

SWRK 409
Social Work with Groups
(Ragg, 2007, Garvin 2011-2012)

CRITICAL GROUP WORK SKILL SETS 1: ACTIVATING THE GROUP

1. **Promoting Interaction.** The first core skill involves helping the group members engage with each other through ongoing and meaningful interaction. Members must be able to share with each other before groups can be productive. There are four skills involved in this skill set.
 - a. **Soliciting Input.** Workers engage all of the members so each person provides their thoughts and perspectives about issues of concern.
 - b. **Activating the Members.** Workers defer to the group members so they increasingly assume responsibility for the interaction.
 - c. **Shaping Response Norms.** Workers help members find ways to share thoughts and ideas that encourage participation and respect.
 - d. **Developing Openness.** Workers help the group members establish expectations that ensure openness, trust and safety in the group.

2. **Identifying elements on the “Shared Table”.** When working with groups the number of relationships and interactions can at time be overwhelming. Workers observe interactions so they can identify important issues and shared concerns. There are four skills in this skill set.
 - a. **Scanning.** Workers mentally sit-back and observe the interactions among the members tracking themes and responses to themes. When several members share similar thoughts, perspective or concerns, the worker makes mental note of important themes.
 - b. **Process Illumination.** When interpersonal processes emerge during the group interaction (e.g., affiliation, agreement, disagreement, tension etc.) workers reflect on these processes so they become evident for the group members.
 - c. **Identifying Themes.** When themes emerge that appear important for several group members, workers highlight these themes so the group can explore shared experiences and concerns.
 - d. **Promoting Group Validation.** Workers engage group members in exploring shared processes and themes seeking to promote shared experiences and endorsements of important issues or concerns.

3. **Building Commonalities.** From the shared themes, workers engage group members in focused exploration so that multiple members can begin to identify shared concerns and common ground that will help to focus the group’s work. There are four skills associated with this skill set.
 - a. **Building Identification.** As themes are explored, workers solicit input and shared experiences from individual members to help each member identify with other peoples’ concerns and perspectives.
 - b. **Building Consensus.** As shared themes and concerns emerge, workers help group members to develop a shared understanding of the issues and the importance of the issues.
 - c. **Building Cohesion.** During discussion and the development of shared concerns, workers help the group members to develop a shared identity and sense that the group is valuable.
 - d. **Promoting Mutuality.** Workers continually defer to the group allowing members to help each other rather than relying solely on the worker. Workers seek to link group members’ skills and resources to issues so the group members help each other.