



DANDELION INITIATIVE

Survivor-Centred Digital Best Practices *For Online Workshops, Groups, and Gatherings*

Resources

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Survivor-Centred Digital Best Practices: One-Sheet

Learn Through Doing: Mix teaching content with group interaction

Keep sessions within 2-hours (with a 10 minute break) to hold attention and keep participants engaged. Alternate information sharing with interactive components to keep the session dynamic and help manage attention. Interactive components can look like reflective activities, sharing experiences, practicing skills, or discussion. Priming participants for the session by emailing intro content in advance can free up time for discussion. Post-workshop follow-up worksheets also increase impact through reflection and integration.

Faces Over Boxes: Maximize face-to-face interactions

The facilitator's face, head, and shoulders being visible will help create safety and rapport with participants. Let participants know that being visible on video is appreciated and increases connection for all, while also emphasizing that their boundaries are respected. This should be communicated twice: once during onboarding and once at the beginning of the video call. This could sound like, "video participation is encouraged to foster connection, *and* we support your boundaries to choose to have your video off, if that's best for you." To accommodate participants who are calling in by telephone, read public chat entries aloud and describe visuals or activities. For workshops with emotionally challenging content, the facilitator should make themselves available for a few minutes after the workshop ends to answer questions or talk to participants.

Security is Safety: Prioritize privacy and security in a Zoom call

The safety and privacy of participants is essential when setting up a Zoom call. Requiring a password ensures that only those invited to the call can join. Select participant video "off" so group members can choose to turn their video on. In "Advanced Options" select "mute participants upon entry". Once the Zoom call has started, click the arrow beside "Share Screen" in the bottom panel, and select "Advanced Sharing Options", then select "Only Host" can share. Participants can rename themselves by clicking "Manage Participants" in the bottom panel of the Zoom screen and then hover over their name when the panel appears on the right side of the screen. Clicking "More" will reveal the option to "Rename". Participants should mute their microphones unless they are speaking. These instructions can be added in the group chat.

Really Open and Close: Opening and closing the online space with a check-in and check-out

Leading a group check-in at the beginning of the workshop will foster safety and connection between participants and also give the facilitator important information about group capacity that can shape how the online session is led. A check-in prompt could be, "how are you coming into the session today?" "What weather do you feel like today?", If the size of the group is large, having each participant check-in verbally may not be possible with time constraints. In this case, have participants write a short answer to the check-in prompt in the chat box. The facilitator or tech support helper can track these answers.

Checking-out at the end of the session closes the online space and gives time to process their experience. Giving participants time to unpack and reflect is especially important if workshop content has been emotionally challenging. A check out prompt could be, "what is one thing you are taking away with you from today?" "How are you going to care for yourself this week or this day?" or "how are you feeling as we close today?"

Circle Up: Maintaining the online space as a circle

Online meetings present challenges to the flow of check-ins and check-outs around the circle of participants. The facilitator can address this by calling on participants to check-in while also expressing that people are free to pass or type their check-in into the chat field to be read aloud by the facilitator. The best practice around this is to have participants indicate the name they will be using on the video call and the phonetic pronunciation during the onboarding and registration process. Time should be opened at the end of check-ins for anyone joining by phone to have a chance to unmute their microphone and speak. In segments of the workshop where participants are invited to share their reflections or thoughts on workshop content, there should be general encouragement without calling upon individuals.

Signaling for Emergencies

Please refer to our accompanying instructions [here](#) on what to do if a group participant indicates that they are in emergent or immediate danger.

Survivor-Centred Digital Best Practices: Multi-Page Resource

Learn Through Doing

Cut your content, increase connection.

- Take the content you usually try to get through and cut it down significantly. In its place, make the gathering as interactive as possible. That looks like:
 - Group discussions
 - As much video time as possible
 - Workshopping ideas
 - Getting to see people's reactions
 - Hearing people's stories

Prioritize engagement when you connect live.

- Is there information sharing that you could move to before or after your session? For example, could you record a video, share a document, or use email?
- Do your best to use group time only for what is most important to do together live, like:
 - Supporting each other
 - Practicing skills
 - Collaborating
 - Making decisions
 - Social motivation

Faces Over Boxes

As many faces as possible.

- The facilitator's face being visible is key
- Let participants know that their being on video is appreciated and increases connection *and* that their boundaries and choices are respected
 - This should be communicated twice:
 - 1) During onboarding
 - Ex. "Video participation is encouraged as it helps everyone connect. *And*, we enthusiastically support your boundaries and ability to choose if video on or off is best for you. You always have the option of having video on, off, or switching throughout."
 - 2) At the beginning of the workshop

Security is Safety

Extra tips (Zoom-specific).

- Always use a password for group gatherings
- Only the host should have the ability to screen share
- For Zoom instruction slides and activity templates, click [here](#)

Really Open and Close

Set up the “space”.

- Acknowledge that being online in this way is new and an experiment and everyone is just trying their best
- Do the same welcome and contextualizing that you would do in-person (ex. Explaining the gathering’s intention, the agenda, who you are, etc)
- Set up the *online* “space”. That looks like:
 - Explaining what tools you’ll be using (ex. chat box, microphone) and where you can find those tools as a participant
 - Set a norm that everyone should be muted when they are not talking (including facilitators), unless your group is very small
 - Explaining what to do when something is glitchy (ex. Let me know in the chat box, wave, privately message our tech person)
 - Explaining the value of being on camera

Bookend the “space”.

- Opening and closing the space with a check-in and check-out is vital to participants safety and wellness. In an online workshop, people have far less gear-up/preparation to draw upon when entering and exiting the workshop
- Check-in
 - Prepare people to engage with the workshop (see “Set up the ‘space’”)
- Check-out
 - It’s also key to set people up with the ability to exit the workshop without feeling disoriented, unpacked, or ungrounded
 - *Think of it like this*: usually participants would be able to do a check-out, pack up slowly, mingle with other participants, talk to the facilitator, and leave the space. Upon leaving the space, they will maybe walk or take some form of transportation to their next location.
 - All of this checking-out and bookending time is not usually acknowledged and re-allocated in online workshops
 - Remember that as soon as you sign-off, participants re-enter their living situation. Remembering this, allocate ample time to check-out

Circle Up

Let people know you “see” them.

- Rewa & Hunter, 2020 say: “The more seen people feel, the more they are likely to engage. They are also more likely to send you clear nonverbal signals through their web camera when they get the signal that someone is looking back through their screen.”
- That can look like:
 - “It looks like only about half the group has shared ideas in the chat box. If anyone is having trouble with the chat, let us know, or you can share out loud.”
 - “I see [name] that you just came off mute. Is there something you’d like to add?”
 - “I see a lot of people are saying ‘yes’ in the chat box, so yes, let’s shift to talking about the second topic.”
 - “I see a lot of heads down on the web cameras, so I’m going to give you a little more time to journal.”
 - “Welcome [name], we’re just in the middle of sharing one thing we have done that’s fun today. [name], [name], and [name] haven’t gone yet.”

Other Tips

Cap it at 2 hours (if possible).

- Rewa & Hunter, 2020 say: “we advise that sessions be no more than two hours of consecutive connection at a time. One and a half hours at a time is ideal when you have a lot of participants who are new to the technology. If you have to go through the day, break it up.” (p. 8)

Include the activity.

- Sometimes, a longer session is okay and even more worthwhile if you include the activity you want people to do
- “Frontloading” your gathering with all the information to do a task/skill and then leaving people to do the skill later will result in less learning and fewer people actually doing the thing

Breaks.

- For a 2+ hour session, have one 5-10 minute break
- For multiple sessions (ex. summits), “plan to give people more time to recover between sessions than you might in person. Thirty minutes minimum between sessions is recommended.” (Rewa & Hunter, 2020, p. 8)
 - Giving people examples of what to do during breaks (especially short breaks) is also helpful. Some ideas:
 - Stretching

- Making a tea
- Having a snack
- Dancing
- Looking at comforting instagrams

Keep up on feedback.

- Make sure you have a way that people can give feedback about the online gathering. It's important to track this feedback overtime for trends, what works, and what doesn't work
- Be mindful about checking your database frequently and seeing how participant's feedback compliments or pushes back on how you plan to hold your next gathering

Resources

- Etherington, Nicole A. & Baker, Linda L. (2016). *Gender-based violence training programs: Online, face-to-face and blended formats*. London, ON: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children.
- Etherington, Nicole A. & Baker, Linda L. (2016). *OAITH Foundations of Violence against Women (VAW) Online Training Program Evaluation*. London, ON: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children.
- Rewa, J. & Hunter, D. (2020). *Leading Groups Online*. Daniel Hunter.

Thank you to all the survivors that we have worked with. Your feedback has been invaluable learning. Your insights are helping us create safer, more survivor-centred spaces online.

Have any other questions, comments, or concerns? Please feel free to reach out to the Dandelion Initiative by emailing coordinator@dandelioninitiative.ca . To see more of what we do, please see [our website](#) and social media ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).



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