

## 6. Communication Resource Guide

### Find Your Facilitation Style

There are many different styles of facilitation, and the style you use needs to be matched to the goals of the group, and your own skills and interests. As a facilitator, you will be more effective when you recognize the needs, roles and potential resistance of group members. Depending on this, the facilitator's role may be one or more of the following:

Directive	Instructing the group how to do something or giving them information.
Objective	Asking questions and encouraging people to voice their own opinions and ideas.
Methods	Assigning tasks and roles to individuals.
Participative	Taking part in the discussion, sharing personal experiences and encouraging others to do the same.

### Basic Communication Strategies

Effective communication is a process of sharing knowledge and ideas with others through verbal and non-verbal communication. Anyone having discussions about ACEs and resilience needs to be aware of their communication strategies. This section provides a brief overview of communication strategies.

#### Verbal Communication Examples

- Comments toward others
- Expressions of values and attitudes
- Volume and tone of voice

The meaning of verbal communication is affected by several factors:

### Tone of voice

- A powerful indicator to the group. You could convey contradictory messages if your tone of voice is inconsistent with the message you're trying to convey.
- For example, if you say "I'd like everyone to participate" in a deadpan voice that does not invite participation, the overt message could be undermined.

### Volume and pitch

- High pitch indicates excitement, fear, or nervousness.
- Loud volume could signal anger, frustration, confidence, or fear.
- Altering the volume is helpful in indicating a change in direction, to gain/maintain attention, or to express enthusiasm.

### Interpretation

- You must be aware of how your beliefs or values can influence your interpretations
- Instead of making pronounced statements of interpretation ("this is the best way to do that"), you should offer suggestions of interpretations ("I have found that this works well, but see what works best for you")

### Language

- Any message can be communicated in many different ways
- Precise wording and language can help others understand our purpose
- Language can either build bridges or separate (e.g., inclusive vs. divisive language)
- Using jargon, acronyms or abbreviations that others don't understand can hinder communication

## Nonverbal Communication Examples

Non-verbal communication (e.g., body language) is also a critical source of information in our interactions with others. Be aware of:

- Facial expressions and posture
- How and when a person chooses to sit, move, position themselves
- Implicit assumptions and biases toward gender, ethnic background, age and gender



## Strategies for Managing Non-Verbal Communication

### Match your state to that of the group

- Shared psychological states lead to synchronized brain states, essentially meaning that you're on the same page<sup>1</sup>

### Synchronize your movements and facial expressions

- Try to make subtle imitations, matching the movements others are making
- This will lead to synchronized brain states, allowing you to get on the same page

### Make eye-contact, but don't stare

- Eye-contact makes the experience more personal
- Failing to make eye-contact alerts the other person's brain that you're hiding something or lying
- You want to aim for intermittent eye contact (60-70% eye-contact) where you maintain contact for around 3-5 seconds at a time – any more than that can make the other person uncomfortable.

### Express emotion on your face

- Emotions are a big part of nonverbal communication and being expressive can allow people to understand how you're feeling
- If you're smiling, make sure it's a real smile
  - Fake smiles lead to people seeing you as untrustworthy and less likable
  - Real smiles make the muscles around the eyes crinkle and, pull up the nose

### Match your gestures to what you're saying

- Most of us do this naturally, but doing it consciously can enhance your communication ability and help you stand out
- Examples:
  - Indicating the number of fingers when listing off the number of ACEs
  - Hands pointing at yourself or toward another when indicating "you" or "me"
  - Hands going over a hump when explaining how people who have experienced ACEs can rebound

<sup>1</sup> Lakin, J. L., & Chartrand, T. L. (2003). Using nonconscious behavioral mimicry to create affiliation and rapport. *Psychological Science*, 14, 334–339.

### Choose the direction of your lean depending on what message you want to convey

- Lean forward to show interest, engagement, and motivation
- Lean back with an open position to show you're receptive to another person's idea
- Do not lean back with your arms and legs crossed, this signals that you're closed off

*Ensure consistency between your words and your actions. Non-verbal actions can either enhance or contradict verbal statements.*

## Best Practices – Facilitation

Facilitating involves effectively balancing information and emotion. Here are some of the best practices to keep in mind:

1. Listen actively
2. Reflect on what you know
3. Focus on the facts (not personalities)
4. Respond with concern for the individual or group's success
5. Maintain awareness and control over your feelings
6. Establish the facts in advance
7. Decide on the minimum action required
8. Keep an open mind to new information



People assign value to the words they hear. Encourage participation by using neutral, or positively-framed words and expressions. See examples in the table below.

Words/Phrases to Lose	Use these Words/Phrases Instead
But	And
Should	Next time
You'll have to...	From now on... OR In the future...
You'll need to	If you could... OR Could you please...
Can't because	Sure, as soon as...
There is no way... OR There is nothing...	I wish OR I hope

## Facilitation Checklist

### You have an understanding of the three basic responsibilities of the facilitator

1. Design and plan the process
2. Implement and record the discussion
3. Take time to reflect and identify strategies to take action on the suggestions identified by the group

### Use the three basic principles of facilitation

- Bring out the opinions and ideas of group members
- Focus on how people participate in the process, not just on what gets achieved
- Never take sides

## BEFORE

**Set the conditions for successful discussions - In planning a good process, have you considered:**

- Climate and environment
- Logistics and room arrangements

## DURING

**Encourage participation:**

- Ensure everyone feels comfortable speaking
- Propose a structure that allows all ideas to be heard
- Ensure that members feel good about their contributions
- Ensure that ideas and decisions of the group are nominated, not leader dominated
- Refrain from criticizing anyone for what they've said

**Decide what successful facilitation of this discussion would achieve:**

- Improved planning
- Sustained member involvement
- Aid in creating leadership opportunities
- Increasing the skills of group members
- Better communication
- Conflict resolution
- Identification of concrete action

**As a facilitator, you:**

- Understand the goals of the meeting and the organization
- Keep the group and the agenda moving forward
- Involve everyone in the meeting
- Make sure decisions are made democratically

## AFTER

**Take time to reflect on the discussion and how you will champion the next steps identified by the group.**

- Document key ideas and elements of the discussion
- Share your report with other champions and changemakers

