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 handy during Circle activities.

When Orienting Members, Mention:

- Virtual has 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 the first meeting

Building Team / Relationships

- Share biographies, resumes and pictures on a private 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 you do in-person training first, 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 this so each member is 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 / offering 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

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