

### What does a facilitator do?

Facilitators encourage participants to share information and learn from each other. Facilitators need to create a safe, non-threatening environment that allows learning to take place.

Facilitating a group can be very rewarding and very challenging at the same time. To successfully facilitate the Family Tutoring programs it is important to know how a group works.

#### Points to consider

##### Be accepting

- Show appreciation for participants' contributions.
- Offer positive feedback and avoid judgmental comments and criticisms.
- Respect the right of each person to participate at his or her comfort level.
- Use a variety of open-ended questions to draw people out.
- Recognize that people participate simply by attending.

##### Be respectful

- Let participants know that you value their contributions and we all have something to offer.
- Encourage and respect participants' ideas and input.
- Ask the group for their feedback from each session.



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### **Be sensitive**

- Most people do not like being put in the spotlight. Ask for volunteers to read aloud rather than asking individuals to read.
- Pair higher level readers with lower level readers.
- Don't talk while participants are writing or working on an activity.

### **Be active**

- Get participants involved in doing things.
- Ask them to try out the different reading strategies with one another. People learn better when they get to 'try' things out.
- Role playing is an excellent way to engage participants.

### **Speak clearly**

- Use everyday language when talking.
- Use concrete examples that participants can relate to in their lives.
- Use stories to get your point across.

### **Be a participant**

- Share your own ideas and personal stories, but do not dominate or monopolize the discussion.
- Use words like "we" and "us" instead of "you."
- Let the group know that you learn from them too.
- Model good listening skills and expect participants to do the same.

### **Be focused**

- Participants come to these workshops to learn practical skills that will help them with their learner's reading and writing.
- Develop group agreements and stick to them. Give everyone an equal chance to participate.



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- Review the ideas for handling difficult people or situations. Review agreements every couple of weeks and ask participants if they want to change anything.

### **Be empowering**

- Listen to participants.
- Refer back to things they have said.
- Use their language.
- Give them time to think and respond.

### **Be aware**

- Be aware that participants have some common concerns and ideas, as well as different ones.
- Point out how participants share concerns and ideas.
- Show respect and tolerance for differing opinions and approaches.



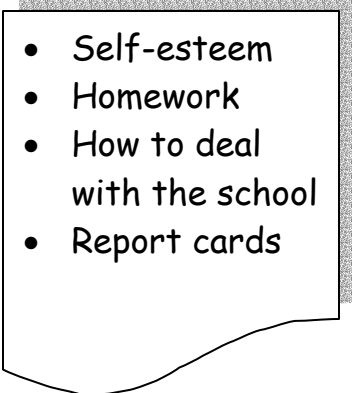
# What is the learner-centred approach?

The Family Tutoring program is based on a learner-centred approach. Learning depends on how much participants contribute in discussions and learning activities. Participants' learn when they discuss their needs, share their ideas and suggest new approaches

## Guidelines for a learner-centred approach

### 1. Involve participants in decision making

- Let participants decide how the sessions will run. For example, when the program begins ask participants what things they want to cover in the discussion topics and use their suggestions.
- Make participants an equal partner in the program.

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- Self-esteem
  - Homework
  - How to deal with the school
  - Report cards

### 2. Create a friendly, safe and non-judgmental atmosphere

- Respect and value the participants' thoughts and opinions.
- Encourage participants to speak about their personal experiences.
- Make sure the group agrees to confidentiality - What people say in the group stays in the group.

### 3. Encourage discussion

- Use small group discussions because they are less intimidating, more informal and help people share their experiences.
- Make time for everyone to speak.
- Recognize that all participants have knowledge and skills they can share with the group.



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- Encourage participants to share their ideas.

**Tip**

Ask questions that participants can't answer with a yes or no. Use words like what, how, where, and why.

**4. Create learning activities that help participants to understand the material**

- Make the learning activities practical and easy to understand.
- Ask participants to practice the reading strategies and ideas with one another.

**5. Be prepared to change your session plan to suit the needs and interests of participants**

- Take your direction from the participants. If they seem to be getting off topic it may mean that they have found something they are really interested in. Check to see what direction they want to go.
- Be aware of the group and watch for signs of boredom or restlessness. People may need an icebreaker, warm-up, energizer, a break or a new topic.



# How to create a healthy learning environment?

### 1. Help participants feel comfortable

- Greet each person as they come in. Let them get to know you by talking about your challenges in life.
- Be informal and relaxed in the sessions. If you are nervous, let them know.

### 2. Listen to what the participants say

- Take the time to listen to the participants. Don't get so caught up in what you have planned that you forget to listen. Let them know that you have heard them.



### 3. Look at participants when you speak to them and when they speak to you

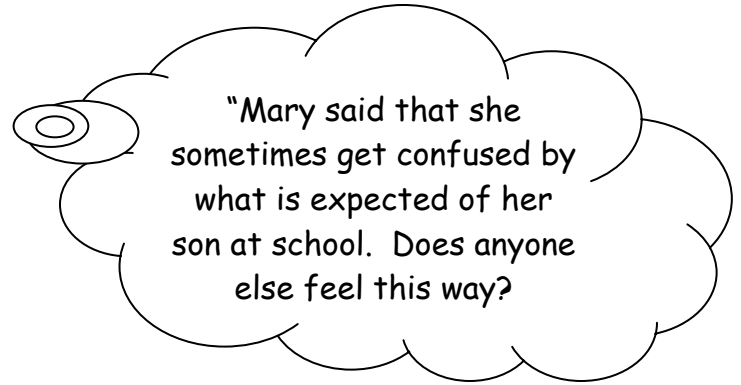
- When you speak to a group, try to look at each person. This helps people feel included and know that their contributions are important.



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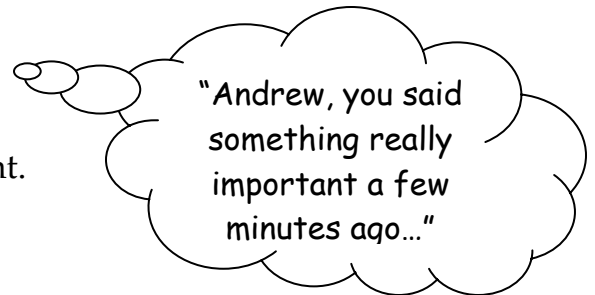
### 4. Repeat what participants say.

- Give participants positive re-enforcement by repeating what they say. This helps people feel included and valued.



### 5. Acknowledge what a parent says.

- Give a lot of positive re-enforcement.



### 6. Remember that learning can be fun!

- Have fun! Learning can be fun – use humour, cartoons, funny stories, etc.

## Helping fathers feel welcome

Most programs struggle to attract fathers to their family literacy programs. Here are some things that may encourage fathers to attend:



- Be yourself and allow the fathers to be themselves.
- Have a male co-facilitator.
- Schedule sessions at a time when fathers are available such as weekends and evenings.
- Recruit more than one father to the group so that they won't feel alone.
- Give personal invitations to fathers.



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- Include topics of special interest to fathers.
- Provide a hearty snack.
- Choose icebreakers that fathers will enjoy.





### How do deal with difficult situations?

As the facilitator of a family literacy program, there may be times when you feel uncomfortable about something that is happening in the group. For example a participant may say something negative about the teacher or principal. It is important to think about how you will deal with these situations before they happen. Try to prepare yourself:

- Think about what issues may come up in the group.
- Identify what your values are about these issues.
- Decide how you will deal with these issues.
- Decide if you should express your values.
- Think about how will this affect the group.

If the facilitator voices his/her opinion forcefully, then the participants may be intimidated and may not be as eager to participate.

### Establishing group agreements

Group agreements help your program run smoothly. During the first session make up a list of guidelines with the group that everyone agrees with. Review the agreements every few weeks and ask participants if they want to add or delete any. The list might have guidelines such as:

- Start and end on time
- Honour all opinions
- Each person has an equal chance to participate
- Keep things confidential
- Give people the right to “pass” in discussion or reading
- Remember that everyone is a learner
- **Have fun!**

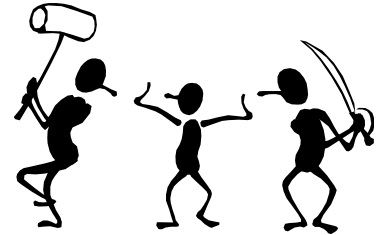


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### Dealing with difficult participants

Facilitators work with a wide range of people. There may be times when a participant creates a difficult situation. A group member may:

- Be angry with you or another participant
- Disagree strongly with an idea expressed
- Become disruptive
- Ask a difficult question
- Express something very personal



Facilitators need to deal with the situation effectively. Do not ignore it. Be calm and thoughtful and non-judgmental. Here are some tips:

- Describe the situation – “Opinions vary about that.” or “Others feel that way sometimes.”
- Ask questions – “Please tell me more.”
- Provide help – “Here’s something to try”
- Invite him/her to speak to you later – “I’d like to talk to you about this some more. Why don’t we do it after the session?”
- Be honest about your feelings – “I don’t feel comfortable talking about this.”
- Be careful to not hurt people’s feelings. Use humour to relieve tension.
- Let the group decide whether discussion should go on – “This is taking us off our topic. What do the rest of you think? Would you like to continue this discussion or move onto something else?”
- Use a non-verbal response to acknowledge the remark – look of concern, nod, etc.

Facilitators need to acknowledge the disruptive participant, but not let their behaviour derail the group. Use the group agreements to help set limits.



Some situations you may experience:

1. **Monopolizers** - People take control of the conversation and block others from participating.

- **Response** – “Thanks for your thoughts on that. Would anyone like to add to or comment on what Mary has said?”

2. **“Been there, done that”** - Participant respond negatively to any suggestion because he “tried it and it didn’t work.”

- **Response** – “I hear what you are saying and it is true that different strategies work with different children; perhaps some of the other ideas that come out of the group will work better for you.”

3. **Aggression** - Participant is very aggressive.

- **Response** – “I sense that this angers you. Remember our group agreements – Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion. .” Or “Take a deep breath to slow down.” Or “Could you and I talk about that later?”

4. **Chronic Interruption** - Participant talks a lot and does not wait for others to finish talking.

- **Response** – “Remember our agreements – please don’t interrupt people.”



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5. **Chronic Disagreement** - Participant disagrees with all ideas.

- **Response** – “Thank you for your opinion. Remember our group agreements - Everyone is entitled to his/her opinion. Let’s listen carefully to each other.”

6. **Passing Judgment** - Participant is judgmental of ideas.

- **Response** – “Everyone’s opinion counts.”

7. **Chronic Worriers** - Participant gets upset when the group doesn’t go smoothly.

- **Response** – “It’s okay for us to disagree – we’re here to learn from each other.”

8. **Non-Involvement** - Participant does not take part in discussion.

- **Response** – “Let’s get some more ideas. Tracy what do you think?” However, if Tracy doesn’t respond, reassure her that it is quite acceptable to “pass”, as we agreed.

