

## Tips for Starting a New Group

It is human nature to feel nervous or apprehensive when doing something for the first time. These feelings often stem from the unknown, the anticipation, or even the excitement of what's about to take place. When starting a new group, many of your participants may experience these feelings long before entering the room where the session is about to begin. They may even second-guess the need for them to participate in a group setting. That's why it's important to offer them a positive first impression that encourages them to participate and increases their desire to return week after week.

To help participants manage their feelings, we've put together a list of things for you, the facilitator, to help ease some of the anxiety participants may have as they walk into the room.

- **Immediate reassuring warmth.** Greet every new arrival warmly, with a smile. Say, *"I am so glad you're here."* However, never touch or pat any participant without getting his or her permission first. (Example: later, after a success, you may ask, *"That's great! May I give you a pat on the back?"*)
- **Fellowship and belonging.** As it is a group session, help each participant make a nametag or a folded nameplate name card. Introduce them to one another. Say, *"While we are waiting for everyone to arrive, I'd appreciate your help. We will be having introductions, so will you help me by learning three things about the person beside you—his or her name and nickname, hometown and hobby?"* Write those three things on the board. Then when everyone arrives, begin by focusing on the participants. Have participants introduce the person sitting next to them by giving those three pieces of information.
- **Move from concern to enjoyment.** Say, *"We are going to learn helpful information and skills and we're going to enjoy doing this together."*
- **"Pulling the stinger" by giving ownership.** Say, *"This is your class. It is to meet your needs. I am here to help."*
- **Deliberate pace.** Counterbalance over-stimulation by slowing down and keeping a smooth, considered pace. Don't feed the over-stimulation by covering "too much too soon."
- **Assigning a special task.** If a participant appears to need extra support or attention, ask him or her to help you. If it is a group session, ask the person to pass out the handouts, or pencils, or write on the board. If it is an individual session, ask the person to help you get to know him or her better. Offer a cup of decaffeinated coffee.<sup>1</sup>

### When Starting a New Group

- Offer immediate, reassuring warmth
- Offer fellowship and belonging
- Move from concern into enjoyment
- "Pull the stinger" by giving ownership
- Speak at a deliberate pace

For your first session, you can take a few minutes for introductions and use an icebreaker by asking participants their name, where they were born, or even what's their favorite TV show or movie. By incorporating these simple steps into your weekly group meetings, it will allow participants to feel more at ease and comfortable joining in on group discussions.

These and other helpful tips can be found in Team Solutions and Solutions for Wellness Binders. For more information on how to receive these binders, please call the toll free Neuroscience Information Line at 888-354-8326.

**Reference:**

1. Johnson McCrary, K., (2009). Recovering: Achieving Your Life Goals, Session 1 - Making Sense of What Happened. In *Team Solutions, Workbook 1* (page 4).