

GUIDELINES

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Each session needs a facilitator from the group who “opens” the session and guides the discussion. Different members of the group share this responsibility. Some groups have found it helpful to have a time-keeper and scribe as needed.

TO OPEN THE SESSION:

1. Your role is to bring a short opening for one session (not more than five minutes). It might be a short personal story, an object or photograph that has special meaning, a poem, visualization, etc. Since this is a time for creativity, there is no prescribed format or expectation. (See sample readings in Resource section of Guide.)
2. The purpose of the opening is twofold. First, it provides a transition from other activities of the day into the group discussion. Second, since the opening is personal, it allows the group to get better acquainted with you. This aspect of the course is often very rewarding.

TO FACILITATE THE SESSION:

1. As facilitator for one session, your principal role is to stimulate and moderate the discussion by asking questions (your own or those from the list of possible discussion questions) identifying key points, and managing the group process. You do not need to be an expert of even the most knowledgeable person about the topic for the week, but you should be very familiar with the material. Be prepared. Plan ahead.
2. Begin and end the session on time.
3. Keep discussion focused on the session’s topic. A delicate balance is best—don’t force the group to stick to the topic or the questions in the Guide, but don’t allow the discussion to drift too far.
4. A primary goal is for everyone to participate in each session. As facilitator, draw out quiet participants by creating an opportunity for each person to contribute.
5. On the other hand, an important role of the facilitator is to restrain a domineering participant. Don’t let one or two people take over the conversation. Thank them for their opinions and ask another person for his or her opinion.
6. The goal of the course is for participants to learn from themselves and from others in a comfortable setting. Any opinion or question is okay.
7. The focus should be on personal reactions to the readings and on personal values, opinions, feelings, and experiences. The group experience is not about reaching consensus. It is designed to generate curiosity and engagement and a broader, deeper understanding of the topic.
8. Be an active listener. You need to hear and understand what people say if you are to guide the discussion effectively. Listening carefully also sets a good example.