



Conducting Groupwork Online

During the Circuit Breaker period, many social service agencies had to adjust and organise groupwork online. Here are some tips on how to conduct it effectively.

- Key considerations when planning online groupwork:**
- ✓ How do we maintain a **safe and smooth** online experience?
 - ✓ How do we provide a **meaningful** online experience?
- Questions to ask:**
- What is the purpose of this groupwork?
- ✓ Psycho-educational, Therapeutic, Support or combination
- What is the client demographic?
- ✓ Age, gender, motivations for joining group, etc.

How to plan groupwork?

Consider your chosen online platform

- Safety / Security of platform used
- Bandwidth and connectivity
- Time limit of online platform to run the session

Delegate responsibilities clearly

- What is the best facilitator-to-participant ratio?
- Should inexperienced facilitators be paired with more experienced ones?
- Is a technical assistant necessary to help participants with technical issues?

Plan your session content thoroughly

Consider:

- Ease of retaining attention
- Needs of audience
- Structure of the programme
 - *Duration, number of sessions*

Ask:

- What activities should be planned to meet our aims?
- What group size works best for each activity?
- Is there a need for breakout rooms for a focused discussion?

Create a safe space for online groupwork

During registration, practitioners can consider to:

- Have a virtual chat with clients to assess their suitability for group work
- Have a waiting room before admitting participants
- Introduce the group work session by sharing about the format and expectations of the session

How to execute groupwork?

Be energetic and attentive to participants' needs

- Use online platforms to engage participants
 - *E.g. Mentimeter, Kahoot*
- Empathise and provide comfort
 - *Give empathic responses and assurances to show that you are present in moments of silence*
- Display enthusiasm
- Observe non-verbal cues of participants
 - *Look out for facial cues and body language to determine the appropriate interaction to engage participants*
- Be flexible and adaptable to unexpected situations

Have clear boundaries and rules of engagement

- To ensure **smooth communication**:
 - *Use the Zoom function to raise hand to speak*
 - *Only one person to speak at a time*
 - *Clarity of roles*
- To ensure **quality interaction**:
 - *Turn on camera*
- **Group norms** could be established via group consensus
- Have an agreement within the group on **privacy and confidentiality** of the session
 - *Chatham house rules - identity and affiliation of participants should not be revealed to people who are not part of the group*
- When dealing with **uncooperative or disruptive** participants
 - *Have a staff on standby to speak to participant in a separate breakout room*

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

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 Mr Benny Bong, Marital and Family Therapist, Clinical Supervisor and Consultant, The Family Therapist
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Common challenges & how to overcome them

Challenges

Ways to overcome them

Logistical Issues

- Access to technology
- Technological skills
- Access to groupwork materials
- Access to calling space

- Communicate consistently to understand participants' needs and concerns
- Work with donors for more resources
 - *Technological devices and activity materials*
- Consider having a technical assistant to attend to participants' technical issues
- Exercise flexibility when resources are lacking

Lack of Rapport

Lack of "human touch" might provide participants with less incentive to participate actively

- Build rapport even before the first meeting (e.g. via text, during the pre-group work chat)
- Maintain support and communication on messenger apps
- Substitute "human touch" by showing care
 - *Consider sending a care pack to clients if appropriate*

Dwindling virtual attention span & enthusiasm

- Distractions from home environment
- "Zoom fatigue"

- Make use of the home environment
 - *Possible icebreaker: Share their favourite item in the house*
- Use group activities to involve everyone
 - *For children: Arts & Crafts*
 - *For adults: Virtual singalong sessions, co-create art pieces through Zoom doodles*
- Schedule regular breaks if necessary

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