



Introduction to Group Sessions for Leaders

General guidelines for leading group sessions

The following is a list of tasks and responsibilities in planning for and running a group.

Planning

- Take the *MOVE!* online training.
- Review the *MOVE!* Group Sessions.
- Clarify your facility's process for ordering pedometers.
- Room size – should be appropriate to size of group.
- Room location – provide signage and directions.
- Room set-up – arrange seating in a circle if possible.
- Have a scheduling process.
- Have a check-in process.
- Chairs – appropriate for overweight/obese veterans.
- Materials:
 - Arrange a pocket-folio for each patient.
 - Order pedometers and photocopy Food and Physical Activity Diaries for the orientation session.
 - Photocopy handouts and worksheets for each session.
 - Arrange Pens/pencils and extra paper.
 - Organize flip chart and/or dry erase board with markers.
 - Acquire any props needed.

General format

- Plan for each session to last 60-120 minutes.
- The Ideal group size is 12-15 people.
- Arrange for individual weigh-in in private (be sensitive to patient's concerns about this).
- Review Food and Activity Diaries at each session. **Note: Diaries and/or worksheets that have been assigned as homework should be reviewed/discussed early in each session. This will communicate to the veteran the importance of self-monitoring.**
- Make each session a healthy meeting by incorporating physical activity (examples are provided in each session plan).
- Each session should include general group discussion, problem-solving, and support.
- Make time for individual consultation if needed.

Group Leader Tasks

- Establish ground rules.
- Facilitate the group process (See: A Guide to Good facilitation, below).
- Encourage veterans to share solutions.
- Identify and teach behaviors and skills.

- Model and demonstrate the behavior.
- Rehearse the behavior/skill with the participants.
- Help participants plan for self-monitoring in real-life.
- Encourage healthy rewards for achieving goals.
- Assist group in determining next steps.
- Encourage questions.
- Solicit thoughts, feelings, and opinions.
- Write major points on a whiteboard / blackboard.
- Frequently summarize key points.

MOVE! Group Sessions

The following *MOVE!* Group Sessions have been developed to help you in your role as leader and facilitator. Suggested *MOVE!* handouts, worksheets and additional reading information are listed for each group session. The complete list of *MOVE!* handouts is located at <http://www.move.va.gov/Handouts.asp>.

GS00. Introduction to Group Sessions

[GS01. Orientation](#)

[GS02. Stepping Out With My Pedometer](#)

[GS03. What's in Your Food?](#)

[GS04. Fit For Life](#)

[GS05. Trim the Fat](#)

[GS06. Play it Safe](#)

[GS07. Tip the Balance](#)

[GS08. If at First You Don't Succeed...PLAN](#)

[GS09. You are the Boss](#)

[GS10. Oops I Did It Again](#)

[GS11. Keep it Going](#)

[GS12. MOVEing Forward](#)

Only an estimated 20% of skills required for disease self-management are disease specific. Many of the skills needed are general problem-solving skills, skills for resisting temptation and preventing relapse, self-monitoring strategies, and skills for enhancing general healthy lifestyle patterns and behavior change. Group meetings and group medical visits offer a supportive environment in which new skills can be introduced, practiced and reviewed. In addition, a group format can be used to review patient progress and to set goals.

As group leader your role is primarily to facilitate discussion, not to lecture. *For example: Instead of listing the known barriers to physical activity try asking the group to discuss why they, in the past, have had difficulty maintaining physical activity.* Solutions and ideas that come from the group are much more powerful than those that are taught. In addition to this primary role as facilitator, some group modules require the knowledge and expertise of the leader to help the group learn and develop new skills.

The *MOVE!* Group Sessions are designed to facilitate guided discussions but need not be rigidly followed. Groups are like individuals; they often will present with some unique concerns. Be prepared to "go with the flow" and address the unique concerns of the group rather than insisting on a fixed format. Rarely do all participants attend every session; thus, consider scheduling approximately 18-20 participants to ensure a group size of 12-15 for each session.

Have the group establish some ground rules at the onset discussing how everyone should get to participate, how confidentiality should be handled, and how everyone needs to be treated with respect. Remember that *MOVE!* Group Sessions are not meant to be a therapy group. Getting into personal issues that are not related to weight-management should be avoided unless it seems appropriate at the moment. If a participant appears to need special attention for a non-weight related personal issue, suggest that they speak with you outside of the group format.

A [Food and Physical Activity Diary](#) has been developed as a self-management tool for use with the group sessions. The diary is a 12 week log in which the veteran can record each week's food intake on one page and each week's physical activity on another page. There are obvious space limitations to this diary format. For those who would like to provide a detailed daily diary, consider <http://www.shapeup.org/support/maintain/logform1.php> or use one of your own.

A Guide to Good Facilitation

Adapted with permission from: Facilitating Meetings: A guide for Community Planning Groups, Academy for Educational Development Center for Community-Based health Strategies

Good facilitators possess a variety of qualities and skills. Some of the qualities spring from such innate personality traits as being able to recognize one's own biases while remaining neutral, enjoying interaction with diverse groups, and inspiring trust. Although some people possess a natural talent for facilitation, most develop the skills through experience and with guidance from experienced facilitators. Skills include:

- Making everyone feel comfortable and valued
- Encouraging participation and idea exchange
- Preventing and managing conflict
- Listening and observing

Make everyone feel comfortable and valued:

Most people will not participate fully in a meeting unless they feel comfortable with other members and believe their opinions will be heard. You, with members' support, must create an environment in which members value the potential contributions of those with different perspectives.

- **Use body language:** You send messages with your movements as well as your voice, so be aware of what your body language is saying. By using body language to show warmth and acceptance, you encourage others to relax and respond in kind.
- **Welcome participants:** Take a few moments to welcome participants. Full participation is vital, for each person brings a different perspective that can contribute to the group's success
- **Introduce participants and yourself:** Introductions help participants feel welcome and remind them who their team members are. Introductions also give you an opportunity to clarify your role as facilitator. Ask everyone to say a few words, even if only, "*My name is*". Once people have heard their voices in a large group, they feel more inclined to speak up again later. If you have limited time or numerous attendees, find ways to ensure that introductions are brief.
- **Consider an icebreaker:** You may ask people to share their favorite ice cream flavor, their first pet's name, or anything else light and personal but non-threatening as they introduce themselves.
- **Thank participants:** By thanking participants, you validate and legitimize their comments and contributions.

Encourage participation and an active exchange of ideas:

Some members are outspoken and energetic. Others are quiet and reserved. As facilitator, you should balance these extremes so that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.

- **Encourage silent members:** If members are silent or disengaged, catch their eye or ask them (or even an individual) to share their experience.

- **Use open-ended questions:** Ask questions people can't answer with a *yes* or *no*. Questions beginning with *when*, *what*, or *how* usually encourage members to provide detailed answers, which can spark additional ideas from other members.
- **Consult the group:** When a participant addresses a question to you, prompt participation from others by consulting the group. This is also an effective technique for shifting the focus of discussion from one member to the whole group.
- **Use visual aids:** Most people process information better if they see it, so write it on newsprint, an overhead, handouts, etc.
- **Be careful when using "why?":** "Why" can imply judgment and cause some participants to become defensive. Instead of saying "*why*," say,
- "*What are some of the reasons ...?*"

Prevent and manage conflict:

One of the best ways to deal with conflict is to prevent it, but some conflict is inevitable and even helpful to the process. Use it to develop options the group would not have considered otherwise.

- **Use team-building activities:** Help members get to know each other better.
- **Set ground rules:** Members' agreement on these makes your job easier when conflict arises. Basic ground rules may be that the group will hear all views and no one will make personal attacks.
- **Search for agreement:** Drawing attention to points that participants agree upon helps create an atmosphere of positive collaboration and forward momentum.
- **Agree to disagree:** Although you would like to resolve all conflicts, you may not be able to. Urge the group to treat each other with respect even when they disagree.

Listen and observe:

Throughout a meeting keep your eyes and ears open and stay attuned to the group. Pay attention not only to the group as a whole but also to individuals.

- **Listen actively:** Apply the basic skills of one-on-one conversation. Truly listen before speaking.
- **Scan the room:** While maintaining eye contact with the speaker, note how other members are responding to that person.