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Tips for Effective Facilitation

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Tips for Effective Facilitation

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As a facilitator, you will have to work with the groups and play an important role in facilitating an understanding of the Child Anemia Training Module and the implementation of the strategy at the SHC level. This part of the toolkit is designed specifically to give you tips on facilitating the sessions.

Release tension: One of the best ways to do this is take deep breaths. Breathe from your diaphragm and remember to exhale all the way. It also helps to exercise regularly, as unused energy may come out as anxiety.

Rehearse: After you have mastered the material, practice the presentation until you feel confident. Before giving the presentation, visualize yourself succeeding. If you imagine success, you are more likely to be successful.

Know the room and your equipment: Finish testing your audio-visual equipment and complete set-up before participants arrive. The training module includes a section on preperation. You must read this and prepare for your session accordingly whether it is in preparing photocopies, putting up chart papers, or getting equipment ready.

Know the participants: Talk to them as they arrive – it is easier to speak in front of people you are familiar with than a group of strangers.

Reassure yourself: The participants are not there to see you perform; they are there to learn the material. People are not scrutinizing you or waiting for you to make a mistake. Most likely, they want you to succeed and facilitate an interesting session.

Re-frame: Feeling nervous and feeling excited are very similar. Harness your nervous energy and turn it into enthusiasm.

Resist imitating another's style: Be natural and relaxed. Only use others' techniques if you can do it without thinking. Concentrating on presenting like someone else takes your focus away from the material, possibly creating anxiety.

Know your first line and the transition to the main point: Memorizing the introduction to the session can dissipate anxiety and help you begin with confidence.

Concentrate on the message, not yourself: Try as hard as possible to turn your attention outward. Focus on what you are there to do. Engage the participants in the material so they can learn effectively.

Rest and eat well: A session requires a lot of energy, enthusiasm, and focus. Being on your toes for several hours can be mentally and emotionally exhausting, so get plenty of rest and nutrition so that you are physically and psychologically alert.

Facilitating Discussion

Actively engaged participants are more likely to recall and use the information outside of the confines of the session. However, leading an active session is hard and requires solid facilitation skills. For this reason, the following sections cover some key facilitation skills that you will need to effectively lead an active and productive session.

This section reviews guidelines needed for:

Leading vs. Directing

The key to facilitating effectively is to remember that your role is to lead the discussion, not direct it. As a leader, you should focus on drawing ideas out of the participants, rather than dominating with your ideas and experiences. The following are the tips to help you remember to facilitate rather than direct:

Respect the participants: Demonstrate this respect by calling them by their titles and listening actively.

Be enthusiastic about the topic and the session program: Display your enthusiasm by leaning towards participants when they are speaking.

Ask and encourage questions and idea sharing: Do not use negative language, such as, "That's wrong," when responding.

Be clear and direct: This means give examples and avoid the passive voice, such as, "Health inequities are revealed by the data," instead of "The data reveals health inequities."

Keep your own contributions during group discussions brief: Let participants respond to questions and to one another first. If they answer a question completely, you need not add additional information. Most of the debriefings will work like that. However, it is important for you to consolidate the session's topics, so participants can easily discuss and learn from each other.

Use silence to give participants time to think about an answer or response to a question before you give them "the answers.": Count to 10. If you don't get any responses from the participants, re-phrase the question and count to 10 again. Then, prompt the group with an answer and ask for others.

Encourage the participation of people who have been quiet: One way to do this is to state the participant's name first and ask the participant an opinion question with no correct answer. You can avoid putting the participant on the spot by asking a question you know she or he can easily respond to.

Facilitating Discussion

Discussions effectively promote active learning. However, interesting discussions that engage the group rarely develop by chance. This section offers tips in the following areas to help you stimulate interesting discussions:

- Asking Questions

- Responding to Incorrect Answers
- Answering Questions

This section can also be used by the trainer in facilitating the session on counseling that will emerge from the role plays. The facilitator can also give tips on counseling and asking questions to the mothers and caretakers using this section. For example, the tips talk about using open-ended questions that encourage answers beyond "yes" or "no" and asking sensitive questions without hurting the sentiments of others.

Asking Questions

It is the responsibility of the trainers to pose stimulating and intriguing questions or topics for discussion. Below are some tips for asking questions that yield powerful responses.

Use open-ended questions that encourage answers beyond yes or no.

Example: Closed question: Did you like the session?

Open-ended question: What did you like about the session?

Ask honest and relevant questions- Begin by engaging participants around what they know. This will certainly help you in elicit responses about challenges that they face in the field,

Use "think back" questions- When trying to engage participants in a discussion about their experiences, ask them to remember their past instead of imagining a hypothetical situation. This will be particularly helpful when you are discussing possible solutions to the challenges that they face.

Ask clear and concise questions- Make sure your questions cover only one issue at a time.

Use unbiased questions- Phrase questions in a way that does not betray your opinion and that does not guide the participants to answer one way or another.

HINT: If no one is responding to your questions, remember to try and ask it in a different way. If that does not work, try prompting the group with an answer.

Avoid asking "why." When asked why they think something or feel a certain way, people can become defensive for many reasons; they might not have an answer, they might not want to share their answer, or they might feel as though they do not need to justify what they believe. Instead of asking someone why they believe something, try asking them what experiences led them to that conclusion, to give examples, or other strategies that will help draw out more information.

Description Example

Introductory: To begin talking about the session topic, ask broad questions.

"How would you describe a responsive service delivery system at the Zilla and Block levels?"

Transition to move the discussion on to the key questions.

"Think back to Session III where we have spoken about the causes of anemia. For children, what are the causes according to that discussion?

Key to get detailed information on the central topic of the session. "What needs to be done to make sure that all pregnant mothers register for antenatal care (ANC) and take iron and folic acid (IFA) tablets for at least 100 days? "Is there anything else anyone would like to add before we move on?"

Summarize the discussion at the end.

"Next we will talk about what each of us can do to encourage families for ensuring that each child is given the full iron supplement."

Responding to Incorrect Answers

Do not shut down a person who gave an incorrect response. This may freeze the discussion, as others will not want to risk responding for fear of being shut down. To minimize the potential for embarrassment, acknowledge the effort and then redirect the question to the whole group. For instance, you might say, "Interesting. I can see how you might have come up with that idea. Who else has an idea?"

Answering Questions

As a facilitator, one of the most common questions you will ask is, "Does anyone have any questions?" If, in response, you are asked questions you think the group can answer, redirect them to the group to encourage active learning. If you are the only person who can answer the question, use the following tips:

You're asked a question that you can't answer. Don't be defensive or fake it, just say you don't know or ask to get back to the person later.

You're asked an extensive question. Break the question down into smaller parts and keep your answer as concise as possible without omitting key details.

You're asked a question you already answered. Try again and if the questioner still doesn't understand, but the rest of the group looks bored, ask to talk about it in more detail after the session.

You're asked a question you think is stupid. Remember, not everyone is as familiar with the material are you are. Be patient.

You're asked a controversial question. This is good. It means people are thinking critically. Take your time in answering, don't be pressured into saying anything you don't mean.

You're asked a hostile question. Stay calm. Rise above it by sticking to the issues.

You're asked a question you don't want to answer. Say so, and, when appropriate, offer to meet with the person later to discuss your response. If everyone at the session wants you to respond, you should consider the reasons why and how it may be either useful or detrimental to the session.

You're asked a dichotomous question. A dichotomous question is one for which you can answer with a simple "yes" or "no." Instead of giving a one word answer, try to add some detail to let the questioner know that you don't think the question is inconsequential.

Facilitating Discussion

Active listening skills are essential for effective discussion facilitation. Active listening builds understanding and consensus in a group, as active listening skills include not only listening to content and feelings, but also responding in a way that enhances mutual understanding. This section covers the following active listening skills and should be used by the facilitator for briefing participants for the counseling session:

- Encouraging
- Paraphrasing
- Mirroring
- Clarifying
- Reflecting
- Summarizing
- Validating
- Stacking

Encouraging

Encouraging is how you create an open space for people to participate without putting any one individual on the spot. Encouraging is especially helpful during the early stages of the discussion, while participants are still warming up. As people become more engaged, they do not need as much encouragement to participate. However, at times, some participants will not feel engaged by the discussion. It is your responsibility as the facilitator to convey interest and help them discover what aspect of the discussion holds meaning for them. You can do this through encouragement. Once you have a participant speaking, you can also use encouragement to get them to keep talking. The following are some encouragement techniques:

How to encourage: Examples

"Who else has an idea?"

"Is there a perspective on this issue from someone in a different unit?"

"Does anyone have a "personal story" who is willing to share relating to this issue?"

Don't agree or disagree. Use neutral words. Use varying voice intonations.

"Is this discussion raising questions for anyone?"

"What was said at the end of the room?"

"Can you tell me more?"

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a fundamental listening skill. Paraphrasing has a calming effect, as it relieves speakers of the fear that they are neither being listened to nor understood. It also reminds the speaker that their ideas are worthwhile. Most importantly, it provides an opportunity for the speaker to hear how their ideas are being heard so s/he can ensure that they are being interpreted the way she intended. The following are techniques to keep in mind:

Examples of how to paraphrase
Preface your paraphrase with a comment like:

- "It sounds to me you are saying…"
- "This is what I am hearing you say…"
- "Let me see if I understand…"
- "Did I get that right?"

- Use your own words to say what you think the speaker said.
- If the speaker's statement is one or two sentences, use roughly the same number when you paraphrase.
- If the speaker's statement is very long, summarize it.
- If the speaker does not feel s/he was understood correctly, ask for clarification.

Clarifying

Clarifying is a way of giving people the support they need to refine their ideas. It can be used to better understand what was said, to get more information, and to help the speaker see other points of view. It sends the speaker the message, "I am with you; I understand you so far. Now tell me a little more." Additionally, it lets the speaker know that their ideas are worth exploring and that the group will give the time needed to allow them to get all their ideas out. Clarifying is particularly useful in two circumstances: 1) when someone is having difficulty expressing an idea; and 2) when someone thinks they are being clear, but the thought is actually vague or confusing to listeners. In order to decide whether or not an idea needs to be clarified, ask yourself, "Do I think I understand the core of what s/he is trying to say." If the answer is "no," attempt to clarify. The following techniques are useful for clarifying ideas.

Examples of how to clarify
The speaker says, "I think it is fair to say that most people would be uncomfortable with the change." The listener says, "So, you are saying most people would not like the change. Can you give me an example of what you

mean?" Other clarifying questions include: "Can you say more about that?" Paraphrase the speaker's statement and then ask a clarifying question.

Reflecting

Reflecting is the act of telling a participant your interpretation of the basic feelings s/he expressed while speaking. A facilitator is using reflecting when they say to participants, "You seem upset," or "You sound very excited about all the possibilities." Reflecting allows you to show the participants that you understand how they feel. It also allows participants to evaluate their own feelings after hearing them expressed by someone else. It is important to maintain a warm and accepting tone of voice.

Summarizing & Tracking

Summarizing is the work that facilitators do to review the progress of the discussion, pull together the important facts and ideas, and establish the basis for further discussion.

Summarizing is not something to save until the end of the discussion. It should be used periodically throughout the entire discussion to ensure participants understand what is being discussed and the direction in which the discussion is moving. In order to summarize, facilitators re-state the major ideas expressed, including feelings.

Validating

Validating is very simple and has a great impact. A facilitator is validating when she acknowledges the worthiness of another person by saying something like, "I really appreciate your participation." This statement demonstrates that you value the participant's ideas, opinions, and feelings; as a result, the participant is likely to remain engaged in the session.

Stacking

Stacking is a procedure for helping people take turns when several people want to speak at once. During a discussion, participants may become distracted as they compete for air time. Stacking lets participants know that they will have a turn to speak and frees up the facilitator to listen instead of constantly trying to remember who has spoken and who is waiting to speak. Even though stacking is not considered an active listening technique, we have included it here because it helps both the facilitator and the participants maintain active listening.

Example of Stacking

- First, the facilitator asks those who want to speak to raise their hands.
- Second, she creates a speaking order by assigning numbers.
- Third, she calls on people when it is their turn.
- Fourth, when the last person has spoken, the facilitator checks for additional speakers.

(1) "Would all those who want to speak please raise your hands."
(2) "Simran, you are first. Devika, you're second and Minal, you're third."
(3) When Simran has finished, "Who was second? Was it you Devika? Go ahead."
(4) After the last person has spoken, "Does anyone else have something to add?"

Facilitating Discussion

Regardless of your skill as a facilitator and the amount of preparation you put into the session, you will inevitably face some difficult situations. This section covers how to handle the following types of situations:

Discussion Dominators
If someone is doing a lot of talking, it may prevent others from contributing their thoughts, which limits their active learning. Although it may seem intimidating, it can be very easy to reduce the amount of sharing coming from one participant.

What to do:

Wait for a pause in her/his speaking, such as when they take a breath. Respectfully acknowledge the contribution they have made, and thank her/him. You can say something like, "I really appreciate your comments." Then make direct eye contact with other participants and ask something like, "I'm very interested in hearing how other people are feeling about this issue" or "It's very interesting to get a variety of perspectives, and I would like to hear from other people as well."

No Response

Every facilitator has stood before a group that stares at her/him blankly after being asked what s/he thought was a very simple question. Even questions that stimulated the most interesting discussions with one group can fall completely flat with another. When this happens, it is important to understand why participants are not responding, and adapt accordingly.

Did you ask a question that was difficult for the participants to understand?

If so, rephrase or reword the question in a way that ensures that salient issues are explored.

Do you think you might have asked a sensitive question *(i.e., something that people are afraid to answer honestly because it might make other people angry)?*

Please see the last part of this section for ideas on how to handle sensitive topics.

Are people tired of talking about the topic and/or do they have nothing more to say about a topic? In this case, it may be important to simply state, "Is there anything else that you would like to share? [pause] If not, we can move on." If you, as the facilitator, think you haven't got all of the information you want on that topic, rather than trying to force the issue, just be aware that there may be an opportunity to elicit salient information through probing that occurs with respect to other questions.

Are participants bored of discussions and need more stimulating activities to get them thinking? Even though the session is filled with engaging activities, it might not be enough. For instance, there may be times when you are conducting a session after a particularly exhausting day for many of the participants and so they are dragging. Instead of trying to force the session as you planned it, make changes where necessary.

Are people feeling uncomfortable about talking? This typically occurs at the beginning of a session and is less likely to occur when the facilitator is able to set a comfortable tone and put people at ease in the beginning. If you sense that the group is not warmed-up enough, you can try another ice-breaker or jump straight to an activity. If, however, this continues to be an issue during the session, talk about easier topics, things that you think participants may be more familiar with or more comfortable talking about, or, perhaps, things that you know are particularly interesting to them. If no one responds to a question, and you aren't sure exactly what the problem is, it's okay sometimes to just wait it out. Be quiet for a moment and allow people time to think. Often, someone will speak up, either to answer the question or to ask a question that allows you to better understand the silence.

Off-topic Discussions

When the group begins to talk about issues not relevant to the session, you might take advantage of a pause and say, "Thank you for that interesting idea. Perhaps we can discuss it outside this session and with your consent, we would like to move on."

Do not stop the discussion abruptly. Unless a side conversation is so distracting it absolutely cannot be ignored, do not interrupt a speaker in order to ask others to quiet down; this may make the speaker lose her/his train of thought and can disrupt the flow of the discussion. Instead, wait until the speaker has finished and respond to the person first. Then, you might respectfully remind people of the ground rules and ask that people finish their conversations and rejoin the larger group discussion.

Skipping Ahead

When a participant skips ahead, providing information relevant to topics you have not yet covered, you can use probes to gently return the person to the topic at hand. You do not want to interrupt the participant; rather, let her/him finish her/his thought and remain an active listener.

Acknowledge what s/he said and that it was an interesting point, and that you would love to hear more from her/him once the group gets to the topic. Once you get to that topic, acknowledge that relevant information has already been shared, paraphrasing what the participant said. Ask the participant if there is anything else s/he would like to add to topic and then ask the group for feedback on her/his point. Make sure that all group members have an opportunity to explore the issue more fully, if need be.

Interpersonal Conflict

If two or more people in the group begin arguing with each other in an unproductive manner, you must confront the situation before it spirals out of control. You can try to defuse the situation with humor, or give the participants an easy way out of the argument by reframing what they are saying and moving on. If one group member continues to attack another person, ask that person specifically to respect the ground rules. If the conflict continues, address the problem directly, asking for any underlying reasons that might be fueling the conflict. Finally, if that does not work, speak to the person or persons involved separate from the group.

Rambling Discussion

In order to get through the whole session, some discussions need to be curtailed, even when they are productive and interesting. When a discussion has gone on for too long, you can jump in when someone takes a breath and comment on the quality of the discussion, but add that it is time to move on. Summarize the key points and offer to resume the discussion later if there is time. (Congratulate yourself on successfully engaging the participants!)

Games and Energizers

Given below are some sample games and energizers which can be used by facilitators during the sessions. These games and energizers are not only helpful as ice-breakers among participants, but can also be used as an interactive technique to enhance learning during sessions. Facilitators can add relevant games of their own during the workshop.

A. Chidiya ud, Pankh ud (importance of listening)

1. Participants stand in a circle.
2. Facilitator stands in the middle.
3. Facilitator will call out names of things that fly and flap his arms.
4. Participants have to do the same, except that if the name that the facilitator has called out does not fly, then they will not flap their arms.
5. Eg: Chidiya ud, kabootar ud, titli ud, kalam ud (participants will not flap their arms; if someone does, that person is out of the game).

B. Seven Up

1. Participants stand in a circle.
2. Facilitator stands in the middle.
3. Facilitator asks everyone to start counting up to number 6.
4. While counting, the person should put his hand (left or right) across his heart.
5. The person towards whom the hand is pointing will call out the next number.
6. The person who calls out number 7 will have to put her/his hand on the head.
7. If the person, who is to call out the number 7, puts her/his hand across the heart, s/he is out of the game and the game starts again with number 1.
8. If the person does this action correctly, the game continues with the next person starting the game with number 1 again up to number 7.
9. If a person towards whom the hand is pointing does not call out the next number, the person is out of the game.
10. The game should be played very fast so that people have to think on their feet.

C. Mismatch

1. Form two groups.
2. Give each member of the group a slip of paper.
3. Ask them to stand away from each other.
4. One group will make a statement, e.g. (We are all standing on top of mountain top right now, etc.)

5. The other group will make a sentence starting with 'now'. Eg: "Now is the best time to buy steak at the supermarket, etc."
6. Facilitator helps in writing the sentences down in case the participant cannot write.
7. Now the facilitator takes the slip from one group and gives one to each member of the next group and vice versa.
8. Participants now stand in two lines facing each other.
9. The statement is read outloud first, followed by the next statement.

D. Ha

This exercise asks the participants to pass the word 'ha' around a circle. This activity is generally more effective when used during the later stage of the training program or session.

Ask the participants to form a circle. When they are ready, explain that the object of this activity is for the participants- without laughing- to pass the word "ha" around the circle. Designate one participant to be the head of the circle. That participant begins by saying "ha". The person sitting to her/his or her right must repeat the "ha" and then say another "ha". The third person must say "ha ha", and then say an additional "ha." In this manner, the "ha" continues around the circle. It ends when all of the participants, trying not to laugh (a virtual impossibility), have repeated the "ha" that preceded them and then added their own "ha".

Variations: Use another word in place of "ha". For example: "he", "laddu", or "kheer" or ask all of the participants to repeat the "ha" stopping only to let the person whose turn it is pipe in with his or her own. You can continue the exercise for five minutes regardless of how many times the "ha" goes around the circle.

E. Grab the Laddu

Participants stand in a circle, arms out to the side. Left hand palm up, right index finger pointing down and touching on neighbor's outstretched palm.

"When I say 'Go', do two things.... grab the finger in your left hand, and prevent your right finger from being grabbed... 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... [add suspense] ... Go".

Repeat several times.

F. Counting the Fingers

Have everyone in your group pair up and face each other. Each person holds up 0 to 10 fingers behind their back. On hearing you say the word "go", they pull their hands from behind their backs. The person standing opposite is to count **the sum of the fingers shown in two hands and say the number. If correct, now they** swap the roles. If wrong, the same person gets a chance to show the fingers.

Repeat 4-5 times.

Variation: Instead of sum of the fingers in two hands, let the person multiply the fingers.

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