

Inclusive Facilitation Practice Toolkit

This toolkit came out of a discussion between the creative ambassadors for [The January Challenge 2025](#), facilitated by Dr Navya Anand.

Read more about The January Challenge 2025 Ambassadors [here](#).

About Dr Navya Anand

Navya is a clinical psychologist and systemic practitioner, working primarily in Children's Social Care and private practice. She offers therapeutic work for individuals, couples, and families, as well as consultations for professionals, staff teams, and charitable organisations. Navya's work is grounded in values of justice, compassion, and connectedness. She has worked with group facilitation for six years, developing her approach to supporting people to have difficult conversations, and equipping organisations with the skills to navigate complex and emotive topics with grace and empathy.

The practices and ideas in this toolkit stem from our collective discussion and collaborative thinking. While there are many approaches to facilitation in different contexts, here we aim to provide some valuable tools and prompt meaningful reflection. If you'd like to share any reflections or have suggestions to add - let us know at yashoda@64millionartists.com.

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What does it mean to be a facilitator?

- Being a facilitator means creating a space where people feel heard, and empowered to share their perspectives.
- It's about guiding conversations and activities in a way that encourages participation, fosters collaboration, and respects diverse viewpoints.
- A facilitator is not there to dominate or control the discussion, but rather to create conditions for meaningful dialogue, learning, and growth.

Here are some key things to consider in your role as a facilitator...

- **Facilitator as a neutral guide:** Remember, as a facilitator, you are not here to make judgments about what is 'right' or 'wrong.' Your role is to support the conversation, helping it stay aligned with the intentions and objectives of the session, and allowing people to take away what is most useful for them. **There is a difference between Taking space vs. Making space:** Facilitators should be mindful not to dominate the conversation (taking space) but instead focus on creating opportunities for others to contribute and engage (making space).
- **Ongoing self-reflection and awareness:** Consistently reflect on your actions and approach to ensure you are being inclusive and neutral.
- **Balancing facilitation and planning with presence:** Facilitation is about holding space without overpowering it. Often, having an expectation of a finished product can hinder the flow of a session. Allow the group to shape the conversation. Be present, to remain adaptable to changes that may come. Sometimes people appreciate working toward a tangible outcome, so it all depends on the context of your group.
- **Self-care and emotional readiness:** As a facilitator entering a space, notice your own boundaries, needs, and limits. Recognizing when you're not at your best is key to ensuring that the space remains supportive for others.

- **Compassion is key:** Recognise that facilitators, like anyone else, can't be perfect all the time. Offer yourself compassion when you don't meet your own expectations or when challenges arise in the room.
- **Give yourself permission to be a facilitator:**
'On this day, and in this context, I can do this my way.'
'I'm setting the scene here for myself, I'm giving myself permission to manage and hold the space. I can set up the space. I can be directive or not.'

Key Elements of Inclusive Facilitation

Creating a Safe and Welcoming Environment

- **Tone matters:** Greet participants warmly, make eye contact, and set a positive tone.
- **Setting clear intentions:** Start by explaining the purpose of the session and reinforcing why everyone is there to create shared ownership of the space.
- **Community guidelines and group contracting:** Set mutual expectations at the start (e.g. respecting different perspectives, speaking openly, maintaining confidentiality).
- **Transparency on process:** Be clear about the structure and flow of the session so participants know what to expect.
- **Acknowledging power dynamics:** Recognize and address any power structures or perceived imbalances in the room.
- **Non-judgmental space:** Make it clear that it is an environment where participants can come as they are and can share without fear of judgement. Invite people to only share what they feel comfortable with.
- **Leaving space for questions:** Encourage open dialogue by explicitly inviting questions and clarifications.

- **Tips on sharing an opening statement, to welcome participants:**
 - Introduce yourself
 - Explain the structure of the session - format of space, timings and breaks
 - Share with the group what your role is as facilitator: interrupting, going back to things, moving things on, noticing and naming language; role of facilitator in having responsibility and accountability for safeness within the space (acknowledgement that safeness is different for everyone based on their intersectional experiences and whose safeness gets prioritised etc)
 - Speak about process: silence and its meaning, role of facilitator in navigating this; gentle invitation to do the opposite of your usual style (e.g. speaking more / listening more)
 - Speak about content: no 'right' and 'wrong' but a process of creating meaning together, gentle invitation for multiple perspectives to be shared and held
 - If online: set up housekeeping rules e.g. videos / microphones on / off, use of chat / use of 'raise hand' function etc

Effective Communication and Engagement

- **Check-in and Check Out:** Open the session by giving participants a moment to check in with themselves, and include time for a reflective check out at the end of the session. Use creative check in's - you could draw on 64 Million Artists [archive of creative prompts](#).
- **Framing questions thoughtfully:** Pose questions that allow people to reflect deeply and engage with the session's core intentions.
- **Moderate responses:** As the facilitator, it's important to ensure a balanced conversation and not dominate the discussion.
- **Allowing freedom of movement:** Encourage participants to move around if needed, giving them autonomy over their space and comfort.

- **Silence as a tool:** Silence can be an invitation to speak. Silence can also be a powerful tool for reflection. Allowing pauses for processing or deeper thinking can help participants engage at a meaningful level.
- **Active listening:** Acknowledge people's input by actively listening and validating their experiences.

Environment & Physical Space

- **Accessibility:** Ask participants ahead of the session about any access needs and requirements that you should be aware of.
- **Venue matters:** The physical space, its layout, and ambiance can influence how inclusive the session feels. Make sure it feels welcoming and comfortable for all participants.
- **Clear information in advance:** Sending an agenda, materials or guidelines before the session helps participants feel more confident and prepared.
- **Access to physical resources:** Make it clear that participants are welcome to step out for breaks, get water, or take care of personal matters.

Addressing Difficult Conversations and Disruptive Behaviour

Do you, as a facilitator, push, pull, ignore, engage, or balance the conversation?

- **Set clear boundaries at the start of your session** around what will and will not be tolerated, use these to refer back to when difficult conversations or disruptive behavior arise.
- If challenging issues arise, **ensure the conversation is acknowledged** and move it to a more constructive space:

- Gently veer it back to the main topic of the session, offering a change in conversation direction that feels safe to do so.
- **Use Punctuation** (definition: to interrupt or intersperse something with). Punctuate with language: “Okay, let’s move on” or “I notice this is coming up again and again” or “I need to prepare to hold a conversation around this, let’s come back to it at another time.”

If offensive remarks or microaggressions are made - how do you openly correct and/or educate in a group without shaming that person?

- **Remember correction requires compassion.**
- Come back to how you set up the space, what can you immediately respond with that refers back to boundaries set up at the start of the session.
- **Debrief and Repair:** Take the time after the session to debrief with both the person that made the remarks, as well as anyone that may have been affected by it.
- **‘Be clumsy, not clever’** - John Burnham. It’s ok to make mistakes, we learn from them. Try not to overthink in these situations, act intuitively with authenticity.

Of course, do whatever you need to do to make the space feel as safe as possible for participants.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Misleading session descriptions:** Avoid labelling a formal session as ‘informal’ or ‘quick,’ which can lead to confusion and frustration when the session turns out differently. Be clear when sharing the session agenda in advance.
- **Not moderating effectively:** Failing to keep the conversation balanced can make some participants feel excluded or unheard. Don’t let one individual’s mood or behaviour define the whole group dynamic. What tools can you use to bring in different voices to the room and disrupt a dominant voice? You might say “We’ve heard from x, does anyone else have any thing to add”
- **Judgement and exclusion:** Avoid creating a space where participants feel judged for who they are and how they are contributing. People can bring as much or as little of themselves as they like to the session.
- **Oversharing:** Don’t take over the conversation or become the focus where not relevant.
- **Closed, sharp responses:** Avoid responding abruptly or shutting down conversations without giving participants a chance to share.
- **Aggressive facilitation:** Forcing people to perform or put on the spot can lead to discomfort. Respect individual boundaries.
- **Ignoring disengagement:** If participants are withdrawing or disengaged, it’s important to notice and address it rather than ignoring it.
- **Unfamiliar or uncomfortable spaces:** If the physical environment is unfamiliar or difficult to navigate, it can create a barrier to engagement. What can you set up in advance to understand what participants need to feel comfortable and welcome in the space.
- **Inaccessibility:** Not providing necessary accommodations for participants with disabilities or diverse needs can make the space feel unwelcoming. Again, what can you set up in advance to understand the needs of participants and if support is needed.

Questions and Thoughts to Consider

Planning ahead: How can you incorporate these practices into your process and session plans?

Your Internal Compass as a facilitator: What do you feel comfortable sharing about yourself? What do I need to feel safe? Over sharing can sometimes lend to a conversation. But how safe do you feel about sharing personal or more vulnerable things about yourself?

Get to know yourself as a facilitator: What do you need to hold space?
Compassion - Self to other, other to self, self to self
Compassion requires grace, so be kind to yourself.

Being ok that it might not be ok: What do you let people into if you are having an off day?

Acknowledge that participants will all be arriving in the room with different lived experiences, feelings.

Thank you for reading. We recognise there are many approaches to facilitation in different group contexts. We hope this has been a useful resource with some practical and reflective tools that are also adaptable. If you'd like to share any reflections, feedback or have suggestions to add - let us know at yashoda@64millionartists.com.

Discover our resource '[**Hosting The January Challenge and other creative activities online**](#)'.