
Compassion Resilience Toolkit



Facilitation Guide

Outlined in this guide are some tips for facilitating the [Compassion Resilience Toolkit](#) materials. This includes general guidance for supporting circles both in person and virtually, and tips for supporting leadership in this work. We hope that these resources help you as you embark on your Compassion Resilience journey.

General Facilitation Tips

- **Choose your space:** If you are meeting in person, look for someplace that's comfortable, possibly with movable furniture. Choose a location and space that fosters connection. If you are meeting virtually, be sure that all participants have the necessary information to join the meeting. Please see the virtual facilitation page for more information.
- **Be prepared:** Make sure everyone gets any necessary information, readings, or other material beforehand. Because many of the resources contain information accessed online, provide material with weblinks and videos to people via email or other digital communication programs. If participants do not have access to the Internet, printing the information documents to have available at your group would be helpful. Some libraries offer free or reduced cost printing for members.
- **Create a safe environment:** Group members need to be able to trust each other and know that the space is safe from judgment and ridicule. The following helps to build that sense of psychological safety. Please see the tips for psychological safety page for more information.
 - **Help the group establish guidelines or shared agreements:** The shared agreements are guidelines that help create privacy and safety for the entire group. As the facilitator, be sure to model this safety and confidentiality yourself.
 - **Respect all participants:** Each participant has something interesting to offer the group. No matter how much you may disagree with participants, allow them to voice their opinion if they are within your group guidelines.
 - **Avoid giving advice:** When you hear other group members start to do this, gently remind them that "this is a safe group, and we're here to listen, not to give advice." It may be helpful to incorporate this into your group guidelines as well.
 - **Use encouraging body language and tone of voice, as well as words:** Lean forward when people are talking, keep your body position open and approachable, smile when appropriate, and attend carefully to everyone, not just to those who talk the most.
- **Give positive feedback for joining the discussion:** Reflect back group members' points to ensure understanding, and thank people for their participation.
- **Be aware of people's reactions and feelings, and try to respond appropriately:** Observe not only individuals, but the whole group. How are people feeling? Being aware of the group's emotions will assist in diverting unnecessary emotional misunderstandings.
- **Be mindful of how you use your own story as a facilitator:** Use of self-disclosure by the facilitator should always be done with the purpose of deepening participants' learning. Reference our helpful tips later in this document when trying to decide whether to disclose or not.
- **Be aware of time:** Stick to the agreed upon time frame for discussions and the allotted meeting as a whole.
- **Consider your social location:** An individual's social location is defined by a combination of factors such as gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Social location is important because it strongly influences our identity, or our sense of self, and how we see the world. It can be helpful to try to understand your social location in order to be able to facilitate across differences. Visit this [website](#) to consider some questions to help think through how your social location may influence the group.



Facilitating in a Circle

Our agendas are designed to be facilitated in a circle format when meeting in person. Below are key components we use when facilitating our circles.

- **Arrangement of furniture:** Put your chairs in a circle with ideally no furniture in the middle. This allows everyone to see each other, not just the facilitator, which fosters a sense of community and opportunities to learn from each other. While, as a facilitator, you may be presenting content in a new way, everyone in the room has expertise when it comes to building and maintaining compassion resilience.
- **Centerpiece:** We recommend putting some object in the middle of the circle for participants to rest their eyes on when they need a break from looking at others. Anything pleasing to look at can work as a centerpiece. We also suggest you place any core content items you have covered in the center of the circle for the group participants to have as a reference as needed. Also, include group agreements you have created and values of the group in the center of every circle.
- **Fidget:** Though not required, many of our participants shared how helpful it was to have items to occupy their hands during our meeting time. These could include a variety of stress balls, pipe cleaners, fidget sticks, or other small items that can be squeezed or manipulated.



Facilitating in a Virtual Setting

Just like everything else, even Compassion Resilience groups needed to pivot with the COVID-19 pandemic. This pivot meant transitioning to virtual gatherings rather than circle practices. With the appropriate adjustments, many Compassion Resilience groups have run with success and strong outcomes. This pivot has also allowed greater access to learning for those who face barriers to in-person groups. Along the way, there have been a few practices that help aid engagement, participation, and learning.



Though things like a centerpiece and fidgets don't translate to a virtual setting, there are ways to ensure that all feel welcome and comfortable

- **Welcome slide:** As participants join the virtual meeting, consider including a welcome slide to say the things you may say as someone entered a physical space. This may include things like "we are excited to have you join us," "we will get started in a few minutes," and any other expectations you may have of the group (changing Zoom name to reflect their preferred name and pronouns, etc.)
- **Encourage cameras to be on:** To help solidify psychological safety, encourage cameras to be on when appropriate. Be sure to mention that there are exceptions to this and that those exceptions are respected. And, explain that when cameras are on, it is a more engaging experience for all involved, particularly when in any breakout groups.
- **Encourage closing other applications:** Having things like email and virtual communication platforms open or even a cell phone nearby can pose as a distraction and tempt participants to multitask. Though it may be necessary to be on the lookout for important communication during group, it is best to encourage participants to be present in the group, even virtually.
- **Change up sharing techniques:** Using breakout rooms in a virtual platform allows you to still use pair shares and small group conversation. This can be beneficial in changing up group dynamics or even simply just changing up the pace.
- **Set guidelines around the use of chat:** Some may find side chatter distracting while a conversation is being had. When setting your shared agreements, it may be helpful to set an agreement on what the chat is used for.
- **Closed captioning:** Most virtual platforms offer closed captioning or subtitles to be turned on. Consider having these turned on and allow participants to choose if this is helpful for their learning or not. Most platforms also allow them to be turned on but hidden if they are distracting to some and helpful for others.
- **Accessibility in virtual gatherings:** Be sure to keep in mind all needs of your group when gathering virtually. The American Bar Association created a [checklist](#) for Accessibility and Best Practices in Virtual Gatherings that may be helpful in being sure your meeting is easy to use for all participants.

Despite a virtual platform, these groups can still be meaningful and spark fruitful conversation. Check out this [video](#) of Priya Parker's Top 5 Tips for Leading a Meaningful Virtual Gathering. Priya Parker is the author of [The Art Of Gathering](#) and offers several resources on gatherings both in person and virtually. Check out her website [here](#).

Co-facilitating

Co-facilitation is when a group is facilitated by two individuals instead of one. There are lots of advantages to having groups co-facilitated. Co-facilitators can take turns and support each other, relieving some of the challenges that come with facilitating by oneself. Co-facilitating can provide another pair of eyes and ears when analyzing what is happening with individuals and the whole group. You can bounce ideas off each other if any tweaks need to be made, such as suggesting a break or restructuring the group setup to improve the atmosphere. Additionally, co-facilitating is useful if one facilitator needs to step out of role to take part in the discussion, have a break, or when back-up is needed in cases of tension, conflict, or confusion. Someone not actively facilitating can pay more attention to the emotional atmosphere of the group.



When selecting a co-facilitator some things you want to consider include:

- **Schedule:** Do your schedules allow for you both to be present for most, if not all, of the groups planned?
- **Diversity:** What diversity do you represent as a co-facilitation pair (in terms of race, age, sex, job title, etc.?)
- **Honesty:** How comfortable are you being honest with each other?
- **Experience:** Does at least one member of the co-facilitation pair have experience facilitating a group, especially one that has more dialogue than teaching? If not, what support do you need to access to help you learn as you go?

Working with a co-facilitator is a different experience than facilitating a group on your own. Here are some tips to consider to help your co-facilitation be successful:

1. **Check in with each other in advance.** As soon as you know you will be working with each other, get together to plan. You need to agree on the timing, who will gather supplies, and what roles and responsibilities you each have.
2. **Tell your co-facilitator what you expect and need.** The first time you meet, tell each other what you expect from a co-facilitator and how you work best. Everyone has a different understanding of co-facilitation and this needs to be shared before you work together.
3. **Check in with each other before and after the group.** Before the group you need to check in with each other to divvy up the agenda and if any adjustments need to be made since you last spoke. After the training you need to check in to share your thoughts on how the session went, what needs to change in the following session, and what could be done better next time. Because 'the unexpected' can always happen, checking in before and after a session is critical. This is also a great time to affirm each other.
4. **Support your co-facilitator.** While your co-facilitator is leading an activity, you should be fully attentive to what they need and what the group may need. Helping your co-facilitator hand out paper, support a confused working group, or tape something on the wall, can help them be more focused on the task at hand and keep up the energy of the group.
5. **Don't interfere.** While your co-facilitator is leading an activity, don't interfere or contradict them (unless it is critical to the learning). You need to stay focused on what is happening so that you can support your co-facilitator without being an interference or burden.
6. **Set personal and team goals.** Before you facilitate, name 1-2 things you want to remember and work on in the session. If you share these with your co-facilitator, you can also get feedback on these goals at the end of the session. Setting team goals is also a great idea.

Co-facilitating (continued)

7. **Stay on time.** Always try to stay within your delegated time frame. The sessions are often scheduled for a short amount of time, where every minute is valuable and accounted for. If you use more than your allotted time, it will impact your co-facilitator's activity and the learning that needs to happen.
8. **Affirm each other.** Whenever possible and true, affirm your co-facilitator. Everyone feels nervous about facilitating. You need to take every opportunity to tell your co-facilitator what they are doing well.
9. **Work as a team.** At all times, you want the learners to see the two of you as "a team." Support each other, affirm each other in front of the group, and weave the work your co-facilitator did into your work. You want the learners to think "Wow, you work well together!"

Adapted from [Global Learning Partners](#).



Creating Psychological Safety and Supporting Trust Among the Group

Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for being their full selves and speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. This feeling is critical for participants to fully engage in the group. Psychological safety starts with a clear sense of trust within the group. Building trust is a competency, a set of skills that can be learned and improved.

Many of the activities involved in building compassion resilience require the development of trusting relationships to be more effective. Trust is choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions.¹ Choosing to trust someone involves assessment of one's care, reliability, competence, and sincerity.

Trust is complicated and fragile. It is a moving target meaning that individuals are either growing in trust or growing out of trust with others. It is not an all or nothing feeling/belief. Either consciously or unconsciously, we continually ask if we can trust another with valuable information about our work or personal life or both. Something about an individual's past actions or words will guide our decision about what is "safe" to share and what is not.

For persons impacted with trauma, trust is often difficult to muster. One reason for this is the neurobiological nature of trust. When someone fears for their physical or emotional safety, the stress response system is activated. The amygdala scans the environment for signals of threats and releases cortisol to fight the perceived threat. Anxiety, fear, and anger are connected to an activated stress system and to the development of distrust. Distrust is emotional, chemical, and neurological. Once distrust of a person, environment, or situation is developed, it is a challenge to change.

On the other hand, the action of trusting someone is connected to a high level of oxytocin that is associated with human attachment, bonding, and social recognition. To sustain a high level of oxytocin in one's system, cortisol, and the emotions connected to mistrust need to be modulated. In other words, two separate systems functioning primarily in two different parts of the brain are associated with distrust and trust.

Another reason building trust is challenging is that it is complex. Brené Brown has developed a model of trust built on the work of Charles Feltman. Unpacking the components helps to understand what to focus on when working to transition from distrust to trust.

Brené Brown uses the acronym of **BRAVING²** to explain the components of trust. For me to be trustworthy, I need to:

- **Boundaries:** Trust a person's boundaries. What is "okay" for them, must be "okay" for me. I need to be able to accept what is "not okay" for them and change my actions accordingly.
- **Reliability:** Do what I say I am going to do over and over again so that others feel assured I will keep my promises or commitments to them.
- **Accountability:** Own up to my mistakes, apologize and make amends for any harm done by my actions, I will be more likely to be trusted.
- **Vault:** Protect others' personal information. The exception to this is if sharing the information can save someone from harm.



Creating Psychological Safety and Supporting Trust Among the Group (continued)

- **Integrity:** Choose courage over comfort by aligning my actions with my values and beliefs even if it is unpopular.
- **Non-judgment:** Make space for others to be vulnerable with me without being judged.
- **Generosity:** Assume the most generous thing about others' words, intentions, and behaviors. I begin the conversation believing that "a person is doing the best they can."

How someone develops a sense of trust differs from person to person based on their own life experiences, and it is important to acknowledge that it may take time for someone to engage in the group to their fullest. To support the formation of trust, maintaining psychological safety and creating an environment for others to show up their full selves when they feel ready is key. Here are some tips for creating psychological safety within the group:

- Set shared agreements that are made collaboratively with the group. When the group establishes norms for participants to follow, it creates a means of accountability to how participants will show up for each other. It may be helpful to suggest the following four and then let the group build from there:
 - Do your best to be mentally present
 - Listen to understand, not to respond
 - What is shared here, stays here
 - Approach each other with grace
- You can adjust your sharing technique to meet the participants where they are at. If the "go around" or "all share" style feels like it may be too much for the time being, consider adjusting to a "pair share" or even individual reflection before taking some share outs.
- Use self-disclosure to model the type of response you are looking for. This will cue the participants to know how deep to share, how long to share, and allows them an example to spark their thoughts. Additionally, it helps show that you are human too.
- Should "problem" behavior (eye rolling, disrespectful language, multitasking, etc.) occur, be sure to address the behavior in a respectful manner in group and outside of group. When addressing in group, it may be a gentle reminder of the group agreements or a direct ask to disengage from the behavior. Outside of group, it may be a more personal conversation to see if further support is needed.
- Structure offers safety. Following the same structure, having group at the same time, and sticking to time limits allows participants to know what to expect.
- Lean into the [Compassionate Action Steps](#) when participants share.
- Be aware of your own personal identities and how they can impact the space dynamics.
- Invite participants to share what they may need to feel comfortable and psychologically safe.

¹ Feltman, Charles. 2021. *The Thin Book of Trust: An essential Primer for Building Trust at Work*. 2nd Edition. Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing Co. p.9

² Anne Whitney-Coulter (February 5, 2021). [Brené Brown on What it Really Means to Trust. Mindful.](#)

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is the process of sharing personal information about yourself with group participants. This can be done verbally or non-verbally, and on deeper or superficial levels. When done appropriately, there are some benefits to using self-disclosure as a facilitation tool. Some of these include:

- Modeling the type of sharing that the facilitator would like to see by participants
- Deepening the group’s learning by helping connect content to real life examples
- Making the facilitator more relatable and ensuring concepts are made less abstract
- Serving as validation for others



However, when not done well, self-disclosure can have a negative impact on the group. Negative consequences could include:

- **Serving as a distraction to participants:** Sharing by the facilitator that is shocking, off-topic, or overly personal, may leave participants thinking about what the facilitator shared instead of the content/sharing covered after.
- **Stunting future sharing by participants:** If the sharing the facilitator engaged in shows a strong preference for a certain belief or opinion, this could stunt the sharing of participants who have a different belief or opinion.
- **Impacting credibility as a facilitator and group leader:** Too much sharing about difficulty engaging with the content as a facilitator could lead group members to thinking the facilitator isn’t qualified to lead the group.
- **Leaving participants feeling they need to take care of the facilitator instead of their own learning:** When a facilitator shares something overly personal and perhaps something they haven’t fully processed themselves, it can leave participants feeling the need to care for the facilitator instead of their own learning.

Tips for self-disclosure

Before choosing to disclose to participants, consider these points:

- **WAIT – Why am I telling?:** Ask yourself this question ahead of time and only share when your “why” is for the good of the participants’ learning.
- **Be intentional:** When preparing for the group ahead of time, think about how you may use your personal story to benefit the participants’ learning.
- **Consider the impact:** Think about what kind of impact your sharing could have on participants in your group.
- **Be brief:** Your share should be concise and to the point. Most of the time sharing should be done by participants, not the facilitator.
- **Use “I” statements: Your story is just that, yours.** Using “I” statements will help you avoid over generalizable statements.
- **Check with your co-facilitator:** Before you do any significant sharing with the group, you want to let your co-facilitator know. Not only will it ensure you two are on the same page but they can also serve as a sounding board as to whether it is something helpful to the group for you to share.

Consider how social identity and level of positional power in your work environment will impact self disclosure. If you are a person with privilege via race, job title, or longevity in the building, for example, the risks that you might take with self disclosure will not be the same as those who are new to the job or who don’t see people in the building who share their identity. It is important not to view this as resistance or lack of engagement when colleagues may be feeling cautious and protecting themselves from any potential consequences. Please see our resource on [exploring resistance](#) in the toolkit.

Engaging People with Questions

Though the agendas are laid out so that you can facilitate them as they are written and see the necessary outcomes, as you feel more comfortable with the material, you may personalize questions or ask them in your own tone. When doing so, there are a couple of things to keep in mind as you ask questions.



Types of questions

- **Open-ended question:** This type of question allows participants to give a free form answer, more than a simple yes or no is needed. We highly suggest this type of question as it allows participants to deepen their learning and connect the material to real life examples or experiences.
- **Close-ended question:** This type of question can be answered with just yes or no and can be useful for check in with the group. A close-ended question you may use while facilitating might be “Are there any questions?” or “Do you feel ready to move on to the next section?”
- **Questions that are looking for the correct answer:** This type of question is just that – a question that can be answered correctly or incorrectly. This might sound something like “What is the definition of Compassion Resilience?” or “What is the second step of the Compassionate Action Steps?” We suggest staying away from these questions as much as possible as no one is expected to be an expert in Compassion Resilience and searching for right answers can shut down participants desire to engage. Additionally, it is more beneficial for participants to connect to the content on a deeper level rather than focus on rote memorizing. Instead of, “what is the definition of Compassion Resilience?” “How have you seen the role of Compassion Resilience play out in your life over the last week?” allows participants to personalize and go one step further.

Set up the question clearly

- Be sure to formulate the question clearly and aim to not ask the question more than twice.
- Communicate what participants can expect from you as the questioner. Letting them know that you are comfortable with silence as participants think deeper, how many responses you plan to take, or in what order you will call on people can provide psychological safety for the group as they formulate responses.
- Communicate what you expect from the participants in their responses. Letting them know how long of answer, how deep of an answer, and how long they have to reflect, also provides psychological safety.

Your responses to the participants’ answers

- Try to avoid value-based responses to answers such as “GREAT answer” or “Yes, that’s perfect!” This may unintentionally convey to other participants who had a different perspective, that they shouldn’t share. As a facilitator, it is important to invite in all perspectives. The best response is often just “thank you for sharing.”
- Do your best to connect someone’s response to the learning of the group. This deepens participants understanding and applies the content to a real life example.

Group Dynamics

Any group of people includes a variety of personal styles of communicating. When facilitating a group, it is your role to guide the members to express themselves within the group guidelines and in line with the agenda for each session. This is often challenging. Here are some of the common challenges that you may encounter, and some tips on handling them with compassion:



- **External processor:** This person finds it natural to respond to questions and typically responds first in the group. Remind everyone in the group of the guidelines and that your goal is to provide space for all to be heard that choose to speak. Breaking into pair shares or small groups often gives space for others to speak. Going around the circle to give each person an opportunity to speak or pass is very helpful. Remind the group that the goal is to listen rather than engage in crosstalk. You can also limit responses to a certain time frame (e.g., one minute), so others have time to respond. You may have times when you want to specifically call on someone to give their thoughts. Be sure to remind them of the pass option. If the problem continues, talk to the person outside of the group about your concern. It may also be beneficial to include a group guideline such as, “Step Up and Step Back,” explaining to the group that if they know they are a frequent sharer, to do their best to take a step back, and if they know they are a bit more reserved, to challenge themselves to speak up more.
- **Internal processor:** This is the quiet person in the group who does not share often. If you think non-talkers just need a little prompting, watch for signs that they might want to participate and ask them to share at that time. Be sure to affirm them after responding and reflect back their thoughts to encourage future responses. Asking participants to write their thoughts first can provide time for a less frequent contributor to focus their ideas for sharing.
- **Tangents, helpful or not:** At times, participants lead the group off track by starting personal or random tangents. Feel free to go off on these tangent occasionally if you think it is appropriate, but also firmly bring the group back on track when needed. If the problem becomes excessive, again, talk to the person outside of group. Affirm them in what they do contribute and let them know about the challenge you have in trying to address all the material in the allotted time frame if the group goes too far off topic on numerous occasions.
- **Skepticism:** This person brings in strong outside thoughts or feelings and casts a negative light on the material being presented or conversation being had. It can be helpful to validate and affirm this person’s feelings while inviting other perspectives into the group as well. Additionally, it can be frustrating as a facilitator when things don’t go as planned due to this person’s strong emotions. Be sure that you stay mindful of your responses and tone as you navigate through. This can be crucial for the psychological safety of the group. An outside check in with this person may be needed to see what support would be best for their productive participation in the circle.
- **Potentially disruptive behavior:** Some behaviors, such as giving unsolicited advice, rolling one’s eyes, or being overly distracted with personal electronics during group time can impact the psychological safety of the group. Remind everyone of the group guidelines and do one-on-one check ins with participants exhibiting disruptive behavior as needed.
- **Pre-existing friendships:** Naturally, as you do this in a workplace, there will be pre-existing friendship that show up to the group. It is important to remind the participants of the shared agreements, and to focus on confidentiality by reiterating the importance of the conversation remaining within the circle. If you find that “group think” becomes present due to these pre-existing relationships, it can be helpful to intentionally ask for different opinions. You can also adjust how answers are shared – consider adjusting to a pair share and switching up how small groups are formed to allow participants a chance to get to know others in the group.

Facilitating with Different Levels of Power in the Room

The role of leadership is essential to culture change, and it is highly encouraged to incorporate leadership into groups. There are a few things to consider when it comes to doing so:

- Sharing content of the group ahead of time allows for a conversation about their supportive participation. Look to our [leadership guide](#) that gives leaders specific guidance for each section of the toolkit.
- Talk with leaders about their sharing in the group with these considerations in mind:
 - Their share could model the vulnerability that you are hoping to see from all participants. It can set the stage that it is okay for participants to open up and speak honestly.
 - Yet, it is a balance of modeling and allowing space for the other participants to share. Be careful that leadership doesn't hold too much space in the group and unintentionally stunt the shares of others.
 - Be clear that while in group, leadership should set aside the need to clarify or correct when another participant shares. Although a follow up may be needed, it should be done outside of the group.
 - Ultimately, this is a great time for leaders to just listen to their employees. This should be a priority for leadership while participating in the group.



How to Support Someone Who Needs More Support

The content of the toolkit asks participants to be vulnerable and turn inward, and this may lead to a participant needing support outside of the group time. At the same time, it is important to remember that these are psychoeducational groups and facilitators are not expected to also be therapists. When someone expresses the need for more support, keep the following considerations in mind.

- Be mindful of changes in participants' behavior, and if concerned, an individual check in may be appropriate.
- Lean into the [Compassionate Action Steps](#), and be sure to have permission from the participant before giving advice.
- Know what supports your organization offers employees. Things like an Employee Assistance Program, HR benefits, or other connections to local resources are helpful details to know as a facilitator.
- Remember support given in the toolkit such as [How To Respond to Someone Else's Pain](#) or the resources listed on the ProQOL [website](#).
- Remember your limitation as a facilitator and connect the participant with a leader or HR partner if further conversation is needed.

