

A black and white photograph of two people sitting on a concrete ledge, looking out at the ocean. A beach ball is floating in the air between them. The image is partially covered by a blue diagonal banner.

ELEVATE ADOLESCENCE PROGRAMS

FACILITATOR *Training*



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
RESOURCE PACKAGE

GROUP DYNAMICS

Facilitators often encounter patterns of behavior in group settings that can either disrupt or reveal deeper needs. This cheat sheet helps you respond with intention—not control. Use these strategies to maintain safety, engagement.

1

The Dominator: One or two individuals dominate the conversation, often steering discussions in a particular direction and potentially overshadowing quieter voices.

2

The Observer: A participant remains quiet, seemingly disengaged or hesitant to contribute, which may stem from a lack of confidence or interest.

3

The Side Talkers: Small, private conversations occur within the group, diverting attention and disrupting the flow of the main discussion.

4

The Distractor: A member introduces jokes or disruptive behavior, which can derail the group's focus and hinder progress.

5

The Tense Energy: Underlying disagreements or unresolved conflicts create a guarded or low-energy atmosphere, impacting the group's overall cohesion.

COMMUNICATION TYPES

GROUP PATTERNS AND HOW TO WORK WITH THEM

The Distractor

When a participant introduces jokes or disruptive behavior, it can shift the group's energy away from the task at hand and make it harder for others to stay engaged.

While humor can be a tool for connection, if used to deflect or dominate, it can erode focus and emotional safety. As a facilitator, the key is to respond with curiosity rather than control—pause, redirect with warmth, and if needed, remind the group of shared agreements.

The Observer

Gently invite these participants to share their thoughts by asking open-ended questions that encourage deeper reflection and engagement. Additionally, consider providing opportunities for smaller group discussions, as these settings often foster a sense of safety and comfort, allowing quieter individuals to express their ideas more freely.

The Dominator

Encourage these individuals to step back and create space for others to contribute by actively inviting quieter members to share their insights. Utilize techniques such as structured turn-taking, where each participant has a designated opportunity to speak, or direct facilitation, where you guide the conversation to ensure that everyone has a chance to voice their thoughts.

The Tense Energy

Tense energy in a group often signals unspoken conflict, emotional discomfort, or fear of judgment—and while it may not surface directly, it can quietly erode group cohesion and safety. As a facilitator, your job isn't to ignore it, but to gently acknowledge and redirect it. This might mean pausing for a grounding breath, naming the energy with care, or shifting into a lower-pressure activity that allows space to reset.

The Side Talker

Small, private conversations—often called “side talk”—can disrupt the flow of a group by pulling attention away from the main discussion and creating a sense of disconnection or exclusion. While they're usually not meant to be disrespectful, they can signal boredom, confusion, or a need for connection. This might mean moving closer to the conversation, pausing with calm presence, or re-engaging the group with a question or reminder of the shared focus.

RESPONSIVE VS. REACTIVE: A GROUP MANAGEMENT SELF-AUDIT

This self-audit tool is designed to help you reflect on how you instinctively respond to challenging group moments. Are you guiding with intention—or reacting out of habit? Use these prompts after a session to strengthen your awareness, recognize your blind spots, and grow your facilitation practice.

1. PAUSE AND REFLECT

When did I feel grounded and present during this session?

When did I feel reactive, rushed, or emotionally triggered?

2. NOTICE YOUR PATTERNS

What group behaviors tend to trigger urgency or control in me?

Did I default to a familiar strategy even when it wasn't effective?

3. REVISIT YOUR RESPONSES

Was my response aligned with the group's actual need—or my own discomfort?

Did I model calm, curiosity, and care?

4. PLAN FOR NEXT TIME

What's one small move I could make next time to stay more responsive?

Who or what helps me recenter when I get off track?

*"Responsiveness is a practice, not a personality trait.
The more you notice your habits,
the more space you create to choose a better way."*

WHAT BUILDS TRUST?

Consistency

Trust starts with predictability. When your group knows what to expect, they can relax into the experience. This doesn't mean everything has to be rigid—but your core structure, tone, and presence should feel stable.

- Arrive on time, every time. Youth notice.
- Stick to session rituals—like opening check-ins or closing reflections.
- If you say you'll do something, follow through—or name it if you can't.

Careful Communication

How you speak matters just as much as what you say. Youth are highly attuned to tone, expression, and nonverbal cues. Careful communication helps participants feel seen without being judged.

- Use warm, clear language. Avoid sarcasm, shame, or overly formal tone.
- Acknowledge effort, not just outcome. For example: "I appreciate you speaking up, even if it felt hard."
- When someone shares something emotional, don't rush to fix it—validate it.

Confidentiality & Respect

Respect is the root of trust—and it shows up most clearly when participants are vulnerable. Reinforce privacy and boundaries gently but consistently.

- "What's shared in circle stays in circle"—unless someone is in danger.
- If you hear something that violates group agreements, pause and reset with care.
- Model respectful listening with your own body language and attention.