ask participants to email their favorite healthy snack/meal recipes to instructor; instructor prints and brings them to next class.</p>
Leadership roles to build confidence	Establishes “roles” among the members willing to step up and be leaders	Builds responsibility, accountability, and reliability among group members	<p>A. Participants are given the opportunity to lead their group members through the exercises while counting out loud.</p> <p>B. Ask for volunteers to lead the group only, and for others to do the counting.</p> <p>C. Ask for at least one person to be the “official counter” in class so instructor can talk while doing the exercises.</p>
Behavior changes of physical activity and fruit and vegetable consumption	Provide small group interaction while exercising	Allows members of the group to discuss and celebrate their improvements or find support where they still need to make changes	<p>A. Share achievements and changes made thus far regarding PA behaviors and diet habits.</p> <p>B. Could ask if the group wants to break into partners. Each partner takes turns leading an exercise while the other counts out loud.</p>

**Table 2. Group dynamics session by session guide. (cont.)**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Strategy example</b>	<b>WHY?</b>	<b>Suggested group activity from the PA leadership team</b>
Revisit group and individual goal setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Work together to achieve a common goal</li> <li>– Relapse prevention</li> </ul>	Target areas have been previously addressed, revisiting allows analysis of progress and/or adjustments needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Ask for volunteers to share their individual goals and how they feel they have contributed toward the group goal.</li> <li>B. Discuss any necessary changes to individual and group goals among the group.</li> </ul>
Maintaining long-term health behavior changes	Provide opportunities for interaction and communication	Relapse prevention: Encourages individuals to set high standards of achievements for themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Take turns answering “topic area” questions (voluntary) while exercising.</li> <li>B. Ask for volunteers to answer the questions and lead group exercises.</li> </ul>
Motivators of long-term health behaviors	Tailor the group environment to promote physical proximity	Relapse prevention: Encourages individuals to set high standards of achievements for themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Open discussion about how participants will stay accountable for their own health and PA.</li> <li>B. Talk about fruit and vegetable consumption in the same manner.</li> <li>C. How will participants help each other stay accountable for their PA (e.g., will the phone tree still exist?)?</li> </ul>
Establish long-term coping and action plans	Provide opportunities for participants to share challenges and motivators	Enhances the effectiveness of the team to work and communicate together (support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Question and sharing: Ask for volunteers to discuss.</li> <li>B. Call on one another: With only three sessions left, most participants know who is and isn't willing to share information. Have them call on their friend to answer the questions.</li> </ul>
Recognize group member contribution	Ask for volunteers to say something positive about someone in their group	Allows individuals to cheer on their group (instead of hearing it from the class leader). Increases motivation and builds team pride	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Superlative Simon says: Volunteers express who in their group was most enthusiastic, most encouraging, etc. It can be more than one person or everyone in the group.</li> <li>B. This is a good activity as long as no one is left out. If there are a few people who are not nominated for anything, the instructor should be ready with ideas to nominate them for the “best [fill in the blank].”</li> </ul>
Acknowledge completion of group and individual goals	Enhance group norms for appropriate social activities during class	Encourages conversations outside of exercise. Builds relationships that may motivate them to continue PA post-program class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Celebrate accomplishments through potluck-style social.</li> <li>B. If possible, provide some small incentive door prizes. Give completion certificates for everyone.</li> <li>C. Ask participants to email recipes to instructors. Compile recipes in a “LIFT cookbook” and provide to everyone at the last class.</li> </ul>

## Resources

“Community Toolbox.” Chapter 16, Section 2, Group Facilitation and Problem Solving: Developing Facilitation Skills. University of Kansas. Center for Community Health and Development. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/leadership/group-facilitation/facilitation-skills/main>.

Prykucki B, March 13, 2014. From ground rules to shared expectations. Michigan State University. MSU Extension. [https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/from\\_ground\\_rules\\_to\\_shared\\_expectations](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/from_ground_rules_to_shared_expectations).

## Motivational Interviewing Resources

“Introduction to Motivational Interviewing” (Bill Matulich) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3MCJZ7OGRk&t=758s>

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