



Sample Group Check-In Questions

Often, people don't know how to share their thoughts and feelings in a group setting. They usually end up going on rabbit trails, venting, or spend too much time talking about others. By asking good initial questions and modeling active listening, small group leaders can help their members discover areas that may be blind spots.

As you lead a check-in time, start off by guiding group members through the following questions:

- Please share briefly a situation going on (event, relationship, other)
- Share the facts from your perspective (what did you see, hear, observe?)
- What are your thoughts about this?
- What emotions came up for you around this?
- What role did you play in this?
- What is your desired outcome?
- What do you think your next step will be?

Active Listening Skills

Active listening is a set of skills and an art whereby the listener both assists the speaker in expressing the fullness of his or her ideas and feelings and also communicates an understanding of the speaker's whole message.

1. A basic skill in active listening is the ability to paraphrase or summarize accurately the content of another person's message.
2. Another skill is to use short encouraging responses designed to get the speaker to keep going and open up further.
3. Finally, probing for new information. When doing this we are not trying to rephrase the speaker's statements or implied feelings. Instead, we are inviting the speaker to open up new avenues of description or reflection by asking good follow up questions.

The following are examples of how to model Active Listening skills:

Note: Until the members of your group learn to ask appropriate follow-up questions, we recommend whoever is leading check-in time to control these kinds of questions.

Paraphrasing: These should be short statements aimed at clarifying the essence of what has just been said. Be sure to use the person's main words when you paraphrase. Paraphrases are often fed back to people in a "questioning" tone of voice.

Summarizing: Summarize their comments and integrate thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Summarizing is similar to paraphrasing but used over a longer time span. It's also a great way to help someone end a thought.

Encouraging: Encourage with short responses that help group members keep talking. They may be verbal (repeating key words and short statements) or non-verbal (head nods and smiling), and are usually less than 3-words responses.

Example: "That's so cool! Uh-huh" "tell us more."

Open Questions: Often begin with: *who, what, when, where, and why*. These kinds of questions can't be answered in a few words. This helps you dig deeper into someone's thought.

Example: "That's a powerful story, can I ask what are you thinking or feeling right now?"

What Questions: Most often lead to facts.

Example: "What happened?" "What are you going to do?"

How Questions: May lead to an exploration of process or feeling and emotion.

Example: "That's an amazing experience! How can that even be explained?" "How do you feel about that?"

Why Questions: Use why questions with care. Understanding someone's reasons for doing something may have value, but a discussion of reasons can also lead to sidetracks. In addition, many group participants may not respond well because they associate *why* with a past experience of being grilled.

Example: "Why did you think you allowed that to happen?" "Why do you think that is so?"

Could, Can, or Would Questions: Use these kinds of questions when you're trying to draw someone out who doesn't tend to share much.

Example: "Could you tell us more about your situation?" "Would you give us a specific example?" "Can you tell us what happened after that?"

Questions as Statements: Some leaders unknowingly use questions to sell their own points of view. "Don't you think it would be helpful if you studied more?" This question clearly puts the member on the spot. Consider alternative and more direct routes of reaching those in your group. A useful standard is this: If you are going to make a statement, do not frame it as a question.