



SWRK 409  
Generalist Practice with Groups

## ACTIVATING THE GROUP

(Ragg, 2007, Garvin 2011-2012)

### Activating member input:

When people enter the group many withhold talking as they scan the others to determine safety. Withholding can be a problem because individuals will lack input into the direction of the group which will effectively seclude them. The leader must often prompt people to talk. Consider the following strategies:

1. *Invitations to talk.* Highlight that a member has not provided input and invite them to talk.
2. *Negotiating alternative input.* If members do not want to engage verbally negotiate a system of soliciting nonverbal input.
3. *Engage member-to-member input.* Either engage another member to solicit input from a silent member or use dyadic/subgroup activities to solicit input.

### Activating group-level discussions:

Members will often prefer to talk to, and through, the leader. This elevates the leader's authority which in-turn diminishes the group sharing. If the members don't talk among themselves there is a risk to mutual aid development. The leader must often direct communication back to the group members. Consider the following strategies:

1. *Simple redirection.* If the members are directing their comments and discussion to you, redirect them to share with the group.
2. *Avoid asking questions.* When you ask questions people will respond back to you so avoid asking questions to the group.
3. *Using directives.* Try to use directives and prompts with the group rather than questions (e.g., talk among yourselves and..., find out how the group wants to...).
4. *Eye scanning.* Try moving your eye-focus from member to member as people are talking rather than maintaining eye contact with the member speaking. This prevents "eye-lock" which can form an individual-level discussion. The member who is talking will then begin to shift focus away from you allowing connections to forge with other members.

### Activating inter-member sharing:

Members often don't feel safe early in the group so they tend to withhold personal information. You don't want this to become normative so we often promote some safe sharing early in the group to set the norms. To promote safe sharing consider the following strategies:

1. *Soliciting I statements.* Try directing individual members who are not highly verbal to share how they feel about specific issues as they emerge in the group.
2. *Verbalize nonverbal communication.* When a member withholds verbal sharing, watch for nonverbal communication. When you observe nonverbal behavior, share your observations. Then direct the group to explore the nonverbal meaning with the member.
3. *Reframing comments as personal disclosures.* If members are too general or externalized, reframe their comments as a personal disclosure (So Janet wants to make sure we don't swear).