

# How to Support Facilitators



Being the facilitator for a learning circle is challenging and carries a lot of responsibility. Facilitators must set up the physical space, create and maintain an atmosphere for learning, structure the sessions and engage the group to share practice stories and commit to changes. Any administrative support which can be provided to the facilitator to initiate and run the learning circle on an ongoing basis would be very helpful for the facilitator at your site.

Areas for support include:

## **Logistical Considerations**

Support the facilitator with logistical considerations such as scheduling. As the site sponsor, you will need to coordinate pay for those attending on their time off, and coverage for those attending during their work hours. Booking all learning circles in advance and keeping to the schedule is helpful. Provide support to the facilitator on deciding how often to hold the learning circle, and for what length of time. The more often learning circles are held, the more effective they will be. Sessions should be at least 60 minutes, however previous facilitators have explained that 90 minutes allows the group to better close the session. Once you have decided on a schedule, circulate dates and times to participants and post the schedule for future reference.

You can also provide support to the facilitator in choosing and booking the learning circle space. The room needs to be private, in a convenient location for staff, away from distractions and with furniture that can be rearranged in a circle. Again consistency is important, so having the same room booked for every session will be useful.

## **Recruitment & Ongoing Participation**

Since attendance at the learning circle is voluntary, recruiting enough people to attend can be a challenge. Ask the facilitator if you might be able to provide assistance with this. Approximately 6 to 8 participants will need to be recruited for the learning circle. The concept of learning circles can be introduced to potential participants through discussion, and with the distribution of a hand-out to detail expectations, logistics and benefits of participation.

It can also be helpful to assist facilitators with ensuring ongoing attendance. A notice can be posted in the workplace to serve as a consistent reminder. You can also issue reminders to participants on a regular basis and minimize distractions by arranging for coverage of cell phones for those attending. If ongoing attendance becomes a challenge, support the facilitator in speaking with participants to clarify reasons for non-attendance, and in adjusting the timing of the learning circle to better suit participants.

## **Use of a Coach or Mentor**

It will be useful to provide the facilitator at your site with a coach who s/he can meet with on an ongoing basis to discuss how things are going and to provide mentoring support. This will be particularly necessary if the facilitator is new to the role. If there are a number of facilitators at your site, you may wish to establish a peer mentoring group. It is a good idea to provide resources which can support these staff members in these activities. A few resources to begin with:

Daloz, L.A. (1999). *Mentor: Guiding the journey of adult learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hawkins, P. & Shohet, F. (2012). *Supervision in the helping professions* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Open University Press.