Tips for Facilitating Virtual Peer Support Circles

The following tips will be useful when conducting virtual trainings or meetings with Peer Support Circles, whether externally facilitated or self-facilitated. Discuss and share these tips with members early in the Circle meetings. Encourage them to have the tips in front of them during Circle activities.

When Orienting Members—Mention:
Virtual has its challenges, but advantages, too:
- It can save money in transportation costs
- It can save time in transportation activities
- Can be done from phones or computers
Don’t judge the experience from first meeting

Building Team / Relationships
Share biographies, resumes and pictures on private a Web space, e.g., a SharePoint
Share questions, answers, materials, etc., between meetings

Planning / Preparing Technology
Considerations:
Real-time video is not that important
Consider a headset so not holding a phone
Use mute to stop background noise and keep confidentiality
Don’t use “Hold” buttons if they play music
Avoid cordless phones – often make static
If using a phone bridge, remember that rented time expires; re-dial in to the conference again to get more time
Turn up volume – better to be loud, than soft
Be sure batteries are charged beforehand
Call in early to verify technology is working

Materials (e.g., if doing a Circle training):
Upload any needed materials before meeting
Verify access to materials before the meeting
If in-person training, turn chairs around – practice communicating without seeing each other

Additional Circle ground rules?
Don’t talk to non-members during the Circle Confidentiality – be in a private area where no one else can hear what’s being said
Avoid paper and keyboard noise

Consistency in Agenda and Roles
Agenda – Stick to Circle agenda so members always know where you at during meeting
Roles – Stick to the Circle roles so members always know what’s expected of them
Breaks – Build in 5/10-minute breaks at least every 1.5 hours
Check-in – Do so each member involved early
Time slots – Make each time slot is equal in length so members don’t get disoriented

At Start of Meeting
Verify they can hear you – "loud enough?"
Do roll call to identify all members present
Make a list of those in attendance
Ask them to mute their phone, turn volume up

Ensuring Focus and Attention
Name the current PPT slides you are using
Name parts of the agenda that you’re on
When offering help to a member – say your name first
The presenter should address one question/advice at a time, before addressing other members

Tracking Participation
Ask – "who’s talking now?"
Call on quiet people
During each time slot, ask "is this helpful?"
If member speaks for several minutes, tactfully interrupt, “Is the Circle process still being helpful to all of you?”
Vary the inflection and tone of your voice

Tracking Attendance
Do a roll call every hour – ask each person to indicate they are present
When checking in, mention your name and ensure that at least one member hears you
When checking out, mention your departure and ensure that at least one member hears