



Meeting Activity: Developing your own Group Agreements

Objective: To develop a set of group norms when communication styles differ.

Introduction: We all grow up with a set of communication norms. They define the way we express our emotions, the way we speak to our elders, and many other verbal and nonverbal rules. They're not written down, but we usually know exactly what's allowed. Trouble is, the norms we follow aren't visible to others! Collectively setting group agreements is one way to reduce misunderstandings when our differing communication styles collide. In this activity you'll discuss your communication "comfort zones" and identify your "communication aspirations" as a group. Choose a facilitator before your meeting so she can review the instructions and be prepared to lead the activity.

Materials:

- Paper or notecards and pens.
- Two-three sheets of large post-it paper and a marker.
- One copy of the printed questions (outlined in #2) for each small group.
- Printed copies of the suggested group agreements, one for every sister. (Found in the online library.)

Two Options for Time:

1. One hour, with limited time for debrief.
2. Entire meeting, with time to debrief all the questions (preferable).

Facilitator Role: (Facilitator also takes part in the small group discussion)

1. **Set the scene** by paraphrasing the introduction, describing why you want to collectively develop group agreements.
2. **Ask your sisters to get in groups of three.** Tell them they will have 30 minutes together to discuss three sets of questions. Give each group a copy of the list of questions (a), (b), and (c) below. For the first ten minutes, ask them to discuss the questions on communication norms. Remind everyone to share the air time!
 - a. **Communication norms:** What were the communication norms within your family and culture when you were growing up? For example, "it wasn't OK to express anger". In what ways are you comfortable or uncomfortable with these norms now?

After ten minutes, let sisters know it's time to switch to the next question about trust. Remind everyone to share the air time!

- b. **Trust:** What will help you trust this group with your deepest feelings?

After ten minutes, let sisters know it's time to switch to the next question about strengths and weaknesses. Remind everyone to share the air time!

- c. **Strengths and weaknesses:** What personal strengths do you bring to a “difficult conversation”? For example, I'm a good listener. What are some of your weaknesses? For example, I easily get defensive when my position or beliefs are challenged.

While one sister is speaking, another can write down words or phrases to summarize her responses.

3. **Ask your sisters to return to the whole group** after the three rounds of questions.
4. Hang a large sheet of paper. The facilitator can ask another sister to summarize and write down the feelings that are expressed on the large sheet so everyone can see.
5. **Suggested de-brief for one-hour version:** Ask each sister to respond to the question, “what will help you trust the group with your deepest feelings?” Before you begin the debrief, note how much time is available for each sister to speak. Gently remind a sister to wrap up so everyone has a turn.
6. When everyone has shared, hand out the suggested list of group agreements. Compare your list to the suggested list and see if there are any agreements you want to add to your list.
7. **Suggested questions for facilitator debrief for full-meeting version:**
 - a. How might your personal strengths help you find the courage to talk about highly charged issues?
 - b. How might your sisters support you in the areas that are difficult for you?
 - c. What will help you trust the group with your deepest feelings?

Hang a large sheet of paper. The facilitator can ask another sister to summarize the feelings that are expressed so everyone can see. When you are finished, compare your list to the suggested group agreements and see if there are any you want to add to your list.