

TIPS FOR TRAUMA INFORMED PARTICIPANT PRACTICE DURING WORKSHOPS

In-person Workshops & Virtual Workshops



- **Ensure that at least 25% of the workshop time is dedicated to practicing and discussion** (30% is even better). For example, for an hourlong workshop, 15-20 minutes will be practice. For a 3 hour workshop, 45-60 minutes will be practice or discussion.
- **Explain practice or discussion exercises clearly.** Unclear directions can create nervousness, especially for those who had poor experiences in school.
- **Split groups in pairs by walking around the room and grouping two people who are sitting next to each other.** When conducting workshops in person, avoiding "counting off" to split groups, as it creates chaos and confusion. Additionally, people often sit next to those they know, making practicing feel safer for them.
- **Keep groups the same for every practice episode.** People tend to feel safer knowing their groups won't change; additionally, it is more chaotic to try and change groups for each practice episode.
- **Ensure participants do not "role play".** This might be the most important guidance for successful practice episodes. Most people have been in trainings where they have role played and often automatically assume this is how they will practice skills - on a partner who is "pretending" to be a patient. Instead of 'role-playing' we are practicing empathic communication skills in real conversations.
- **Discuss vulnerability before starting practices.** Because we are having real conversations during practice, let participants know that we want them to moderate their own vulnerability, to share only what they feel comfortable sharing with their partner.
- Recall that **preserving participants' self-image and self-esteem** is very important. No one is able to learn, or take in information if they feel criticized, or less-than. Avoid any criticism of participants.

- Caution everyone explicitly to avoid giving advice.** The single most common thing participants do, which renders practice ineffective, is giving advice instead of practicing skills. Most importantly, interactions that involve fixing and advice rarely result in deep connection, which is what we are hoping for. We are all incredibly conditioned to give advice. The tendency is so strong, people tend to engage in it without even knowing they are doing it. Before every practice episode, it is important to remind people not to give any advice, not even a smidgen! This includes "have you ever thought of..." and "do you think X might help..."
- If possible, demonstrate the skills being practiced before each practice episode.** It is most useful if this demonstration is spontaneous, not practiced or scripted with your co-facilitator. This models equality with participants by modeling we too are just fellow practicers. It also shows vulnerability. If there is a misstep or even something you wish had gone differently, openly talking about this demonstrates humility and can be as useful of a learning moment as 'ideal' demonstrations.
- Time the practice.** Timing is important as it helps people feel less nervous. It is reassuring to know that it is just a short period of time, and that the facilitator is containing/managing this. 3 minutes per person is a good range for practicing single skills (6-8 minutes per practice episode), later in the workshop when practicing multiple skills, 5-7 minutes per person (15 minutes per practice episode in pairs) is a good range of time. To signal transitions in person, call out for people to switch roles. In virtual sessions, you can send a message to the breakout groups at the correct minute mark.
- Ask for people to share out when practice episodes end and everyone comes back to the larger group.** Asking something like "what were people's experiences as practicers?" and "how was it to be on the receiving end of these skills?" or "what did people notice?" Having 2-3 people share their experiences with the big group after coming back from practice episodes helps the larger group benefit from others' experiences and is a useful transition for people to get settled back into the larger conversation. Avoid calling on people (more on this in the workshop facilitation document).

