

D. Be Approachable as a Facilitator- Handout

Sometimes group leaders can seem unapproachable to participants, making it harder for participants to relate which prevents a good flow of communication in the classroom. A few simple actions can go a long way towards helping participants feel comfortable with opening up during class. This will help create a more relaxed, enjoyable group learning experience for both you and the participants.

- ***Greet participants with respect.*** Use a friendly tone. Remember that the participants made an effort to come to class and deserve a welcoming experience.
- ***Sit among the participants, not away from them.*** CCNE is based on interactions among people. Instructors are encouraged to conduct classes in a circle. Even if this is not a possibility due to space, mix it up once and a while. Sit in a row with participants. Avoid standing over them because it promotes a lecture format.
- ***Treat everyone like you know them personally.*** Even if you have never met a client that is in your class, treat them like you would a friend. When you approach the room as if it was a group of friends, it reduces your nerves about teaching and helps promote a more conversational and comfortable group learning experience.
- ***Smile.*** It is a simple idea, but one that can be easily forgotten. A smile goes a long way to making you approachable and warm.
- ***Watch your nonverbal signals.*** Remember to avoid crossing your arms or legs when talking to participants; it sends the message that you are unapproachable. Also, be careful with eye and face movements, which could be misinterpreted.
- ***Be curious and empathic.*** Relate to participants in a natural way and show curiosity and interest in their comments and suggestions. The following steps can help you be a more active listener.
 - ***Figure out*** who you are listening to and do your best to tune out the other noises and distractions in the space around you.
 - ***Focus*** in on that participant or conversation using some of the above suggestions like smiling to let the person(s) know you are listening to them without interrupting them.
 - ***Know*** what you are discussing. Many times a facilitator may try to respond to the participant's question before having a firm grasp of what the participant is really asking. Give the participant space to explain before diving into a response. Also, keep in mind that part of your role is to help participants learn from each other, so rather than jumping into a response, consider finding out what the participants can learn from others in the group.
 - ***Remember*** the important details. When you respond, the participant will feel more engaged with you when you use part of their conversation in your answer. Try to remember names, parts of the problem, and specific details that you can incorporate into your response.

- **Respond** only after you do the first four steps. While this sounds like a long process, it can become second nature once you get the hang of it. When you address the person asking you the question, make eye contact with others in your group to make the conversation more than a one-on-one.

Active Listening Activity

- Divide staff into small pairs.
- Speaker:
 - Discuss something you are trying to make a decision about – it can be anything. (3 min.)
- Listener:
 - Practice active listening skills
 - Smile and show good nonverbal habits.
 - Avoid the temptation of giving advice, or interjecting
 - At the end of the description, paraphrase (check accuracy of your understanding by offering a verbal summary of partner's message without make any judgments or suggestions)
- Switch roles

After the exercise, discuss the following questions with staff:

- What behaviors indicated active listening and empathy towards the participant?
- How accurate was the listener's paraphrasing?
- How did it feel to be the speaker? The listener?