

GROUP AGREEMENTS: The Cornerstone of Group Dynamics

What are group agreements and why do they matter?

A group agreement is a clear set of guidelines on how your group will handle discussions, meetings and sensitive information raised in the group setting. Establishing group agreements sets an important foundation for your group that acknowledges each individual member's right to respectful treatment and lays the groundwork for equitable inclusive participation. When engaging family leaders, it is important to engage all in co-creating a space where all can feel valued. By clearly stating expectations, you can start to lay the basis of trust between group members and give your group the best possible start.

What should I include in my group agreements?

Your group agreements will be exactly that - yours, however there are a few areas that you may want to prompt the group to consider as you are crafting the group agreements. The following are intended to frame the conversation around how the group functions and to start to add a why to each group agreement. This will help the agreements to be more than statements, but rather true norms that all group members understand and agree with.



Some points you may consider include:

- **How are we sharing responsibility for the success of the group:** is everyone contributing to the running of the group/are they expected to/how can we ensure that this is true?
- **How does the group feel about confidentiality:** Is it important that what is shared in the group remains in the group/If so why/Who is at risk in the absence of confidentiality? Are you recording meetings? How does the group achieve consensus about when/what to record?

- **How can we ensure we are listening to each other:** How can we ensure we are listening to each member/what is the risk to the group if we do not?
- **How can we ensure we are sharing the space:** How are we allowing each member the opportunity to contribute/Why is this important?
- **How can we ensure we respect each other's perspective:** Why is it important that we respect everyone's different opinions, experiences and backgrounds/What do we lose if we do not?

Some sample groups agreements

Ultimately your conversations should be rich, and will hopefully lead to a list of group agreements that are simple, direct, and easy for folks to understand and reference should they feel they are not being honored. The agreements should be posted in the space and referred to at the start of every meeting. Some examples of language for group agreements are listed below:

1. Step up, step back
2. Allow everyone to speak at least once in the course of the meeting
3. Respect everyone's time by starting and ending on time
4. Be present
5. Respect each other's truth
6. What is said stays, what is learned leaves

Things to consider for family leaders at your tables

For some family leaders this might be the first time at a table where they are an equal and valued voice, for others this might be an extension of their previous experience. However, all will need time to build trust in this new space. We are looking to co-lead these spaces with family leaders as increasingly we see the value of their lived experience in informing public policy, however the reality of the lived experience is often steeped in trauma. Family leaders bring stories and lived experiences, while professionals in the same spaces can offer a more abstract lens. It is important that everyone at the tables recognizes the inherent differences. Family leaders will often require trust be built in spaces before they can share and that the act of sharing their lived experience can often reopen wounds and reignite trauma.