

Strategies to Promote Effective Small Group Sessions

General guidelines

- Be enthusiastic about the topic
- Engender excitement for learning
- Infuse the discussion with energy
- Use a compelling case, startling statistic or surprising finding
- Model the desired thinking and reasoning process
- Provide analogies, examples or supporting data
- Rephrase or simplify complex statements
- State relations between what different learners say
- Use visuals to capture main ideas
- Use questions and silences strategically to prompt thinking and engagement (see related tips below)
- Provide handouts to further explain information and/or highlight key learning points
- Create a guide of FAQs based on questions posed by the learners

Using questions & silences to encouraging thinking and discussion

Questions can:

- Stimulate thinking
 - Help contextualizing difficult material
 - Encourage the group to make connections among concepts
 - Probe for underlying reasoning
 - Create conversations of depth and breadth
 - Achieve balanced participation
 - Unite the group in cognitive processing
 - Allow immediate diagnosis of learner's understanding
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- Cases develop questions that force a critical appraisal of information
 - Use open-ended questions more frequently than closed-ended questions (Open: What are major problems that this patient presents? Closed: What specific entity is associated with this behavioral pattern?)
 - Wait 3-5 seconds after asking questions to allow adequate think time.
 - Ask the question before calling on a learner to ensure that everyone is thinking about the answer.
 - Redirect questions to the group instead of answering them yourself.
 - Rotate how you use questions: calling on those who volunteer; calling on learners randomly; going around the room in order.
 - Ask learners to share their opinions about other peer's response/comment.
 - Use questions to encourage alternative perspective (e.g. If this diagnosis were wrong. What would you do next?)
 - Use questions to probe critical thinking (e.g. You stated good reasons to support your diagnosis. Which one is of most concerned?)

References

- Graffam, B. (2008). Deriving better questions: creating better clinical instruction. *The Clinical Teacher* 5(2): 98-102.
- Muller, J. & Irby, D. (2005). Practical teaching. How to lead effective group discussions. *The Clinical Teacher* 2(1): 10-15.