Leading a Small Group

- Set accepted rules for small group interaction:
  - everyone gets opportunity to share
  - no one is forced to share
  - confidentiality
  - no put downs on what someone says
  - respect opinions of others even if you disagree
  - other mutually agreed rules as needed

- Make sure the conversation stays on topic. If the group strays from the topic, bring them back.
- Encourage everyone to share but do not exert undue pressure on participants to share things they are uncomfortable sharing.
- If the group begins slowly try a few of the following techniques:
  - Break into smaller groups – pairs, trios, etc.
  - Say, “Let’s begin with the person with the longest last name..., the person with the most recent birthday..., the person with the most jewelry on...”
  - Share something yourself that is on a deeper level or personal. This will help set a tone that will hopefully encourage them to open up a little.

- While you may need to set the tone for sharing in the beginning, as the participants begin opening up, allow them to talk more and you talk less. The small group leader or facilitator should be a good listener.
- Avoid moralizing and trying to solve problems or answering every question. Concentrate on listening and allowing participants to express themselves.
- Ask open-ended questions: “How do you feel about that?” “What do you think?” “How does that relate to your life?” Avoid questions that can be answered with a “yes,” “no,” or “I don’t know.”
- Thank participants for their responses and ideas.
- Prevent any one participant from dominating conversation, distracting the group, or sidetracking the topic. Confront gently at first, but employ more assertive techniques if needed. If necessary, confront the distracting participant one-on-one at a break and seek to get his/her cooperation.
- Learn to become comfortable with silence. Occasional periods of silence are OK. Some people need to process things before speaking. Don’t rush to fill the silence. Be patient. Give them the opportunity to respond.