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How to Successfully Facilitate Small Groups

Hello, and thank you for your willingness to be a group facilitator in our community wide book read of [How to Be an Antiracist](#).

Conversation about race, racism, and justice is one of the most crucial conversations needed across our country. This crucial conversation is also uncomfortable and, therefore, it is often avoided. These facilitator training videos aim to encourage and equip you, as a facilitator, to create a safe space for listening and learning together on this journey toward racial justice and healing.

Choose to assume the best about each other. Internalized racism has done a work on all of us, and there are broken relationships with self and others because of it. At an Undoing Racism Workshop I attended, the facilitator told us to acknowledge that there is always ignorance, arrogance, superiority, inferiority in the room. Choosing to believe the very best about each other is a way to foster grace and trust for this journey toward healing and justice.

The first thing to know is that people will enter this conversation on different levels with different life experiences and understanding. People of color tend to enter race conversation at a 301 and 401 level, while white people often enter at a 101 or 201 level. Naming this can be helpful.

Here are some small group tips that will help you lay a solid foundation as a facilitator:

1. **Be prepared.** As facilitator, make sure you have read the material and are prepared with questions for the group. If you don't get through a list of questions, that is fine, but also don't get stuck on one question when the majority of the group is ready to move into a new one.
2. **Honor people's time.** If you plan to meet for an hour, then start when you say you will and end when you say you will. If some want to stay on the zoom call after that allotted time, then that is fine, but you as the facilitator need to watch your clock and honor people's time.
3. Encourage participants to journal, take notes, write questions and thoughts as they continue to read the book.
4. You, as facilitator, are there to keep conversation going, not to teach or dominate the group yourself. You are **facilitating** discussion, and therefore you also are listener and learner.
5. **Listening** is primary. Please remind participants to listen well, to not interrupt, and to be mindful of how often and how long they themselves are speaking. Please ask your group to work intentionally for all in your group to have time and space to share. You can tell your group that you, as a facilitator, will interrupt and ask someone to please finish their thought if someone is dominating the conversation.

6. Try to provide a short time in the beginning of each of your sessions to ask a short question that **helps people get to know one another**. This is not for long answers but rather a place for connection before diving deep into the book content. For example: Name a highlight for you from this past week. (again, answers should be less than one minute)

7. As a facilitator, you might sometimes engage everyone by letting the group know that you'd like each person to answer a question you ask, but that participants always have the right to "pass" if they do not wish to answer that question.

8. There are many powerful emotions that come with race conversation. Frustration, anger, exasperation, confusion, insecurity, fear, guilt, shame, might all be in the room at some point. To grow trust, it can be helpful to acknowledge this and to ask participants to try to **recognize strong emotion in themselves and others, to try to objectively see it and name it without judgment, and to work to stay at the table and not act out of emotions or defensiveness**.

9. One way to enhance listening skills is to ask a final question at the end of the night: **What is one thing you heard someone else in the group say tonight?**

10. In recovery groups, the facilitator lets participants know **HOW** they will recover....they will recover through **Honesty, Openness, and Willingness**. This is also the HOW of the recovery needed to dismantle racism. You might remind participants that this HOW is a good group mantra to remember.

11. Finally, in an Undoing Racism workshop I took back in 2011, we read aloud a covenant each morning. I have used this covenant in many groups since. This might be something you choose to say together at the beginning of each of your sessions as well:

Everyone participates
 We listen
 We go to the growing edge
 We struggle together honestly
 We can be safe but not comfortable
 Stay the whole time
 Respect...don't judge others' experiences
 No quick fixes
 Clarify if there is a question about language or definitions
 Be fully present