



LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

A Short Course for Group Facilitators



3-hour session



OVERVIEW

PART ONE: **Becoming a facilitator**

Introduction	10 mins
What is good facilitation?	10 mins
Thinking about thinking	10 mins
Becoming a good facilitator	15 mins

45 mins

PART TWO: **Facilitating sensitive discussions**

Introduction	5 mins
Managing triggers	20 mins
Handling conflict	20 mins

45 mins

PART THREE: **Facilitating the LLF Course**

Partnering	5 mins
Preparing	15 mins
Performing	15 mins
Pondering	5 mins
Close	5 mins

45 mins

PART ONE: Becoming a facilitator

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INTRODUCTION

10 mins

Welcome!

Welcome the participants to the course, thanking them for offering to facilitate LLF groups.

Introductions: Invite participants to say their name and where they live | work, explaining that there will be opportunities to get to know each other better as the groups work together. Begin by introducing yourself in this way.

Aims

Using the PowerPoint, run through the aims and plan for the course.

Having completed the course, we hope that participants will

- ❖ be aware of the hallmarks of a well facilitated group discussion
- ❖ understand and begin to embody the qualities, skills and beliefs of a good facilitator
- ❖ be more equipped to facilitate discussions about sensitive and potentially divisive subjects
- ❖ feel confident about facilitating a small group doing the LLF course

**Plan**

The course has 3 parts. Each will last approximately 45-minutes with a break of 10 to 15 minutes in between each session.

The course will involve plenary teaching, group work and personal reflection.

Part 1: Becoming a facilitator | Part 2: Facilitating sensitive discussions | Part 3: Facilitating the LLF Course

WHAT IS GOOD FACILITATION?

10 mins

Invite participants to think about a meeting or group discussion they've recently been a part of:

Replay the discussion or meeting in your mind's eye.

- ❖ What made it a good experience?
- ❖ What left you feeling frustrated or unsatisfied?

Use Jamboard post-its: invite people to write a word or phrase to describe

- ❖ *a well facilitated discussion on **yellow** post-its, and/or*
- ❖ *a poorly facilitated discussion on **pink** post-its*

When everyone has had a chance to contribute (give a few seconds' warning), read a range of contributions out loud, covering major themes that have emerged. Add any (from the list below) that may not have been mentioned.

Here are some characteristics of a well facilitated discussions:

- ❖ Everyone is able to contribute, with no one dominating
- ❖ People feel safe and relaxed enough to be open, honest
- ❖ There is a culture of mutual respect
- ❖ People feel heard, listened to and understood
- ❖ Energy is maintained: it isn't too slow or too rushed
- ❖ The discussion has a sense of movement, momentum, direction
- ❖ Time-keeping and a clear road map is appropriately maintained
- ❖ The facilitator does not talk very much
- ❖ New insights emerge

One way to prepare for facilitating a discussion is to write down for yourself how you want people to feel at the end of the meeting. These '**experiential aims**' are good to bear in mind as you plan and prepare for facilitating the discussion.

THINKING ABOUT THINKING

10 mins

One of the tasks of a facilitator is to 'slow down' the way we think so that we can do this together as a group. Our thought pattern generally takes this form:

Observation:

We notice something: we experience something through one or more of our senses. We see, hear, touch, taste or smell something.

I am walking in the park and I see coming towards me a person walking a large dog.

Response:

We respond or react to it: we the experience evokes feelings or associations or memories. We feel anger, fear, confusion, pleasure etc.

I feel anxiety, my palms become sweaty. I remember an occasion of having a large dog leap on me as a child.

Interpretation:

We interpret the experience: we give it meaning by drawing out its significance or implications or by asking questions about it.

I consider my options: I could turn away and avoid meeting the dog or I could risk walking past it. I notice the dog is on a short lead and seems to have passed other walkers without losing control.

Decision:

We decide or act on it: we decide what action to take or what decision to make.

I choose to keep on walking and pass the dog uneventfully.

Once we're aware of these 'layers' of thinking, we can see how discussions can go around in circles as participants jump from observation to decision, or focus on response and can't get beyond that to interpretation and decision. The facilitator can help guide the group to be more purposeful together, So, in a Bible study, for example, after reading the Bible text, here is a simple sequence of questions:

What words would you use to describe what you heard in this text?

What surprised you? What feelings did the text arouse in you? What did it make you think about?

What questions do you bring to the text?

What difference does this text make to our discussions about... ? What challenges does it ask of us?



HOW DO I BECOME A GOOD FACILITATOR?

15 mins

We often think of facilitators as people who have a toolkit of techniques that they know how to use to enable groups to have effective discussions.

While facilitators do need to have some skills and ‘options’ that they can draw upon in a group discussion, good facilitators are good because of who they are: the qualities and beliefs they embody and the habits they have learned.

The habits of a good facilitator include:

Servant hearted – the facilitator is the one who does all the hard work of preparing and planning before the meeting and of listening, reflecting back and gently guiding the discussion during the meeting. Meetings that are well facilitated have usually been very carefully and painstakingly planned.

Selfless – the facilitator relinquishes their right to take part in the discussion. This can be hard when it is something the facilitator may have strong views or even a lot of knowledge and experience about!

Genuinely curious – facilitators are people who really do want to know about and understand other people, regardless of who they are and what their views are.

Observant – facilitators are quick to pick up on body language and group dynamics – noticing quiet people as well as people who are easily dominate, and picking up on power dynamics.

Undistracted – facilitators listen attentively to every contribution, modelling undistracted, focused listening. This means that facilitators need to have such a clear plan in their heads that they are not ‘planning the next step’ while participants are discussing.

Unanxious – facilitators are contagiously calm (at least on the outside!) and do not get flustered if the timings have to change or conflict erupts or even if they themselves come under attack.

Flexible – facilitators sense when to ‘let go’ of a plan and allow a discussion to take longer or shorter than anticipated, while honouring the overall time commitment of the group.

Hopeful – facilitators believe that everyone has a contribution to make and that together we can come to new insights and better solutions.

Loving – facilitators love the people they facilitate. They hold the participants in prayer before the group meets and asks God to help them love each one with the love of Christ.

Group work (5 mins)

*Invite the participants to split into groups of 3 or 4, and ask each group to talk about “**what qualities make for a good facilitator?**” Ask the group to come up with a list of up to 5 single words.*

After 5 minutes, bring the participants back together and, using Jamboard, ask one person from each group to write down the words they came up with on post-its.

Group the same words in clusters so you can see which ones predominate (like a ‘word cloud’). Draw out any that are missing...

PART TWO:

Facilitating sensitive discussions

Introduction	5 mins
Managing triggers	20 mins
Handling conflict	20 mins

45 mins

INTRODUCTION

5 mins

The Living in Love and Faith Course is about topics that are deeply personal – touching on both painful and joyful experiences, realities and memories. They are also topics we may have very strong convictions about. To complicate matters further, the choices we have made or the experiences we have had may be ones that others in the group believe not to be in line with their understanding of Christian discipleship or vice versa. In this part we will be looking at 2 aspects that characterise discussions which are both sensitive and potentially divisive: triggers and conflict.

TRIGGERS

20 mins

What do we mean by triggers?

In the last part we talked about the levels that we naturally go through when responding to something we experience or something someone says. The second one – response – relates to what happens ‘inside’ us. When someone experiences intense emotions that appear disproportionate to what caused them, we speak of it as a response to a triggering event. The emotions that have been unleashed may prevent us from being able to engage further in a constructive way.



When talking about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, that ‘response’ may be very powerful. It may be so powerful that we become overwhelmed with pain, memories, fear, anger or other emotions. The person may become tearful or there may be a physiological response (shaking, faster heartbeat, shortness of breath).

Some participants (including the facilitator) may come to the discussion knowing (and fearing) that the topics may trigger such responses. Sometimes, though, a story or a film or someone’s contribution or behaviour takes a participant completely by surprise, triggering powerful emotions of a past situation, hurt or memory.

What are the symptoms of a triggering event?

These ‘trigger events’, may cause us to respond in one of three ways: we **fight**, we take **flight**, or we **freeze**. They hinder us from moving on to other levels of conversation such as interpreting, questioning or decision-making. They can also affect the dynamics of the whole group.

Facilitators themselves may also find that something or someone in the group triggers a powerful response. It will be important to be aware of this possibility and to acknowledge it to yourself so that you can respond in a way that doesn’t disrupt the group’s conversations. Triggers may not be related to the subject matter, but may relate to the behaviour of a participant – this could be refusal to engage in dialogue, making arrogant assertions, bullying or belittling others. These can become moments of opportunity for the facilitator to model good facilitation skills. Good

Individual work (3 mins)

Invite participants to think about a situation which was a ‘trigger’ for them. Allow a moment of quiet for this. Invite participants to write down the key ‘trigger’ and some words to describe what emotions were aroused.

approaches include refusing to indulge in judgmentalism and being open to the possibility that there is a story behind the behaviour that needs to be heard, as well as being open to learning yourself. A good way to start is to reflect back what the person said and invite others to contribute. This also gives you breathing space to regain your composure. If your facilitation is being challenged, invite the participant concerned to say more. See it as a learning opportunity and invite others into the discussion.

How can we help when participants experience trigger moments?

One of the roles of a facilitator is to be aware of participants' responses. It can be especially helpful to appoint someone as a co-facilitator who can help look out for the members of the group and notice when someone appears distressed or behaves in a way that suggests deep emotions have been triggered.

How can we help prevent harmful and painful triggering events?

We can't prevent trigger moments from happening, but we can do preventative work to reduce the likelihood of trigger events and minimise their negative impact. We can help prepare participants so that they are less likely to occur in a way that is disabling and harmful.

1. Create a braver and safer space

We need to be brave enough to learn new things and to meet people with different views and experiences from our own. We need to be safe enough to share our experiences and perspectives without being rejected or judged or our views met with scorn. Introduce participants to this, encouraging each other to be both 'brave' and to be people with whom others are 'safe'.

2. Preview the topics and stories that will be covered

Make sure participants are aware of the topics that will be covered in each session and of the story films that they will see. This will help participants (and you!) to consider whether there are matters that are likely to be difficult for you to engage with.

3. Check in regularly with the group

Make it part of the group's culture to pause the conversation, asking if anyone has been distressed by a contribution but hasn't been able to say so. If so, facilitate an 'ORID' conversation that starts with 'what was said', 'what was its impact' (on the distressed person), 'what was its intention' (of the person who made the contribution) and 'what do we need to do now'. This can be a valuable learning moment for the whole group.

4. Know the boundaries of unacceptable behaviour

The 'Braver and safer: creating spaces for learning together well' guidance outlines behaviours that are not acceptable. Familiarise yourself with these so that you can respond appropriately.

Group work (10 mins)

Invite participants to form groups of 3 or 4 for about 5 minutes. Thinking about the trigger moments you identified, ask each other the question,

- ❖ How did you respond to the trigger? Did you recognise the 'fight, flight, freeze' responses?
- ❖ What would have helped you at the time?
- ❖ How could you have been better prepared?

After about 5 minutes, bring participants back together and invite feedback from the groups.

CONFLICT

20 mins

One of the reasons we are exploring questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage is because people in the Church disagree about some aspects of them. The facilitator's role is create an environment in which participants can disagree freely and fruitfully. Here are some ways a facilitator can help the group to handle conflict in a way that doesn't harm each other and may result in better mutual understanding and new insights.

Expect and welcome conflict

When disagreements surface, it can be helpful to remind the group that conflict is part of the reason for the group's learning together, and that walking towards conflict, rather than away from it, brings us into a creative space of deeper understanding.

Model genuine curiosity

Model a real desire to understand different viewpoints, thereby moving away from a defensive dynamic to an undefended one.

Inject hopeful energy

Gently encourage deeper questioning that reveals more common ground as well as clarifying the roots of different viewpoints. Be hopeful that learning from and about one another can lead to new insights for everyone.

Establish boundaries

Do not allow disagreement to be personalised or to become a seeking after victory. If appropriate, find ways to gently remind participants that we are not here to judge one another nor to win a debate, but to understand and learn from one another.

Some practical suggestions

Here are some practical ways to facilitate good conflict:

- ❖ Invite another view from among the group: 'Does someone have a different view?'
- ❖ Invite story telling: 'What led you to that conclusion?'
- ❖ Dig deeper: 'Tell me more'
- ❖ Recap what the disagreement is actually about: 'So this disagreement seems to centre around...'
- ❖ Invite points of agreement, common ground: 'We've talked about our disagreements. Where do we see common ground?'
- ❖ Encourage learning: 'What new insights have you gained from this discussion?'

Group work (10 mins)

Invite participants to form groups of 5. Assign the person whose first name comes first in the alphabet as the facilitator. The task is to facilitate a discussion about the following question:

"Should the facilitator of an LLF group be neutral?"

Bring the group back together and invite feedback.

Was there disagreement? How was it handled? What did it feel like to facilitate the discussion?

PART THREE: Facilitating the LLF Course

Partnering	5 mins
Preparing	15 mins
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Close	5 mins

45 mins

PARTNERING

5 mins

Consider asking someone to accompany you as you facilitate the group. This person

- ❖ can share the facilitation or simply be an extra pair of eyes and ears
- ❖ may remind you to mention things you've forgotten
- ❖ can help with the technicalities of running the course
- ❖ may notice someone wanting to speak or someone who appears disengaged or distressed.
- ❖ can be on hand if someone needs to take time out.



It's also helpful to have someone with whom to review each session and think about ways to improve the group's experience of and learning together.

PREPARING

15 mins

The LLF Course material

Invite participants to brainstorm what they would do to prepare themselves in relation to the course material / video / booklet.

- ✓ Watch the relevant LLF Course video and read the relevant chapters in the booklet, including the 'Going further' section.
- ✓ Read the *Notes for Leaders* for the Course and for the relevant Session.
- ✓ Plan the session with approximate timings. Make sure it is clear in your head and that you have a copy of the LLF Course booklet.
- ✓ Mentally walk through it, including how you will begin and end, and how you will introduce each component / film.
- ✓ Where appropriate, consider who may be willing to read prayers and readings.
- ✓ Familiarise yourself with the questions and prepare different ways of expressing them.
- ✓ Rehearse any technicalities of accessing the LLF Hub and showing/screensharing the films.
- ✓ ... or prepare the room with comfortable seating in a circle or around a table with the screen for showing videos visible/audible to all.
- ✓ Whether meeting on zoom or physically, prepare some flowers or something else to bring beauty to the space.
- ✓ Consider possible 'contingency plans' if timings go awry.

The participants

- ✓ Write a welcome email to participants.

Brainstorm what this might contain, for example:

greeting that sets the tone

zoom link and instructions

timings

use of 'chat'

'Commitments'

chaplancy arrangements

your mobile number

topics for the coming session ...

- ✓ Welcome each participant in your heart and mind: love them.
- ✓ Consider any accessibility needs and how to meet them.
- ✓ Consider whether the group needs to be broken down into smaller groups of 3 to 5 people and how to do this.
- ✓ Consider the extra time needed if working with a big group that splits into smaller groups.
- ✓ Pray for each participant; pray that God will help you to love each member of the group.

Yourself

- ✓ Note your own responses to the matters being discussed
 - ✓ Identify your fears about the facilitation, the topic and the participants.
 - ✓ Plan to look forward to it!
-

PERFORMING

15 mins

Personify welcome, warmth, kindness, gratitude and calm.

Very briefly outline the plan | content of the session.

Reflect on the commitments and tell participants about the practicalities of support available.

Much of the course is 'led' for you in the video. There are also Leader's Notes on the LLF Hub for every session, as well as general notes in the Course Booklet.

Use the questions given in the course, rephrasing as appropriate.

Allow space and silence: as facilitator, talk as little as possible.

Respond genuinely appreciatively to contributions, modelling 'multipartiality' and an eagerness to listen and learn.

Managing group dynamics:

Invite participants to respond to the following question (in small groups if time allows):

"What kinds of behaviours and situations am I worried about – and how can I address them?"

The quiet group:

Invite people to talk in pairs (if meeting physically) before sharing with the whole group;

or go around the circle with a specific "O" question: for example, 'When was the last time you were prompted to think about this topic?';

Dominant members:

Invite others into the conversation: for example, 'I wonder if anyone who hasn't had a chance to speak would like to add to that?'

If a point of view is forcefully expressed, silencing others: Reflect back the view that has been expressed and then say, for example, 'We're here to listen to and learn about the different views that people hold. Would anyone like to share a different perspective?'

Timings go awry:

Don't be afraid to propose cutting out a section rather than rushing to do everything. However, check with the group that they are happy with your proposal. Also don't be afraid to finish early!

Personas to avoid: Teacher | Preacher | Disciplinarian | Timekeeper | Agenda holder

Group work (10 mins)

Invite participants to form groups of 4 and for one member of the group to facilitate a conversation about the following question:

"What are different ways to introduce the 'Commitments', bearing in mind the different characteristics of groups?"

Bring the group back together and invite groups to share their ideas.

PONDERING

5 mins

- ❖ Reflect on how the session went – ideally together with your co-facilitator.
- ❖ Notice any inner work you need to do.
- ❖ Think about what you might need to do differently next time.
- ❖ Consider whether any members of the group need to be contacted to check they are ok.
- ❖ **Send a link to the survey and encourage everyone to complete it and complete it yourself.**

CLOSING

5 mins

Invite members of the group to stand up and stretch (as they are able).

Once seated, invite a short moment of quiet reflection on what has taken place over the past few hours.

Invite each member of the group to speak out one word to describe how they feel about being a facilitator.

Thank everyone for coming and taking part.

Close with an appropriate prayer. For example, this prayer reminds us that the Holy Spirit is the great facilitator and we can entrust ourselves wholly to the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

**Lord God,
 you have called your servants
 to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
 by paths as yet untrodden,
 through perils unknown.
 Give us faith to go out with good courage,
 not knowing where we go,
 but only that your hand is leading us
 and your love supporting us;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**