

**New England MIRECC Peer Education Center  
Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital  
200 Springs Road, Bedford, MA 01730**

**Part II of Peer Support Group Facilitation Skills Training:  
Dealing with Challenges in Groups**

**Role Play Activities**

*Instructions: The following role plays were developed to allow the training participants the opportunity to practice managing challenging situations in a peer support group. Ask for four volunteers from among the training participants. Assign each of the four participants a number (1-4) which will correspond with the role the participant will have in each of the vignettes below. Allow 5-10 minutes for each vignette and 10-15 minutes for feedback and general discussion about the role play activities.*

**Vignette #1—The Nothingness:**

Participant #1 = Group facilitator

Participants #2, 3, & 4 = Respond to Participant #1's topic introduction with silence.

Problem: Participant #1 begins the peer support group by introducing the general topic of "working towards recovery." Group members sit in silence for 3 minutes or more.

Narration: If there are additional training participants present, take a brief timeout to ask the training participants what they see going on in the group. If no one says it, identify the issue as silence or "nothingness." Explain how silence can be a good thing, but it can also necessitate an intervention by the group facilitator if it is prolonged. Then, segue back to the role play where the group is silent again for a short time until Participant #1 intervenes.

Intervention: Participant #1 uses one or more of the following interventions:

- Ask the group what the silence means.
- Suggest possible topics for conversation and open it to a group vote as to what to discuss.

The group members respond appropriately depending on which strategy Participant #1 employs.

### **Vignette #2—The Problem-Solver:**

Participant #2 = Group facilitator

Participants #3 = Problem-solver

Participants #1 & 4 = Appropriately contributing group members

Problem: Participant #2 begins the group by introducing the general topic of “working towards recovery.” Participant #1 responds appropriately by discussing general issues (s)he is experiencing (Ex. difficulty getting out of the bed in the morning though Participant #1 knows (s)he should; being triggered by neighbors who are drinking; etc). Participant #4 chimes in appropriately (Ex. says that Participant #1’s situation sounds tough, that Participant #4 has had similar experiences, etc.). Participant #3 interjects by providing direct answers to Participant #1’s problems (Ex. “You should just get out of bed; get new friends,” etc.).

Narration: If there are additional training participants present, take a brief timeout to ask the training participants what they see going on in the group. If no one says it, identify the problem as Participant #3 being a problem-solver. Then, segue back to the role play where Participant #1 begins reflecting on his/her issues only to have Participant #3 engage in problem-solving again. Participant #2 responds with an intervention.

Intervention: Participant #2 reminds the group participants about the comfort agreement rules of no cross-talking and no giving feedback to others unless requested. Group members respond appropriately.

### **Vignette #3—The Sidetracker:**

Participant #3 = Group facilitator

Participant #4 = Sidetracker

Participants #1 & 2 = Appropriately contributing group members

Problem: Participant #3 begins the group by introducing the general topic of “working towards recovery.” Participant #1 responds appropriately by talking about either: (a.) steps (s)he has taken to work towards recovery; or (b.) some other relevant response. Participant #2 chimes in appropriately as well. The conversation between Participants #1 and 2 lasts a minute or so. Participant #4 chimes in by bringing up an unrelated topic (Ex. securing Veteran benefits or some other common sidetracking topic). Participant #4 talks for a minute or so about the new topic.

Narration: If there are additional training participants present, take a brief timeout to ask the training participants what they see going on in the group. If no one says it, identify the problem as Participant #4 sidetracking the conversation. Then, segue back to the role play where Participant #1 begins reflecting on recovery steps only to have Participant #4 sidetrack the conversation again. Participant #3, the group facilitator, responds with an intervention.

Intervention: Participant #3 uses one or more of the following interventions:

- Check in with the group to see if a new topic is of interest. Example: “We started off talking about ways to work towards recovery. (Participant #4) is bringing up the issue of Veteran’s benefits. Would the group like to continue with that or go back to the topic of recovery?”
- Create a “parking lot” sheet of additional topics and post it on a wall nearby.

Group members respond appropriately depending on which strategy Participant #3 employs.

#### **Vignette #4—The Dominator:**

Participant #4 = Group facilitator

Participant #1 = Dominator

Participants #2 & 3 = Appropriately contributing group members

Problem: Participant #4 begins the group by introducing the general topic of “working towards recovery.” Participant #1 responds by talking for a while about how (s)he promotes his/her recovery. Participant #1 eventually stops talking. Participant #2 responds by linking his/her experience with Participant #1’s experience. Rather than acknowledging what Participant #2 has said, Participant #1 responds by talking only about him/herself again. Participants #2 and 3 try to chime in, but Participant #1 keeps talking.

Narration: If there are additional training participants present, take a brief timeout to ask the training participants what they see going on in the group. If no one says it, identify the problem as Participant #1 dominating the conversation. Then, segue back to the role play where Participant #1 begins again talking about him/herself for a short time. The group facilitator responds with an intervention.

Intervention: Participant #4 uses one or more of the following interventions:

- Reflect on the dominator's sharing and pointing out the need to hear from other group members. Example: “(Participant #1), you have been talking about your problems with \_\_\_\_\_, I'm wondering what others think about what (Participant #1) has said.”
- Call on someone if necessary. Example: “(Participant #3), do you have anything to add?”

Group members respond appropriately depending on which strategy Participant #4 employs.