



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:

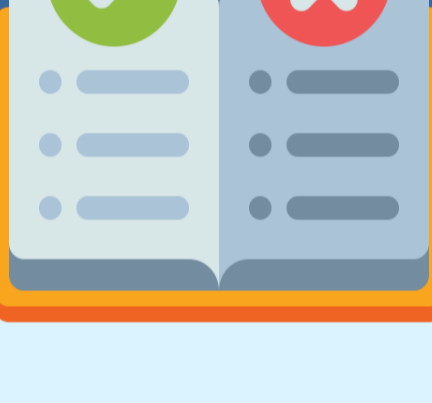
- Have a virtual chat with clients to assess their suitability for group work
- Have a waiting room before admitting participants
- Introduce the group work session by sharing about the format and expectations of the session

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: Ms Sandra Loo, Senior Manager, Viriya Community Services
 Mr Ben Ang, Principal Social Worker, Thye Hua Kwan Family Service Centre
 Mr Benny Bong, Marital and Family Therapist, Clinical Supervisor and Consultant, The Family Therapist
 Ms Rosedah Bte Mohamed Anuar, Senior Consultant, AWWA Family Services
 Ms Nazreen Johari, Program Coordinator, AWWA Family Services

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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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