

How to be a great facilitator

Here are some tips about how to be a great facilitator:

- Be prepared. Write out the format of the workshop session and go through it with your partner before the session.
- Keep all the resources you need at your fingertips.
- Have someone else manage the time. It's great to get the parents involved.
- Speak slowly, clearly, and loud enough so everyone can hear.
- Set up a question board where people can stick up any issues that are on their minds. This can help you if you are not sure how to answer some questions.
- Remember that you do not have to have all the answers or respond to each comment someone makes. You are there to generate discussion and keep people talking about the set topic.
- Be careful not to patronise. Remember that the aim of the programme is to create partnership.
- Value all opinions, even if they are not the same as your own.
- Thank people.
- Encourage discussion rather than dominating it.
- Keep the programme interactive.
- Remember a person who you admire as a good facilitator and try to take on one of their attributes.
- Have fun! If you are happy and enjoying yourself, the parents will enjoy themselves too.

Techniques to use during sessions

You may like to use the following techniques during the sessions:

- Brainstorm key words – individually, in pairs, or in groups.
- Make mind maps with key headings that could be given by you or negotiated with the whole group – individually, in pairs, or in groups.
- Have each person write three sentences summarising their responses to the discussion, a handout, or a video and listing possible areas of focus.
- Make spider charts – hand out sheets with circled keywords (such as “partnerships”) in the middle, and have each participant write eight personal associations around the keywords as “legs” to the spider. Set a time limit, such as one minute. The charts can then be shared in small groups or with partners to discuss similarities and differences.
- Ask the participants to offer responses to key statements (“think, pair, share”) – individually, in pairs, or as a group.
- Set some thought-provoking questions and ask the participants to “post” their responses anonymously in envelopes provided. Divide the participants into groups and have each group collate and summarise the responses in a set of envelopes, then share these with the whole group.
- Use a “round robin” format to encourage sharing – have each participant make a response to an issue or topic, going around the room. This is useful for gaining contributions to a brainstorm or for debriefing.
- Have the participants discuss an issue in pairs, formulating a solution. Each pair can then join with another pair to reach a consensus or refine their solutions. The fours can then report back to the whole group.
- Divide the participants into topic groups, then have each group “unpack” a topic or article that you have provided, each member becoming an expert on one aspect. Reform the groups with one expert from each topic group in each new group, and have them share their knowledge or recommendations.
- Perform a gap analysis: draw a three-column chart for an issue that describes the present state of affairs, the desired state, and the gaps (including an action plan for closing the gaps).
- Use the questions “What?”, “So what?”, and “Now what?” in debriefing.