

Right to Privacy

Create clear expectations regarding privacy. If your group is operating within an agency or organization, there may already be rules about confidentiality that the group needs to follow. However, even if the group is completely independent, participants need to know that their privacy will be respected. Example: "What and who is seen and heard in this group stays here, within the group, and is not to be discussed outside of this group." Or "It is ok to talk with others about the general issues that we discuss here, but do not ever share anyone else's story without their permission." Also, sometimes people ask for a phone list of all group members. Decide as a group whether this is ok or not.

Equal Opportunity to Participate

Everyone deserves opportunities to speak. Sharing group time or "air time" should be expected of all members. Some may choose not to speak much, but that doesn't mean they are not benefitting from the group. It is important that individuals do not dominate the group's time with their own personal issues. TIP: If one person is dominating the group, explore the possibility that this person may need additional attention outside of the group so that his/her issues will not dominate group life. This can also be related to the issue of treating each other with respect.

Diversity is OK

Acknowledge diversity within the group-- whether visible or not. People will bring various life experiences to the group, will be at different levels educationally, occupationally, and in terms of their disabilities. Avoid value judgements about where people are at. Articulate that all experiences and questions are valid and valuable material for the group, and that each participant is entitled to her/his own opinion.

TIP: It can be helpful to invite people to use "I" statements (telling about their own experiences and/or opinions), rather than judging other people's experiences or opinions.