

A Guide to Facilitating Audience Discussions

Suggestions for organising discussion groups using Dawaween videos:

Where appropriate, we have included some questions with each video that you may find useful if you are moderating a discussion to follow its screening. You may also find the following guide useful if you are responsible for organising a discussion.

We've found through experience that viewers who reflect on and discuss the issues in our films are more likely to benefit from the advice and information they contain. One of the most beneficial outcomes is when the participants in a discussion share with others the things they've learned through their own experiences. But just having a discussion in itself is not enough to produce these positive outcomes. The type of discussion and the way it is managed are very important.

Discussion can support people acting in a more healthy way but if discussion is not facilitated well, it could also reinforce harmful behaviour and end up being a very negative experience.

Here are some of the things we've found help facilitators make discussion groups work well:

- **Preparation is crucial.** Make sure you are well briefed about the subject or subjects to be discussed and know where to direct people to get help and more information. You might want to consider inviting someone with special expertise or experience to take part.

- **Try to find a space for the discussion that is quiet and private**, away from distractions and without the presence of others who may inhibit participants from speaking freely. You may want to consider segregating the sexes, especially if there are gender-sensitive topics involved, and providing somewhere for small children to sit and entertain themselves with paper and crayons so they don't disturb the adults.
- **Always get people's consent** before photographing, filming or recording them.
- **A circle is a good way to arrange participants** in a discussion as it helps people to hear what others are saying and to see each other. It also promotes a feeling of equality amongst members of the group.
- **Welcome everyone and thank them for coming.** Introduce yourself and explain what will happen during the meeting, (we will be watching a film about, for example, registering children in a local school, and having a discussion afterwards). Ask participants to introduce themselves. You may want to keep repeating who you are and what the group is for in case of newcomers.
- **Remember to call on participants by name:** it creates a personal connection and shows respect.
- **Ask the group if they want to set ground rules** (for example, respect each other's ideas, avoid interruption etc.). If yes, can these be written down? If no, explain a couple of key things you feel might be important for the discussion, for example switching off mobile phones, and ask the group if they are happy to respect these.

Remember:

- **Preparation is crucial**
- **Try to find a space for the discussion that is quiet and private**
- **Always get people's consent**
- **A circle is a good way to arrange participants in a discussion**
- **Welcome everyone and thank them for coming**
- **Call on participants by name**

- **Allow all participants sufficient time to comment and communicate** in response to each of the questions and issues raised. Encourage participants through support not by pressure.
- **When participants share their ideas, be sure to let them know that you have heard them and appreciate their comments**, but at the same time allow discussion to continue. A simple smile or nod can be enough if someone else in the group is responding already.
- Any time you introduce a concept or term that may be new to participants, ask the group to help you define it and come up with examples.
- **Keep the discussion focused on the session's topic.**
- **Make sure that the participants understand the topic at hand.** Every now and then ask if anyone has questions.

- **Ask open ended questions** that allow the participants to come up with many possible responses, such as “What do you think of...?” “What’s your experience of...?” Avoid questions to which someone can answer just yes or no.
- **Suspend your own judgment**, certainties and assumptions – your opinions should not be expressed.
- **Use conflicts productively** and do not allow participants to personalize their disagreements. Do not avoid conflict but try to keep it narrowly focused on the issue at hand. Participants should feel comfortable saying what they really think.
- **Give people time to think and respond** to questions or something else someone has said. Do not start talking straight away if the group are quiet – give them a few seconds to consider what they want to say and allow them to lead.

Facilitators should avoid:

- **Downplaying people’s ideas**
- **Pushing personal agendas and opinions as the “right” answer**
- **Dominating the groups**
- **Reading from paper**
- **Using inappropriate or offensive words**
- **Contributing too much of their own personal experience**

- **Always finish by thanking your participants** for their good ideas and participation. Then give a summary that includes all the issues raised and discussed.
- **Ask if there are any last questions or thoughts** and ask people to say what they found most interesting or a new thing they have heard today or a new thing they will be trying after the meeting.
- **Repeat important points.** Clarify any misunderstandings and misconceptions.
- **Thank everyone for coming and for sharing their views and ideas.** Encourage them to share their experience with others.

If you have any inquiries or suggestions please contact us:

beirut@bbcmediaaction.org