



Keep Connected Institute for Strengthening Family Relationships

Participant Workbook Day 5

October 23, 2020





General Tips for Facilitating *Keep Connected* Sessions

Facilitators in schools and organizations that piloted *Keep Connected* offered these tips and strategies for effectively facilitating the sessions with parenting adults, youth, and families.

Set the stage for participation

- *Set shared ground rules or expectations* about how group members interact with each other. (Session 1 includes youth proposing and parenting adults adopting ground rules.)
- *Be welcoming, warm, and nonjudgmental.* Parenting adults may have a history of difficult relationships with your organization, making them reluctant and mistrustful to open up. In addition, participants may be tired, having spent the day in school or at work.

Keep sessions on track with time management strategies

- Plan ahead with materials and have all handouts and activities set up before each session starts.
- Use a clock or designate a timekeeper to signal when it's time to transition.
- Consider doing highs/lows or introductions during the shared family meal to save time.

Encourage full participation

- Check understanding of all participants using nonverbals, such as thumbs-up/thumbs-down.
- Provide positive reinforcement to parents and youth who may be reluctant to participate.
- Use a talking piece to designate a speaker and discourage interruption when someone is talking.
- Use wait time to give participants time to think through answers and absorb what is being said.

- Address participants privately if they are talking over others.

Build trust by sharing your own experiences or struggles

- Parents and youth enjoy learning from a facilitator who understands what they're going through and is willing to share stories from their middle school years.
- Stories from personal experience may provide connections. It also reminds them that you, too, face challenges in family life and parenting.
- If you aren't a parent, you can still lead parenting sessions. Be open about your own life experience, and ask questions. (Let the parents teach you.) You can also highlight examples you've seen from other parents or from your own family growing up.
- Make sure your personal stories don't overpower the session or imply that your parenting style is the "correct" way.

Be confident in your abilities

- Become familiar ahead of time with your section of *Keep Connected*, anticipating parts that may need more of your attention.
- Imagine that your sessions will be a success. Participants will not worry about what will go wrong and will typically not notice mistakes.
- Create your own summary of the session beforehand.
- After each session, reflect on how it went and what might be improved for next time.



What Do You Do When These Folks Show Up?

Dominators

If some participants talk over each other, try these strategies:

- Use a “*talking piece*” to help participants take turns talking. Often a talking piece is an object of significance for the group (or the facilitator). It’s placed in the center of a circle, then people hold it when they want to speak. Whoever is holding it can speak while others just listen.
- Find an opening to thank the talker for their input and immediately invite someone else to share.
- Write the dominator’s idea or thought on the flip chart and ask other to build on it with other ideas, clearly signally that you’re ready to move on.
- Instead of having everyone respond verbally, take two minutes for people to write down their answers. Then go around the room (starting with someone other than the dominator), asking people just to read what they wrote, one comment at a time. Or form small groups and have them first talk about their ideas.
- Post a “*parking lot*” where you (or participants) can jot down issues that come up that are important but are not on topic. They are placed in the “parking lot” as a reminder to come back to them—either later in the session or elsewhere. Be clear when the topics will be addressed, otherwise participants may be reluctant to “let go” of an issue.
- *Play music during quiet times* to reinforce the reflective goals of the time and to reduce the sense of awkwardness that some people feel during silence (which prompts them to talk).



What Has Worked for You?	What Hasn't Worked?

What Do You Do When These Folks Show Up?

Wallflowers

If participants are slow to open up, try these strategies:

- *Bring in everyone’s voice very early in each session.* One reason to have introductions in every session (even if people know each other) is that speaking early on (even with just their name and a few words) makes them more likely to speak up later.
- *Share first (briefly) as a facilitator.* Opening up about your own challenges makes it safer for others to open up. Share your own experiences and stories that you believe participants will relate to. That said, avoid coming across as the expert or as having the final answer—which will only shut down other perspectives and voices.
- *Push back on advice giving.* If people share something in the group, there’s often a rush to give advice—when people just want a listening ear and to be validated in their experience. Cut off people giving advice and affirm the person’s experience. Thank them for sharing. Depending on the situation, you might ask them a follow-up question that will help them open up more. Or you might invite others to share similar experiences (without shifting to giving advice).
- *Invite participants first to reflect (and even jot notes) before they share.* Some people need time to collect their thoughts.
- *Don’t rely on whole-group discussions.* If you have more than four to six participants, breaking into pairs and small groups and structuring space for everyone to talk more privately can prepare them to share their perspective with the larger group.
- *Thank participants for sharing.* One facilitator said: “Some people don’t want to open up regardless of the high or the low or the discussion topic. I always said, ‘Thank you for sharing,’ something like that, so I think they felt valued, that they were able to open up and not be criticized on anything that they said.”



What Has Worked for You?	What Hasn't Worked?



What Do You Do When These Folks Show Up? Emotional Wrecks

If a participant reveals a personal crisis and is an emotional wreck, how do you respond?

Unfortunately, the best answer is, It depends.

If the group is newly formed, people don't know each other, and it quickly becomes awkward, the best response is likely to be to express empathy and concern, offering to talk more after the session. If necessary, another participant and the upset person could step out to regain composure.

If the group has bonded and the person's revelations are not part of a pattern and, instead, draw the *whole* group together, you could choose to shift to be supportive of this person. Not only would this be responsive to the group dynamic, but it could be a vital moment in building community.

However, if someone is showing up session after session with a new crisis, it is much more likely to drive people away than bring them together. It may be part of a pattern of a needy person.

First try gentle interruptions to move to the next person and reminders of the purpose of the workshops or the activity.

If those approaches don't work, you'll want to address the issue outside of the workshops. You may want to meet the person for coffee to see if that satisfies the need. You may also get a better understanding of their needs. You may also see a need to refer them to a counselor or other services.

What Has Worked for You?	What Hasn't Worked?

What Do You Do When These Folks Show Up?

False Advertisers

If participants advocate for inaccurate information or harmful practices

Sometimes a parent may share inaccurate information or advocate for harmful approaches to parenting (such as harsh discipline). Here are some productive ways to respond:

- *Avoid confronting or shaming.* Rarely will these responses help change behaviors or attitudes, and it may erode trust or participation. Trying to convince them by quoting all the research rarely works either.
- *Give the group time to “self-correct.”* Often another participant will have a different perspective and will offer an alternative that will gain support.
- *Affirm the motives, while offering alternative strategies.* For example, you might say: “It sounds like you really want to ensure that your children follow the rules in your family. I wonder if you might try some other ways to get them to follow rules that might be even more effective. Do other people have some ideas they’ve used?” (You might also share your own experiences.)
- *Guide the discussion to connect different elements of their relationships.* For example, “It sounds like you really want to challenge your child to grow, so you have high demands. I wonder how you might do that in ways that also express care.”
- *Suggest a separate session to focus on the topic,* if it’s clear that interest is high. For example, they may be debating whether social media is good or bad. Set up a session focused on that topic. Bring in someone with expertise to guide the discussion productively.
- *Be knowledgeable about resources and responsibilities for responding to harmful practices.* *Keep Connected* is a general family strengthening resource, and is not designed as an intervention for harmful practices. If you hear things that could suggest that abuse or neglect may be occurring, follow up in ways that are appropriate to your level of expertise. Privately discuss the issue with someone who is qualified to respond appropriately. If families need extra support, privately encourage them to connect with appropriate services. Ideally, personally introduce them to someone you trust who can offer additional services.



What Has Worked for You?	What Hasn't Worked?



Your Re-Entry Plan

Use this worksheet to think through your re-entry plan when you return to your organization and community.

What you'll say to people who ask about this workshop

Draft a ONE-MINUTE statement of (or key ideas about) your plan and why you're excited about it.

WHO WILL DO IT? BY WHEN?

Loose ends you need to tie up

Parts of the plan you didn't have enough information or time to complete that you'll want to do right away.

Who you'll talk to get buy-in and support

Stakeholders, influencers, and allies to engage so they can help move it forward (or not get in the way).

Lingering questions you need to resolve . . . and steps you'll take to resolve them.

How will you keep the questions from stalling your progress and plans?

First steps you'll take to set the workshops into motion

When is it realistic to set as a goal for having the first *Keep Connected* workshops (even if they're pilots)?