

Presenter Reminders and Suggestions

The National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (NFFCMH) thanks each of you for the valuable contributions you are preparing for our conference program. Sharing your wisdom, knowledge, lived experience and compassion with our audience is an important part of what makes our event a success year after year.

The NFFCMH conference is a unique event that educates, empowers and reenergizes parents, caregivers, family members, mental health professionals and advocates as well as the parent/family peer support workforce. As presenters and discussion facilitators, we see each of you as an extension of our organization's values. In that role, you play an important part in helping us ensure that we offer an atmosphere that is safe, welcoming and open to everyone.

To that end, we would like to share a few reminders and suggestions to help make the conference and your breakout sessions as productive, inclusive and supportive as possible. Please take a moment to review these as you finalize your presentations and prepare to join us at the NFFCMH 30th Annual Conference in Phoenix, AZ. We hope both new and seasoned presenters will find them helpful.

Reminders:

- Be [strengths-based](#), i.e. use the word "challenge" instead of problem.
- Use [person-first language](#), i.e. a child "who is diagnosed with bi-polar disorder" rather than "a bi-polar child," "my son has schizophrenia" rather than "my son is schizophrenic."
- Attendees come from diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences - all should be treated with dignity and respect and given a voice.
- As a presenter, it is also your role to facilitate group discussions, encourage audience participation and support *equal* opportunities for sharing.
- It is also your role to direct the conversation, ensure your audience stays on topic, keep time so no one person dominates the session and lastly, ask that any inappropriate or side conversations be held until after your session ends.
- If you make any changes to your room set up, please be sure to reset it at the end of your session. Please *do not* ask hotel staff to change your room set up.

Suggestions:

- Set ground rules before you begin. Ask your audience to participate by contributing to and agreeing on these together.
- Stay on topic. Follow the presentation you have prepared and encourage participants to avoid "side" conversations and save unrelated questions until after the session.
- Polling your audience is a great way to engage session attendees.
- Keep time to ensure equal participation during group discussions.
- Find helpful guidelines and tips for effective group discussion on the following page.

We thank you again in advance for the time, effort and thoughtfulness you all bring to our conference program. If you have any questions or need assistance, please feel free to contact our Conference Planner, Kelsey Engelbracht, at kengelbracht@ffcmh.org.

Facilitating Effective Group Discussions

What is an effective group discussion?

- An effective group discussion is one in which the group is able to learn from each other, share ideas and opinions openly, accomplish a purpose and/or to establish a basis for ongoing discussion or collaboration among its members

Elements of an effective group discussion:

- All members of the group have a chance to speak, expressing their ideas and feelings freely, and to pursue and finish their thoughts
- All members of the group can hear others' ideas and feelings stated openly
- Group members can safely test ideas that are not yet fully formed
- Group members can receive and respond to respectful, honest, constructive feedback
- A variety of views are put forward and discussed
- The discussion is not dominated by any one person
- Differences of opinion are based on the content of ideas and opinions, not on personalities
- Even in disagreement, there's an understanding that the group is working together to meet a goal or simply learn from one another

General guidelines:

- Put people at ease
- Help the group develop ground rules
- Set an agenda or clear goals for the discussion
- Lead the discussion
 - Set the topic
 - Foster an open process
 - Involve all participants
 - Ask questions or provide information to move the discussion along
 - Summarize and/or clarify important points and conclusions
 - Wrap up the session
 - Follow up with participants afterward, as needed
 - Thank them for coming

Do's for discussion leaders:

- Model the behavior and attitudes you want group members to employ
- Use encouraging body language and tone of voice, as well as words
- Give positive feedback for joining the discussion
- Be aware of people's reactions and feelings, and try to respond appropriately
- Ask open-ended questions
- Be aware of your own biases
- Support disagreements, and help the group use them to learn from one another
- Listen as much as possible

Don'ts for discussion leaders:

- Don't let one or a small group of individuals dominate the discussion
- Don't let one point of view override others
- Don't assume that anyone holds particular opinions or positions because of his/her culture, background, race, religion, personal style, etc.
- By the same token, don't assume that someone from a particular culture, race, religion or background speaks for everyone else from that group
- Don't try to have all the answers