

Structuring each session

Here are some tips for running group sessions:

- Start and end on time.
- Have a plan ahead of time for what you want to accomplish in your session. Then structure the time in a way that will help you do this.
- One common group technique is to have a "check-in" at the beginning or at the end of the session. This can help people transition into the session and helps participants know each other better. A typical check-in might be to respond to a question like: "how are you feeling today?", "how was your week?", "what have you been thinking about employment issues this week?" Or "what progress have you made in your job search this week?"
- An alternative is to have a check-in at the end of the session. Leave enough time for each person to be able to speak briefly about how group was for them that day.
- Open-ended discussions have a way of eating up a lot of time. This is fine, and sometimes is exactly what the group needs. However, if you are trying to teach information, it can help to save the discussion for after you've covered the desired material.
- Try to pace the group slowly enough that most participants can keep up, but quickly enough that things don't get boring. If you have someone who seems to want to move much faster or much slower than the rest of the group, it may be helpful to spend time with that person outside of group, either giving them extra things to do or to help them catch up. If you let that one person's needs determine the pace of the group, you run the risk that other participants may be annoyed or come to resent that person.
- Pay attention to who is active and who tends to be quiet in your group. Try to make room for the shy types by asking them questions and offering opportunities for them to speak, but do not force them or embarrass them.
- One way to cover the brochure material is to have participants read an assigned brochure (or part of one) prior to the start of the session. Then each person can read at her or his own pace and you can start your group activities based on the assumption that you share certain information.
- Participants might also be asked to prepare for a session ahead of time by doing "homework" assignments (e.g. keeping a journal, cutting out want ads, drafting a cover letter, etc.) This can help participants to stay engaged with the material in between sessions, and can provide a spring board for group activities and discussion in the next session. If you do choose to give such assignments, make sure the expectations are clear and understood by all participants.