



BEST PRACTICES FOR DISCUSSION FACILITATORS

Purpose of the Facilitator

Your role is to guide an open respectful discussion that supports learning and sharing around student mental health topics. You may select the most appropriate questions from a provided list to shape the conversation.

Before the Discussion

- Review all pre-screened questions.
- Identify questions that feel most relevant to your group's experiences or needs.
- Pre-select 3–5 starter questions to begin the discussion.
- Be sensitive to emotional topics as participants may have personal experiences. Remind them they are welcome to step out and take a break if needed.
- Stay flexible and ready to adapt as your school nurse team jumps in.

Starting the Discussion

- Establish ground rules (e.g., respect, confidentiality, listening without judgment).
- Invite participants to suggest additional topics or questions for focus if they wish.
- Create a welcoming environment with a simple check-in or icebreaker.

During the Discussion

- Use selected questions flexibly adapting as needed.
- Ask open-ended follow-up questions.
- Encourage participation from all attendees.
- Respect silence and allow time for reflection—long pauses give participants an opportunity to gather their thoughts.
- Watch for shifts in group energy. If negativity surfaces without a path forward validate the concerns you hear and guide the group back to productive conversation. Try reflecting back what's been shared ('What I hear you saying is') and posing a question that focuses on what they can influence or improve.
- Handle emotional moments with care reminding participants about available supports.

Navigating Difficult Moments

- Normalize vulnerability ("It's okay not to have all the answers.").
- Keep the discussion focused on applying learning to practice.
- De-escalate tension respectfully and refocus on shared goals.

Closing the Discussion

- Summarize key insights and common themes.
- Invite final reflections (e.g., "One takeaway from today?").
- Express gratitude for participants' time and contributions.
- Share any follow-up resources and supports.

Quick Checklist for Facilitators

Review and pre-select 3–5 discussion questions
Open with group ground rules
Adapt and use questions flexibly
Encourage diverse voices
Handle emotional moments thoughtfully
Summarize key takeaways and close with appreciation