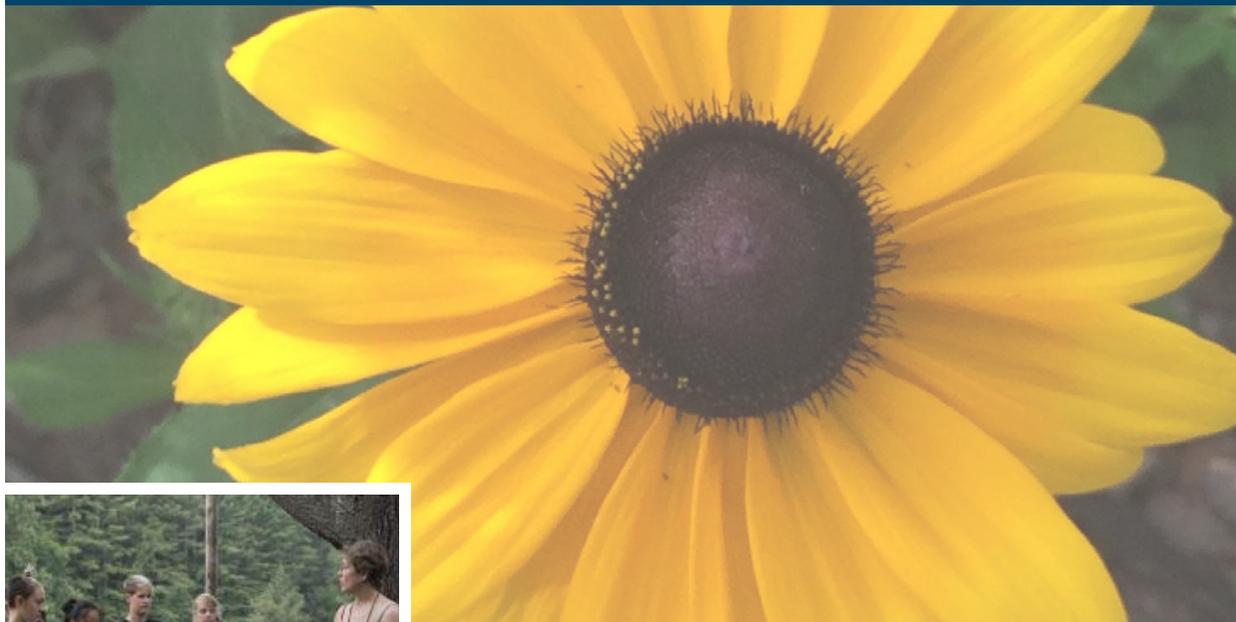


Leading Spiritual Deepening Small Groups



The quality of the spirit of the facilitator — that is, centered, gentle, receptive, knowledgeable/informative but not know-it-all — and the quality of the skill of the facilitator — creating opportunities for everyone to share and knowing how to move the group toward deep connection, dealing with difficult people — are probably the most important prerequisites for success.

— Facilitator of Spiritual Deepening Pilot Group, 2015

This page offers suggestions about ways to lead a Spirit-Led small group experience by honoring yourself and your participants.

The Spirit of Facilitation

Your success in leading a Spiritual Deepening small group is rooted in honoring Spirit, being yourself, and staying flexible.

All Spiritual Deepening sessions should start with worship or incorporate some form of worship as part of an activity. Invite participants to keep the focus on their personal experiences, not abstract ideas, and to share from the heart.

Going deeper with Spirit requires vulnerability and curiosity, which you can model by sharing what you don't know and being honest about your spiritual condition. Know yourself and what might rise up as a block, such as certain theological language, and be gentle with yourself as you try to have a soft heart.

Video: Having a beginner's mind (2 minutes)
<http://tinyurl.com/hmw5f6q>

Make the Spiritual Deepening program your own. Within the Grounding, Sharing, and Practicing structure, there are any number of possibilities for creating a meaningful and transformative opportunity for your small group. If you're a singer, sing! If you love art, make art together! Go outside! Meet at midnight! Pay attention to Spirit and change your plans mid-session. Follow the energy of the group and prioritize community building.

Video: Finding Your Facilitation Style (2 minutes) <http://tinyurl.com/zsjk4v3>

What makes for Spirit-filled facilitation?

- serving as a spiritual guide and holding the space for Spirit
- asking probing open-ended questions to help deepen exploration and learning
- letting people explore and take responsibility for moving forward
- giving people the space to speak for themselves without being right or wrong
- modeling vulnerability, sharing, patience, and openness
- trusting the process and allowing uncertainty — a deep and spiritual experience may look different than we expect
- using humor, respect, and empathy
- acknowledging and responding to emotions
- keeping spaciousness around any conflict or conflicting opinions

Note that much of this can be accomplished just by paraphrasing, summarizing, and repeating back what people say.

Video: Leaving shame out of facilitation (2 minutes) <http://tinyurl.com/zegbgks>

If you're new to small group facilitation in a spiritual setting, you may want to consider inviting someone you know, perhaps a "weighty Friend" from the meeting, to participate in your small group and serve as a mentor or elder. This intentional invitation for support can provide a sense of groundedness as you practice new forms of leadership. You may also collaborate with a co-leader to share the responsibilities of the group.

Leading "Meetings for Learning"

In facilitating a Spiritual Deepening small group, you will be creating opportunities for participants to explore Quaker thought, share their own spiritual stories, listen deeply to each other, and practice connecting to the Inward Teacher. Your session will likely generate discussion. With groups of passionate seekers, it is easy to veer off onto other topics or do a lot of talking. In addition, there are bound to be messy conversations, disagreements, and sometimes conflict.

As you help the group stay focused on Spirit, your role is to stay open to all participants, broaden participation, help individuals make their points, and manage divergent perspectives. The following techniques may help you guide the group with empathy and inclusion.

Video: How to Stop Talking and Trust the Group in Facilitation (2 minutes)
<http://tinyurl.com/h8lv76>

Interruptions

There will always be someone who breaks in while another person is speaking. Most interrupting during discussion is due to enthusiasm. Control the interruptions by saying, “Hold that thought, Sheryl. We’ll want to hear it again once Maria has finished.”

Monopolizing Conversation

Acknowledge the contributions being made as you cut in on a longwinded group member with, “That’s an interesting point you just made. Do others agree or have a different point to make?”

Allowing everyone the chance to contribute

Engage silent participants by posing open-ended questions directly. But don’t badger the participants who really don’t want to participate. Try asking, “What is on your mind right now David?”

Encouraging

“Who else wants to say something?” “Frank, do you have anything to add?” (If their body language suggests they want to speak)

Balancing

“Does anyone have another point of view or perspective on this?” Go around the circle allowing each person to talk or pass.

Using the Clock

“We have a few more minutes; I want to hear from everyone.”

Active Listening

Give full attention, acknowledge emotions, paraphrase key points and summarize as needed.

Drawing People Out

“Can you say more about that?” Use constructive questions at appropriate times to draw out thoughts and experiences.

Calling for Responses

“Are there any reactions to what (the speaker) said?”

Refocusing

“Our discussion has branched out from our original purpose of (restate purpose). Which do you think are relevant? Does anyone have any comments on any of these issues or how they relate?”

Video: How to handle conflict in facilitation (2 minutes) <http://tinyurl.com/zu45aj5>

Unpacking Quaker Jargon

Your Spiritual Deepening small group may be made up of a mix of newcomers, members, and attenders. Participants will be familiar with Quaker practices, terms, and perspectives to varying degrees.

As you lead activities and facilitate discussions, keep your ear open for “Quaker jargon” that may be confusing to folks who are less familiar with Quaker language. Examples include First Day, leading, worship sharing, yearly meeting, testimony, convinced Friend, AFSC, Gathered Meeting, Facing Bench, FUM, and so on. When these Quaker terms are used, offer a translation or an explanation. For example, testimonies can be explained as “the way we live our values.” First Day School can be translated to “Sunday School” or “our children’s program.” Hearing these terms translated can even be helpful for folks who have been around Quakers for a long time!

Similarly, the people who attend a Quaker meeting may have very different vocabularies for understanding their spiritual journeys. What some people call God, others may refer to as the Divine, The Light, The Universe, The Inward Christ, Spirit, The Inner Teacher, That Which Is Eternal, The Mystery, or something else. Whatever your preferred language, consider incorporating other sacred names as you speak about the Truth and the spiritual journey. You may also choose extend this invitation to your participants.