



Tools for Connecting with (Young) People for Parents, Teachers, and Caregivers

In our work with youth and with the broader community, we have found that the way that we do something—the process—is just as important as what we’re doing—the content. This document covers some of the core facilitation techniques that we use, as well as why we use them. We encourage you to modify these tools to fit your family and to explore the resources listed. To learn more about GRuB’s youth development resources and workshops, see <https://www.goodgrub.org/pollination-program>.

Daily Check-ins

Check-ins mark the beginning of time together and allow each person to arrive and bring their voice into the group. Check-ins are meant to surface how folks are doing energetically as they start their day, get to know more about each other, and provide the facilitator with information that might inform their design of the day. Cross-talk or responding to individuals’ check-ins is discouraged. You can use a talking piece or the rule “one microphone” to give each person an uninterrupted turn. When possible, a circle configuration for the group to do check-in is recommended. Circles allow much better eye contact, in turn improving each person’s experience of being witnessed and heard, and breaks down the power dynamics of a facilitator(s) standing “up front” talking at an assembly of chairs, tables, and desks pointed to them. This simple approach sets the tone right away, and invites a deeper and more meaningful level of participation. A check-in might consist of an individual’s name, gender pronouns, support needs, and the answer to a creative question (see below).

- *What is your superpower? Or if you can have a superpower what would it be?*
- *Who made it possible for you to be here today?*
- *If your mood was a season/plant/ecosystem/weather system today, what would it be and why?*
- *What is something you appreciate about spring/summer/fall/winter?*
- *What’s a special place in nature for you?*
- *Describe a moment where you felt connected to your culture?*
- *Give us a stretch and tell us how you are doing physically and emotionally today.*
- *What is something you appreciate about the person standing to your right?*
- *What is something you’ve been complimented for?*
- *Who is a personal hero/heroine and why?*

Check-outs

Similar to check-ins, these are an opportunity for everyone to share a last thought.

- **Rock, Stick, Leaf** – What’s something that *rocked* today? What feeling or concept or idea is going to *stick* with you? What is an assumption or belief you’re going to *leaf* behind? (Or what is wisdom or feedback you’d like to *leaf* behind for the group or facilitators?) If you’re short on time, participants can choose just one of the three to share with the group.
- **Rose, Flowers, and Thorns** – What was sweet? What felt prickly? What knowledge or experience from today will help you protect or nourish yourself?
- **Gratitude and Regrets** – What is something you are grateful for in our time together? What is something you regret? This can also be a great one for part way through a longer day or workshop so that folks can get their regret off their chest and still have time together afterward.
- **Other check-out prompts** – One word of appreciation; one thing you’ll do to take care of yourself; one thing you learned/did well/will remember/surprised you.
- **Give Back** – When the group has had a guest teacher or presenter, they can ‘give back’ to them by telling them one thing they learned or appreciated about their teaching/presentation.

Guidelines

One of the most important things we do as a staff at GRuB, and within our youth programs, is to create a community contract where we spell out our expectations of each other. We then use tools to give each other feedback about our alignment with the contract. Examples of guidelines include:

- **Try on*** – This is an invitation to be open-minded to others’ ideas, feelings, worldviews and ways of doing things so that greater exploration and understanding are possible. The invitation also includes feeling free to take those things that “fit” and to leave or file away those things that don’t fit.
- **Both/And Thinking*** – This skill invites us to see that more than one reality or perspective can be true at the same time rather than seeing reality as strictly either/or, right or wrong, good or bad, this or that. Using “both/and thinking” can be very helpful in reconciling differences and conflicts that do not present easy solutions.
- **Don’t Yuck My Yum** – Encourage participants to hold their immediate negative impressions of any activity or taste to themselves so as not to taint the experience for everyone around them. This is particularly helpful when tasting new foods with children.
- **Move Up/Move Up** – If you are someone who doesn’t usually engage in discussions, challenge yourself to “move up” and make an effort to share your perspective more than you currently do. If you are someone who usually contributes a lot in conversations, “move up” by practicing your listening skills.
- **Five Finger Contract** – This is a quick, clever and kinesthetic contract for short-term engagements. (1) Pinky = safety (physical & emotional), (2) Ring finger = commitment (to the task at hand and group goals) (3) Middle finger = respect (for each other and the land), (4) Index finger = accountability (we take responsibility for our own actions), and (5) Thumb = fun (the thumb can also be used for an overall agreement with the contract).

**These first two guidelines are part of VISIONS Eight (8) Guiding Principles for Successful Outcomes Across Cultural Differences. (For more information or for training in the VISIONS, Inc. Model of Multicultural Change, please contact VISIONS Inc., 1452 Dorchester Avenue, 4th Floor, Dorchester, MA 02122, (617) 541-4100, or visit our website at www.visions-inc.org.)*

Appreciations

In the midst of our busy lives and especially during stress and challenge, we can forget to pause and express our appreciation for each other. While in-the-moment appreciations should be sprinkled throughout our days, here are a couple of more structured formats that allow us to get a good dose of gratitude in our lives.

- **Appreciation Shower** – Each person takes a turn receiving verbal appreciations from three people (or more if you have more time) in the circle. An appreciation is using a few sentences that describe ways this person is in the world as well as actions/decisions they've made that have positively affected our own lives. The more specific the appreciations, the more digestible by the receiver.
- **Appreciation Poster** – Each person puts their name in the middle of a piece of paper and passes it to the person to their right. Everyone has 1 minute (or more if you like) to write a short appreciation to that person. Papers continue around the circle until they arrive back at their owner. Owners then have a chance to read over and can choose to share one or two aloud. You can experiment with using the chat function on an online call to do this activity.

Games

Icebreakers are just simple activities that soften the awkwardness (the ice) and start to build energy in a group.

- **Plant/Animal Celebrity** – Prepare small pieces of paper ahead of time with names of plants, animals, famous people, or another category (just choose one category). Tape 1 paper on each person's back. Players mingle and ask yes/no questions of others to try to figure out their mystery plant/animal. The online videochat app called Houseparty has a version of this game built in.
- **Shake It Out** – Shake right hand in the air 8 times while counting backwards, "8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1" and then repeat with left arm, right leg, and left leg. Start over with your right hand, but cut the amount in half each time, "4,3,2,1" for each limb, and then "2,1" for each limb, and finally "1,1,1,1".
- **Clap Lap** – Everyone is positioned in a circle. The leader turns to the person next to them, and both people attempt to clap at the same time. The second person then turns to their other side and claps in unison with the next person, and so on. The goal is to pass the synchronized clap around the circle as fast as possible. A second clap can be added when the first clap is on the opposite side to the circle to increase the difficulty. Facilitator can time the rounds if the group wants/needs a greater challenge.
- **Zip Zap Zup** – Everyone is in a circle. First person points their joined hands at someone else in the circle and proclaims "Zip!" The second person then sends the electricity to another person and says "Zap". The third person passes it along and, of course, yells "Zup!" The cycle repeats with members getting eliminated when they pause too long, say the wrong word or pass the zap back to the person who sent it to them. This game can be equally fun, and energizing if you choose not to play with the elimination aspect.
- **Bring Me...** – This game can be played on online conferencing like Zoom calls. You can use it to engage peoples' senses and learn about each other. Ask students to bring something that feels fuzzy, smells good, travels fast, etc. You can have everyone get a few items and share, or have each person come up with a question for the next person. This is a home scavenger hunt of sorts.

Empowering Communication

Active Listening

Active Listening is a communication tool that can be used in any conversation, and is particularly helpful to use when dealing with conflict. It also encourages participation because youth feel heard when they give an answer or speak. Active listening includes the following practices:

- **Attending** – Use non-verbal cues (body language) to show someone you are listening to them.
- **Pacing** – Match the energy of the speaker (happy or sad etc.) showing that you're concerned and really care.
- **Reflecting** – Stating back to the person what you heard; "I'm hearing you say_____. Is that right?"
- **Acknowledging** – Validate what the speaker said, not agreeing but letting them know you hear what is important to them; "It sounds like you are angry with Karina because she didn't call you."
- **Reframing** – This is similar to reflecting, however the emphasis is on removing the harmful or attacking language and trying to name the underlying needs/interests; "It sounds like you need people to be honest with you."

Active listening is especially helpful when mentoring youth one-on-one to guide them through finding a solution themselves. Reframing can be particularly useful if the youth is feeling helpless or particularly resentful about the situation. Reframing what they are saying, or what is going on in the situation, can help them see it from a more positive perspective and move into a more productive and effective space.

Active Listening is Not: Giving advice, agreeing, fixing the problem, telling your own story or mentally preparing to tell your story, or asking "Why?"

Council

(from *The Ojai Foundation*, www.ojaifoundation.org)

This is a tool for allowing the group to have a discussion, and once the guidelines for council have been laid out, they are guiding the conversation themselves. Having some sort of talking piece is encouraged for this activity. Council should have an opening and closing of some kind (intention, song, spontaneous offering). Council guidelines include:

- **Speak from the heart** – Share what is true for you in the moment. Speak from your own experience. Listen and feel for what your heart wants to express.
- **Listen from the heart** – As others hold the talking piece, practice active listening. Invite the little voice in your head to take a break so you can be fully present with what is being shared. Notice emotions and physical feelings that arise as others speak from their hearts.
- **Spontaneity** – The practice of not rehearsing. Easier said than done! When the talking piece arrives in your hands, take a moment to ask "what do I need to share, or express in this moment?" You may be surprised by the answer. Trust what comes. Silence, singing, laughing, dancing, speaking; the options are unlimited.

- **Leanness of expression** – Try to say what you need to say without dressing it up or wandering here and there (unless, of course, that is what is needed). Get to the point. This is also about noticing time and group size and leaving time/space for others to share as well.
- **Confidentiality** – What is spoken or done in council stays in council. Council has a clear beginning, middle and end. If the stories and events of council are discussed outside of this container it weakens the integrity of the council.
- **The person with the talking piece is the only one who speaks** unless they ask a direct question of someone else or the group.

Facilitated Conversations through Conflict

(Modified from the Dispute Resolution Center of Thurston County)

Conflict is natural and normal (even desirable!), and being ready to deal with it contributes to a positive and safe environment. If there is a conflict between group members that they feel cannot be resolved on their own, this process can be helpful. As a facilitator, you are focused more on the PROCESS than the content. You create a safe space and hold both parties to the ground rules. You guide everyone in an orderly process of sharing experiences and identifying needs and feelings. You do NOT solve their problem or act as a judge.

1. Facilitator Preparation

Ideally there are two facilitators who meet before the conversation to prepare by going over the following outline and deciding how you want to work together. It is often useful to have one person as the primary process facilitator with the other person focusing on what is said, what good questions to ask, helping to seek out the deeper issues and interests.

2. Creating a Safe Space –Transparent Process & the Ground Rules

A key part of facilitating a successful conversation is to create a safe space and a clear pathway. Welcome the participants and thank them for coming together to talk. Explain that conflict can be scary, but as they get more practice, they can be great opportunities to strengthen our relationships and learn from each other. Tell them about what the process will look like (see below) and be clear about what you need each person to agree to. (see below). Do not move forward until all parties have agreed. If they can't agree, you can ask them about the consequences of letting this conflict linger.

Transparent Process

- I'll ask for uninterrupted input from each of you
- I may ask questions to help you share your story
- We will go 1 person at a time, ask others to be active listeners (also possible to reflect back)

Communication Rules

- Speak with compassion and respect/listen (we're not here to blame)
- No interrupting or name calling
- Honesty
- Work to solve the problem
- Speak from your experience ("I statements")
- Maintain confidentiality

3. The Snapshot

Explain that each party will have a few minutes to give their side of the story. While each is telling their story, the other listens. If they hear something they want to respond to, they should write it down. Begin simply - *What's going on?* Other questions that you can use include:

- *What is your greatest concern?*
- *What do you most want the other person to understand?*

Take notes as each person explains their side of the story. Use Active Listening (see section above) to reflect back what you heard them say, including content and feelings, helping them hone in on their issues/interests. When you have finished reflecting, ask if there is anything else they wish to add.

4. Create a Plan

Create a plan that allows both participants to move forward. You can encourage this by asking questions.

- *If you could do it all over again, is there anything you'd do differently?*
- *What do you most want to see happen?*
- *What are some possible solutions to this conflict?*
- *What are you willing to do right now?*
- *What's your next step? When will you do this? What kind of support can you use?*

5. Closure

Thank everyone for their honesty and hard work. Acknowledge that dealing with conflict can be challenging and scary, and that the work they did today is a big deal. Let them know they can try the same steps in their other conflicts and may find these as opportunities to create deeper relationships.

The Life-Cycle of a Group Theory

This is a group development theory that might be useful as your group or family spends more intensive time together. This view of group development sees a group's journey as similar to that of a human being with various life stages that parallel birth, adolescence, adulthood, middle age, and elderhood/death. These stages of group development were first presented by Bruce Tuckman and Mary-Anne Jensen. For more information see *Journey toward the Caring Classroom* by Laurie S. Frank or search online for forming/storming/norming.

Forming – This phase is the beginning of a new class, crew or group. The “honeymoon” phase. Risk-taking is low because people are generally feeling some amount of anxiety about whether or not they will be accepted. Teacher or mentor role at this phase is to create a safe and inclusive space where there are opportunities for people to get to know one another. It is also the time to establish and clarify rules, expectations, and guidelines.

Storming – In this phase, a base level of trust has been established between group members. With trust comes a feeling that it is OK to take risks and be ourselves. As people take risks, their differing personalities, communication styles, and values can create conflict. It is a time when groups can fall apart without conscious leadership and guidance. Teachers/facilitators during this phase can create space for conflict mediation as well as the exploration of individuals' diverse learning and leadership

styles through various inventories (Leadership Compass, Conflict Styles, etc....). Allowing a group to be in the storming phase and use it for learning and sharing is essential.

Norming – Having made it through the “storming” phase, the group now has a deeper level of trust. As the group continues to work together, norms will surface. Group members will easily be able to see and identify some norms, while others will be less obvious. Lookout for unspoken norms (biting sarcasm, perpetual tardiness, dominant speakers for example) that are detrimental to the health and safety of group members. Teacher or mentor role at this time is to be a process observer, ask clarifying questions and help bring unspoken norms to light for the group. The group is ready to take on more responsibility at this phase. This is an excellent time to do some deeper team-building activities.

Performing – At this phase the group is working together effectively and collaboratively. There is a deep level of trust and honesty in the group and less superficiality. Members feel respected and seen for their unique skills and gifts. Teacher or mentor role at this time is to step back, give away work, and occasionally offer guidance and outside resources as needed to support the direction and vision of the group. New members joining or old members leaving at this time won't be as disruptive to the functioning of the group at this phase.

Transforming – This is the time when a group's time together comes to an end or changes. The group may continue again through the other phases with more wisdom and experience and as a result deeper learning and growth. Teacher or mentor role at this time is to create space for the group to mark the end of one part of their lives and the transition into something new or unknown. Reflecting on time spent, sharing memories, offering appreciations, acknowledging grief, and saying goodbye are all important parts of the transforming phase.

Resources & References

While GRuB has a lot of great tools to offer on working with people, we have also greatly benefitted from the work and wisdom of countless individuals and organizations.

Ultimate Camp Resource: online treasure trove of games and activities. www.ultimatecampresource.com

Silver Bullets: A Guide to Initiative Problems, Adventure Games and Trust Activities by Karl Rohnke. This has a lot of great team-building activities and light warm-up games as well.

Journey Toward the Caring Classroom by Laurie S. Frank. This excellent book outlines the theories of teambuilding and the behind-the-scenes structures, as well as facilitation tips and specific activities.

The Food Project: A non-profit organization similar to GRuB based out of Boston, Massachusetts. One of our favorite resources for activities, facilitation styles, and program structure is Growing Together by Greg Gale. Visit www.thefoodproject.org to see their other awesome resources and trainings.

Council: This tool exists in many different versions so it is worth exploring which version is the best fit for your program. We often use the model taught by the Ojai Foundation in the book The Way of Council, by Jack Zimmerman and Virginia Coyle. Visit www.ojaifoundation.org and www.centerforcouncil.org.

Dispute Resolution Center of Thurston County: offers training on mediation as a tool to resolve conflicts and offers support for resolving conflicts effectively. To learn more, visit www.mediatethurston.org.