

Feb 3, 2020 (Third Meeting) Kits Debrief

5 participants, 2 connected to XR. Given the relatively smaller size of the group this week, we had a more intimate session characterized by discussion and support.

Process Highlights:

While the attendance wasn't high, the people who did attend were very invested in the group meeting, and very forthcoming with what they've been experiencing regarding the climate. I struggled internally this week, as I had a nervous and scattered energy (which I'm told didn't show) that made it more difficult for me than previous weeks to facilitate. However, Tom did an excellent job this week facilitating, which took a lot of the pressure off me.

Facilitators are likely to be having a wide array of personal experiences week to week, and are also likely to be affected in various ways by the climate crisis given that facilitating this support group necessitates their week to week focus on the issue. This, to me, illustrates the importance of having two facilitators. It will be difficult for one facilitator to maintain confidence and well-being every week, and I feel it is good practice to ensure that facilitators have the support of another facilitator when doing this group.

Given that our various reactions to the climate crisis come naturally from our connection to the natural world, I feel that it should be expected that facilitators will struggle in their delivery of this group at least some of the time. Therefore, allowing a group to run with only one facilitator may leave them feeling isolated, and it is crucial that we make considerations to care for our facilitators, as well as our participants.

We kept things more simple this week, giving preference to circle discussion and support. This was very well received by the group. Participants felt free to talk about how they have been affected by the climate crisis, and to expand upon the issue and how they relate to it. We had a theme for the night, connection, which the group had been speaking about at length before knowing what the theme was.

We asked a specific question relating to that theme about where people draw a sense of connection from, which one participant told us helped them feel grounded. We dedicated part of our session to asking for participant feedback. Overall, they felt happy with how we conducted the session, saying that having the space to talk about how they feel without being shut down is very helpful. They also appreciated hearing what other participants had to say, so it seems that the discussion portion of our support group is very well received.

Further, one participant said they felt like there was more sanity within the room than outside it, citing the denial and misinformation that many other people in the general public are engaged in when it comes to the climate crisis. It seems that offering this group goes a long way to help people feel less isolated in their feelings about the climate crisis, since it is such a

common experience that many of us can't talk about the crisis with people in our normal lives without negatively affecting our relationships. One participant recommended we bring tissues, which are a must, since crying is part of the experience for some. Also, we may consider a talking stick for larger groups and see how that is received. A talking stick, so says the group, is less necessary for smaller groups.

There is a real fear that the climate movement will fizzle out without accomplishing much. Additionally, some participants showed up hoping for some clarity as to what they can do. **This, to me, confirms that one of the crucial functions of our group is to bring non-activists and activists together.** It is important that our activist friends receive our support to feel less isolated and more hopeful, and that we enable our non-activist friends looking for ways to become involved to add themselves to the activist movements.

While we do not require that people attending the group become activists, maintaining our activist connections will help cultivate participants' self-efficacy for taking action in the face of this climate crisis. XR's and SPEC Elder involvement has been a great gift, and it would be very beneficial to our group to find members who are willing to facilitate future groups. Our outreach efforts to engage with teen groups such as the Fridays for Future have so far not garnered results.

We did a group "Macy" meditation, which was well received. However, I am inexperienced with group meditations, and while we think I did well, Tom feels that it would be beneficial for me to slow the pace at which I read meditations, and I agree. When looking for facilitators, it will be worthwhile to provide some guidance on how to deliver meditations/guided imagery, or to look for people with experience in those areas. Tom has experience in this type of work and his mentoring and suggested readings have been helpful. Tom also read a children's story he wrote about courage, bravery and heroism.

The idea is to put children's stories on the reading list as a resource for working with younger children. I believe that having a smaller number of participants means that more energy is spent throughout the course of the group session by each participant than would be in a larger group where each participant listens more and shares less. As such, Tom read the energy of the room and decided to forgo an exercise we had prepared. I agree with Tom's decision here, and it is important that facilitators use their own discretion in terms of how closely to follow the agenda for the night.

We ended earlier than normal, due to our read of the group's energy; it seemed like the right time. Future facilitators should use their judgment for when to end the session, and not stick to two hours arbitrarily.

Although we are working on a "manual" of sorts for how to deliver this group, it should be made clear that the manual is a resource to help guide and structure sessions, and not a firm

agenda that must be followed in spite of the needs of the group. In this sense, our group is emerging as “client driven” and not “theory driven”, to use counselling terms. In other words, the participants’ needs are more important than the agenda, and future facilitators should feel free to adapt their delivery of the group and how much they stick to the agenda on a week to week basis in response to the emerging needs of the group.

As a general rule of thumb, facilitators can expect the agenda to be more valuable in larger groups and for group activities to be more helpful for structuring the session when many participants are present. When the number of participants is low, it is likely that the agenda becomes less important and that the setting will feel more intimate. Breaking into smaller discussion groups will help to increase intimacy.

Ideally each group should be 6 people. With low numbers, the majority of the session will likely be spent in circle discussion and support, with some questions derived from the theme for that session to help ground participants in their answers. Because interpersonal connections form more easily in small groups, there is less of a need for group activities and exercises to help create connections.

I feel that guided imagery or meditation is helpful regardless of the group size, as it aids participants in finding a sense of relaxation and inner peace after talking about emotionally heavy content. I would consider 11 or 12 participants the threshold for when a group can be considered large and more benefited by group activities.

While our prediction that large groups benefit more from keeping to an agenda and doing group activities than smaller groups do, this prediction should still be taken with a grain of salt. Rigidly adhering to our manual for how to run this group will feel artificial for participants. I believe it benefits the group more to have facilitators that come across as participants than facilitators that come across as experts.

Being loose with how one implements the manual conveys more of a personal touch, whereas being rigid conveys a more professional atmosphere. I am partial to the former, but facilitators should use their best judgment in determining which is more beneficial to the group.