

# 5. Facilitated Discussion Guide for Talking About ACEs and Building Resilience

## Getting Started with Facilitation

Organizations rarely change on their own. Real change comes from dedicated, inspired people pushing their peers to improve. This guide will help you drive real change within your organization about how you talk about ACEs, how their effects are understood, how people who have experienced ACEs are treated and how you work together to build resilience. It will help you prepare for, have, and follow up on the coaching conversations that need to occur to improve your ways of working.

Use this guide whenever you need to initiate or facilitate an ACEs or resilience conversation within your organization. An ACEs & Resilience Champion aims to get everyone on the same page through education and guiding discussions about concrete actions that can be taken to prevent and reduce the effects of ACEs and build resilience.

## What is Facilitation?

Facilitation is a way of working with groups that enables and empowers others to meet their goals. Skilled facilitators are less about “doing” themselves and more about using their skills to enable groups to reach decisions, set goals and/or learn skills. When done right, facilitation encourages people to share ideas, resources, and opinions while thinking critically.

Facilitators have **four primary functions** when facilitating group discussions:

- Bring out the opinions and ideas of individuals
- Offer evidence-based information
- Ensure a positive and healthy process
- Never take sides

A good facilitator recognizes when functions are achieved and not achieved, and where to take the conversation next.

## The Principles and Values of Facilitation

Listening	Facilitation means listening to what people are saying (verbal communication) and tuning in to what they're not saying (non-verbal communication)
Confidentiality	Each person is confident that everything they discuss is safe within the bounds of confidentiality
Respect	Facilitator acknowledges and respects each individual of the group
Equality	Each person is regarded as having an equal right to contribute, influence and direct the group
Value of personal and/or professional experience	Each person feels their contribution to the discussion is valued
Trust and safety	Facilitator develops trust and safety to ensure maximum participation
Group process	Facilitator is aware of how the group is operating. They resolve conflict and difficulties as they arise
Inclusion and encouragement	Facilitator is intentional about creating an inclusive space. They encourage everyone to use their voice
Participation	Facilitation succeeds when there is a genuine belief in the value of candid participation



## Planning a Session

Whether you're having a one-on-one conversation or a group session, think about the following to keep your discussion on track.

### Reflect on Session Strategy

**Take Action**

*Think about the person / group*

How many people will be in your session?

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If a group, do these people already know each other, do they work together or is this a new group?

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What does the person/group already know about ACEs?

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What does your person/group want or need to achieve?

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**Take Action**

*Think about the organization*

What is the organization's goal for these meetings?

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What is the aim of the work according to the organization?

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**Take Action**

*Think about the equipment*

Do you have a room with enough space for your session?

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What resources do you need and how will you acquire them?

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**Take Action**

*Think about the duration*

How long will it take for the group to achieve the aim of the discussion?

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Is this going to be a one-off session or the first of a series?

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**Take Action**

*Think through the process*

How do you plan to ensure the needs of the group are met?

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## Facilitation Plan

Once you have reflected on all the preparation items, you are now in a position to plan your session. Helpful information on facilitation and communication styles can be found in the [Communication Resource Guide](#).

### Overall Aim

What does the group/facilitator hope to achieve?

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### Specific Objectives

Break the overall goal into smaller parts. List them here:

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### Method

What are the techniques you plan to use (examples: group discussion, role playing, hands on activities)?

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## Facilitated Conversation Structure

The following is a guide to help structure your discussion. Think about how you are going to go through the following process:



### Open

Ensure that discussions have a clear, agreed-upon purpose.

- Do introductions
- State the objectives of the meeting
- Outline the session agenda
  - What you're going to cover
  - How long you'd like to spend on each item

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## Clarify

Clarify facts (measurable, verifiable information) and any issues or concerns of the participants. Both are essential.

- Go over some of the facts needed before the discussion to ensure clarity
- Address any concerns before getting started

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## Develop

Ask questions and include others in the process. Before you start, plan what you'd like to do and when to share these ideas. Emphasize that you are seeking others' ideas too. People are already doing great work. Acknowledge what is currently happening and consider ideas that support, leverage, and/or scale existing actions and interventions. Use your Facilitation Plan from above as a guide.

- Address each question you'd like to cover using the **method** upon which you've decided

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### Agree

Before closing, support the group to develop a plan to follow through on ideas that were developed. What are the next steps or action items? Who will complete them? What is the timeline?

- Plan to follow through on the ideas that were developed

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### Close

Double check that everyone agrees about the next steps and is committed to following through. How are you going to do this?

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## Facilitated ACEs and Resilience Discussion Examples

### Sample 1 - New Employee Training

*1 hour*

#### Situation

A group of new employees have joined your organization. You need to introduce the foundational elements of ACEs and Resilience, and how those concepts are applied in your workplace.

Aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To begin a conversation about ACEs and resilience with newly hired employees</li> </ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Define ACEs and their effects</li> <li>● Answer the question, what is resilience and how can it be promoted?</li> <li>● Describe the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study</li> <li>● Describe how ACEs are being addressed in your community</li> <li>● Identify specific actions our organization can implement to prevent and reduce the effects of ACEs and promote resilience.</li> </ul>
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Group discussion</li> <li>● Resilience game</li> </ul>

## Structure

### Introduce the facilitator and the session plan

*2-3 Minutes*

Explain the learning objectives for the session today

- “We are going to talk about ACEs, in particular, what they are and how they can affect long-term health.”
- “We’re also going to talk about what resilience is and how it can buffer the effects of adversity.”
- “We are going to talk about the CDC-Kaiser ACE study and how it has become a landmark study for research related to adverse childhood experiences.”
- “Finally, we’re going to talk about how Guelph and Wellington are championing ACEs prevention and promoting resilience.”

### Introduce participants

*5 Minutes*

Have everyone in the group introduce themselves by saying their name and a little bit about themselves

- Example icebreaker exercises to get everyone comfortable:
  - Say your name and what you hope to get out of this session
  - Say your name, your role and one thing you like to do for fun

## What are ACEs?

*15 Minutes*

### Information

- Adverse childhood experiences are potentially traumatic or stressful experiences that happen in a person's life before the age of 18. These experiences can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. Additional information to guide the discussion can be found at [acescoalition.ca](http://acescoalition.ca).
- There are ten broad categories of ACEs:

Abuse	Neglect	Household Dysfunction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Physical</li> <li>● Emotional</li> <li>● Sexual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Physical</li> <li>● Emotional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Household member struggling with a mental illness</li> <li>● Incarcerated household member</li> <li>● Parent treated violently</li> <li>● Substance abuse by a household member</li> <li>● Parental separation or divorce</li> </ul>

### Questions for the group to facilitate discussion

- Has anyone heard of the term ACEs before?
- Will someone please define ACEs for the group?
- What can anyone tell me about the potential impacts of adverse childhood experiences?

Resilience: How can resilience help reduce the negative impacts of ACEs?

*2-3 Minutes*

### Information

- Resilience is the ability of an individual to rebound from difficult times
- Go the [Center for the Developing Child](http://Center for the Developing Child) at Harvard University to find their InBrief: [What is Resilience? video](#). Consider playing this 2-minute video so people receive high-quality, easy to understand information about resilience.

## Resilience Game

***12 – 15 Minutes***

**This game is intended to do two things:**

1. Introduce the complex and often unpredictable combinations of risk and protective factors that people accumulate
2. Prompt conversation about how your organization can better support people on a unique, case-by-case basis.

Create two children as stick figures on a white board or chalkboard for everyone to see. Label them child A and child B.



Write on small pieces of paper different protective factors and risk factors, and mix them up in a bowl. Explain that these are life experiences that accumulate over the years. Make sure you have the same number of risk factors and protective factors. Apply a ranking of -1 for ACEs risk factors and +1 for protective factors.

Example risk factors	Example protective factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Witnessing domestic violence in the home (-1)</li> <li>• Mother is emotionally abusive (-1)</li> <li>• Chronic neglect (-1)</li> <li>• Mother has a substance-use disorder (-1)</li> <li>• Father has schizophrenia (-1)</li> <li>• Father is incarcerated (-1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meets a role model and has a healthy relationship with them (+1)</li> <li>• Has a good relationship with a cousin (+1)</li> <li>• Does well in school (+1)</li> <li>• Lives in a safe neighbourhood (+1)</li> <li>• Develops emotional regulation skills (+1)</li> <li>• Develops a strong sense of self efficacy (+1)</li> </ul>

Note: Make sure you have the same number of positive vs. negative factors

Go around the table and have each person pick one piece of paper and apply it to one of the two stick figure children, alternating between them. Use a magnet or tape to keep them organized and visible.

Once you've gone around the table once, review the factors that each child has. Add and subtract the numbers for each child, and determine a final score. If the child has a positive score, this child has experienced more positive experiences throughout life, and is more likely to experience fewer negative life outcomes than a child with a negative score.

Discuss how these factors might influence the life of this person, and how they might be manifested. Would you recognize the impact of these factors if the child was to visit your workplace? What about if they grew up and began working in your workplace? If not – what can you do to ensure that they're given the support they need regardless?

**Critical information:**

- Resilience is the ability to adapt or rebound from adversity.
- Resilience is not something someone 'has' or 'doesn't have'.
- Resilience is promoted by protective factors and inhibited by risk factors.
- When protective factors are present in a child's life, healthy development (social, emotional, and physical) is promoted even if that child may experience severe adversity.
- Resilience is built over time. It is not static.

[What is the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study?](#)

*5 Minutes*

**Before going over study information:**

- This study was conducted in the United States of America. What issues might arise when trying to apply the findings to our context here?
- Potential questions include:
  - Did the sample only include Americans?
  - Would the results look different globally and across different cultures?
  - Do we have local or Canadian data to compare to these results?
  - What research has been done since this study was conducted?



### Give a brief overview

A study conducted in 1998, by Felitti et al., from the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) and Kaiser-Permanente published the results of a joint research project, "[The Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACE\) Study.](#)"

This study has become a landmark study for research related to ACEs because of the findings:

- a) ACEs are common and universal.
- b) ACEs don't usually happen in isolation.
- c) There is a strong association between childhood adversity and negative health outcomes.
- d) There is a clear dose relationship between the level of exposure to ACEs and risk of poor health.

What can we do to address ACEs and build resilience in our community?

*10 Minutes*

### Questions for discussion:

- What are organizations or community stakeholders already doing to address ACEs and/or build resilience?
- What is a first step you can take?
- What is a first step your organization can take?

### Critical information (example from Guelph and Wellington)

- Several community leaders organized an ACEs Coalition
  - The ACEs Coalition started after a one-day call to action event that focused on strengthening partnerships, building a collective impact approach to ACEs prevention and reduction, and developing new ideas for how to best support families and individuals at-risk of ACEs and build community resilience.
- The ACEs Coalition:
  - Offers training for primary care providers, allied health professionals, and community partners
  - Creates resources to support raising awareness and behaviour changes related to ACEs and resilience
  - Supports and uses local research to guide our work
- Inform them about what your organization is currently doing for the ACEs and resilience community

## Close meeting

### *5 Minutes*

#### **Critical information to review**

- ACEs are common and universal – they are found across all cultures, genders, and socio-economic groups
- Early adversity can dramatically affect health across a lifetime
- Prevention and early intervention are necessary. Preventing and reducing ACEs and building resilience requires a whole community approach.

#### Final Questions

"One person can make a difference, and everyone should try." - John F. Kennedy





## Sample 2 - ACEs Action Brainstorm

*30 Minutes*

### Situation

A group of team members aware of ACEs and the importance of resilience gets together to identify actions they can take to address ACEs and build resilience more comprehensively.

Aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Begin a discussion about how your organization can address ACEs and build resilience more comprehensively</li> </ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To think critically about how your organization can become better at addressing ACEs and building resilience</li> <li>● Initiate improvements within your organization</li> </ul>
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Group activity</li> <li>● Discussion</li> </ul>

### Contents of the Discussion

Introduce the facilitator and the session plan

*2 Minutes*

**Explain the learning objectives of the following session**

- “Our goal is to start thinking about how we as an organization can become better at addressing ACEs and building resilience.”

## Introduce group activity

### *5 Minutes*

- “Today we’re going to use a brainstorming activity to get us thinking about the actions we can take as an organization.”
- Get into groups of two. Together, come up with 5 ideas about how our organization can address ACEs. Try to answer the following questions:
  - How can we as an organization become more ACEs- and resilience- aware?
  - How can we as an organization ensure we’re holding ourselves accountable?
  - How can we ensure we’re actively applying our ACEs and resilience knowledge in a way that’s making a difference?

## Brainstorm

### *5 Minutes*

- Pass out sticky notes and instruct participants to write down one action idea per sheet
- Respond to questions that arise. When appropriate, involve all participants to answer them

## Reflect

### *5 Minutes*

- When the groups are finished, get one member from each pair to arrange their posts on a wall or a large surface.
- As the facilitator, arrange any ideas that have similar actions together (if there are any)

## Identify Actions

### *10 Minutes*

- As the facilitator, call out any recurring themes and clarify any actions that might not be clear.
- Ask everyone to come together as a larger group to discuss. Let each pair vote on the actions they think are the most creative, and most practical. A cohesive group may be more focused on taking larger group actions, but others may be more at the individual reflection and action stage. Get a mix of ideas for individual and group actions. Prompt the group to identify:
  - The top 1-2 actions that are most creative
  - The top 1-2 actions that are the most practical
  - 1-2 that can be implemented right away (if there are any)

## Close meeting

### *3 Minutes*

Organize a time to have a session about putting these ideas into action.

## Reflection for the Facilitator

### Take Action

*Take some time to reflect on your session. Consider your approach to facilitating and how you will champion the next steps identified by the group.*

### Facilitating the Group:

What went well?

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What challenges did you encounter? How did you manage them?

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What will you change the next time you facilitate a meeting or activity?

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Consider your ACEs & Resilience Champion goals, how well did the session align with your goals? What needs to stay the same? What will you do differently to achieve your ACEs and resilience goals?

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## Ensuring Action

What happened during the session? Reflect on the key elements of the experience and discussion, draft a summary.

What were the most important ideas discussed?

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What ideas require follow-up? (e.g., clarification, additional information, or consultation)

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Who needs to know about the discussion? (e.g., debrief with your supervisor, share summary with meeting participants)

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Now what? How do you plan to follow-up? Who needs to be involved? How will you include meeting participants in future action?

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When will the actions occur?

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What additional resources do you need?

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How will you communicate your ideas?

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Do you have a local committee, collaborative group or coalition (for example, the ACEs Coalition in Guelph and Wellington) that can help? If yes, how can they help?

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