

Facilitating a Group Discussion

BP3 RELIES ON TWO METHODS FOR FACILITATING A GROUP DISCUSSION

- The way of council as taught by the Ojai Foundation
- The third pathway of the Noble Eightfold Path — Right Speech

In prison, we have found that a sense of formality and etiquette regarding group discussions is appreciated and adhered to once the facilitator explains the practice of “Right Speech” and “Right Listening.” This is especially important in a large group (more than 10) where discussions can get loud and mindfulness tends to fall away. Without adequate instructions, cross talking and on occasion arguments have occurred.

1. If possible, have your group sit in a manner where everyone can see everyone else. A circle formation is most effective. Remind sangha members about confidentiality of sangha discussions.
2. Ask people in the circle to introduce themselves. Each person in the circle looks fully at all other participants, bows to the group and states his/her name.
3. After participants have introduced themselves, the facilitator will present the session’s topic and should offer some initial thoughts, or perhaps share a pertinent story in regards to the topic.
If appropriate the facilitator can ask for comments on the topic from the participants.
4. Participants can indicate their interest in speaking by raising their hand or “bowing in.” An alternative method is to go clock-wise around the circle, allowing participants to “pass” if they choose.
5. The facilitator will indicate whose turn it is to talk by acknowledging the person by name and bowing to them.
6. The facilitator should emphasize that the first intention is to “speak from the heart.” This means to speak not only with your head but with your feelings as well. It means tell your story as honestly as you can in that moment.
7. Remind sangha members to “listen from the heart.” This means noting your own internal reactions to what is being said by others. How does it feel in the body and mind?

8. Remind sangha members to always speak spontaneously. Try to wait before talking. Don't plan what you are going to say. Allow your inner wisdom to come forth.
9. If one person tends to verbally dominate, "skillfully" break in and suggest that others may wish to offer their perspective. Remind the group to practice speaking "leanly."
10. There is NEVER any cross talking. Each person speaks his or her own truth.