



**Adopt US Kids**

*Together we hold their future*

# **PARENT GROUP LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM**



## **MODULE 3: FACILITATING GROUP MEETINGS PART I – THE BASICS**

Total time: 150 minutes, including break

# Module agenda

Review homework and objectives—10 minutes

What makes a good facilitator?—10 minutes

The role of a facilitator—5 minutes

Getting ready for your first meeting—60 minutes

 Activity: Practice icebreakers

[Handout 1: “Icebreakers for Groups”](#)

[Handout 2: “Parent Bingo”](#)

Break—10 minutes

Facilitation success—20 minutes

Facilitator dos and don’ts—30 minutes

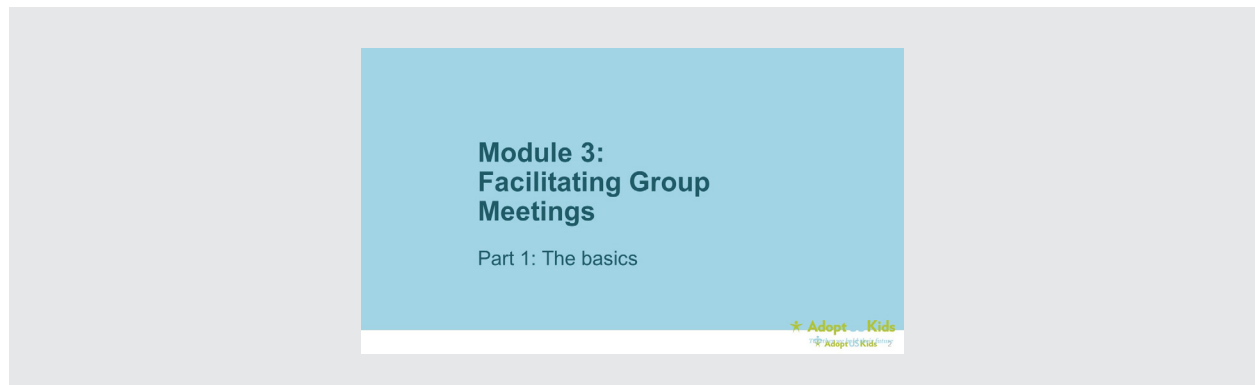
Review and close—5 minutes

## Materials and preparation

**NOTE:** Familiarize yourself with the entire curriculum, including all handouts and activities, to ensure that you are fully prepared to deliver it.

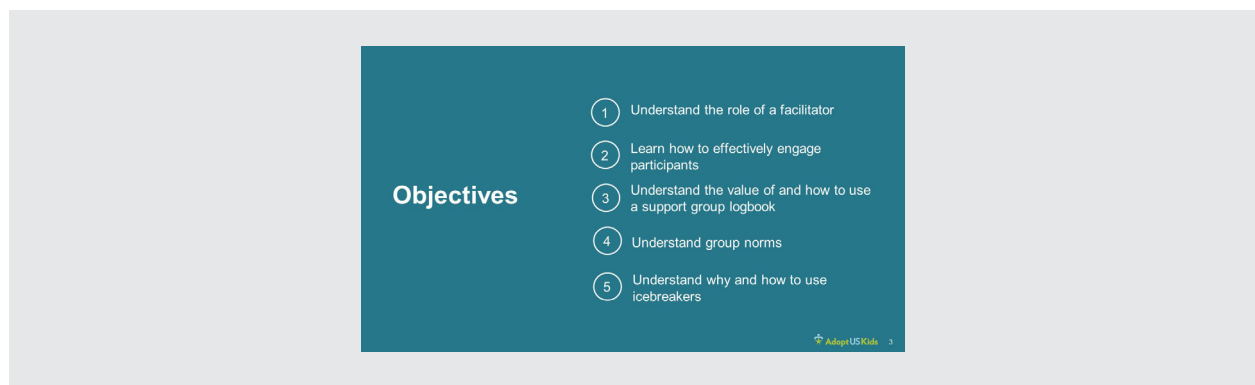
- Review the activity and prepare any materials needed.
- Prepare the two handouts of this module to distribute to participants.
- Gather needed materials:
  - ✓ Name tents and markers for participants (from the previous sessions)
  - ✓ Flip chart and markers for facilitator
  - ✓ Computer with Module 3 PowerPoint slides loaded and ready to display
  - ✓ Method to display slides, such as projector and screen or large monitor visible to the participants
  - ✓ Fidgets, coloring materials, and snacks (optional)
- Set up the room. We recommend setting up the chairs and tables in a semi-circle or a U so participants can see you, each other, and the presentation. We also recommend having extra chairs and a space that accommodates free movement.

# Review homework and objectives (10 minutes)



## Say

Welcome back! Today we're going to get into the basics of group facilitation.



We'll go over the primary roles of a facilitator, keeping to an agenda, group norms (sometimes also called group agreements), and how icebreakers can help you as you facilitate your group. But first, let's debrief the last session.

## Ask

- Have you thought more about who your potential members are and how to engage them?
- Did you have an opportunity to work on a parent survey or an action plan for getting started?
- Have you had a chance to look at the additional resources I gave you in Modules 1 and 2? How is what you learned going to shape your next steps, and, ultimately, your group?
- Any questions or aha moments?

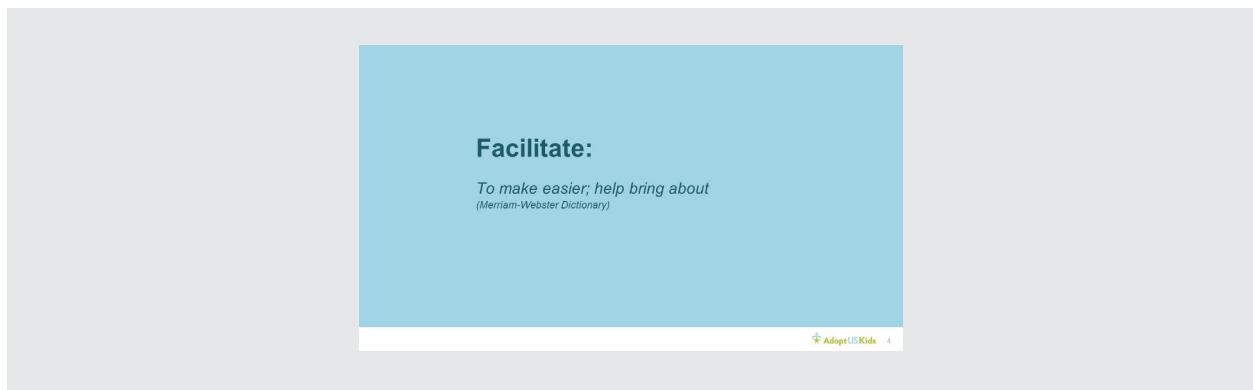
## Say

Let's review the homework from last session. Everyone should have completed at least one of the strategies for the three objectives provided on Module 2, Handout 3. Would anyone like to share one or two of your strategies? Does this help you think about how you'll develop your own action plans, once you know your group's purpose and direction?

## Do

Lead the group through the sharing of several participants' strategies. Provide encouragement and feedback as needed.

# What makes a good facilitator? (10 minutes)



## Say

Think about a time when you went to a meeting that you didn't want to end. Did the time fly by? If it was an occasion that you knew was the first of a series, did you leave feeling excited about coming back?

Try to think about what it was about that meeting that made you eager to engage. How did the leaders involve you and encourage you to engage with other attendees? What qualities did that leader have? What skills did that leader have? What about the meeting's organization or structure helped to make it work?

## Do

Record responses to these prompts on a flip chart. Discuss with the group some themes that emerge.

If they don't come up, offer these:

- Leaders who show enthusiasm for a subject encourage that in their attendees.
- Leaders model the behavior they want others to exhibit in the session.
- Leaders give attendees the tools to actively engage.
- Leaders are organized and structure the session to encourage its success.
- A leader clearly has a plan.
- Leaders present information that is relevant to the needs of the attendees.
- Leaders end the session with a message about more to come that will meet attendees' needs.

## The role of a facilitator (5 minutes)



### Ask

What is the facilitator responsible for during a support group meeting?

### Do

Record the answers on a flip chart as people say them. Offer the following if they don't come up:


- Moving the meeting along.
- Making sure the conversations stay on track, while allowing for important side ideas that you may need to circle back to. Create a parking lot for these important ideas: many groups will have a flip chart and marker available for this purpose and will make it a norm that anyone can add something to the parking lot as needed.
- Keeping participants engaged.
- Sharing insights and learned wisdom.
- Drawing out the ideas, concerns, and wisdom of others.

- Paying attention to both what is shared and how it is being shared.
- Maintaining a neutral stance while offering support and validation.

## Say

This can seem like a fairly big list of responsibilities, but with practice and attention, you'll find that your meetings flow naturally. Let's think about how a leader can accomplish each of these responsibilities.

# Getting ready for your first meeting (60 minutes)



**Your first meeting**

- Welcoming, positive tone
- Introductions
- Establish group norms
- Determine goals and objectives

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## Say

Have you heard the Will Rogers saying, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression”? There is so much truth to that! One of the best ways to ensure that support group attendees will return is by making their first experience with your group welcoming, positive, useful, and safe. Coming to a group for the first time can feel very intimidating. Many caregivers are already feeling unsure of themselves and worry that they may be judged for not being a good enough parent. Our number one job is to make the group feel accepted, validated, and reassured—in a word, supported.

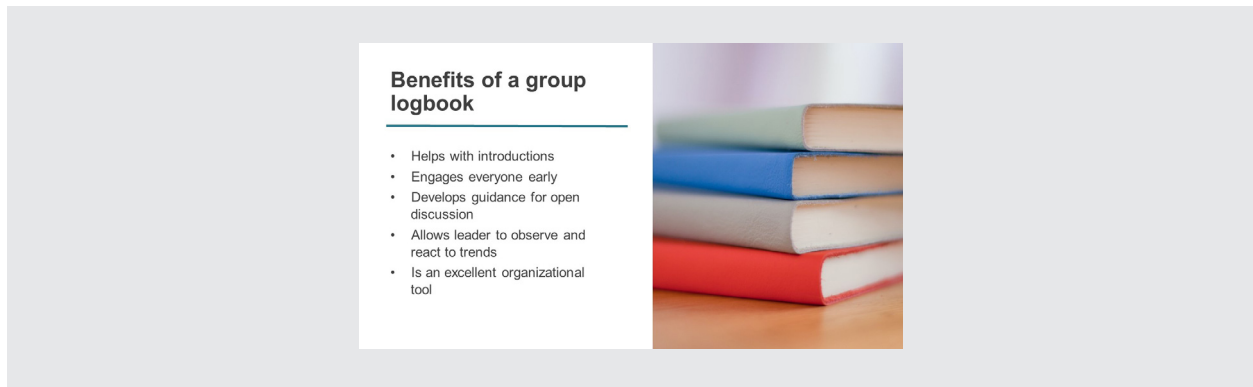
So how do you do that? As each person enters the room, greet them with a smile and introduce yourself. Let them know how happy you are that they made the time to be here. If there are others in the room, do some preliminary introductions. If you know details about the attendees that can help make connections between them, mention those. For example, “Maya, this is Joe. You both are parenting sibling groups of three. I bet you’ll have a lot to talk about!”

Once everyone is settled, do introductions around the room, taking notes for yourself all the while. We’ll talk more about that in a minute.

Experienced leaders will tell you that it’s essential to set group norms together, as a group, and to start doing it at your first meeting. This is a good way to reassure everyone that you are committed to maintaining a safe and respectful atmosphere that is responsive to all members’ needs. When the

members have a role in setting these norms or agreements, they will have a sense of ownership and responsibility for the group's success. We'll talk more about what those group norms can look like later in today's session.

And, as with the group norms, it is important to include your members in determining the goals and objectives of the group. As leader, you will have come to this first meeting with a draft of what these goals and objectives are, based on the survey of stakeholders that we discussed in Module 2. But remain open to the ideas of your members as well.

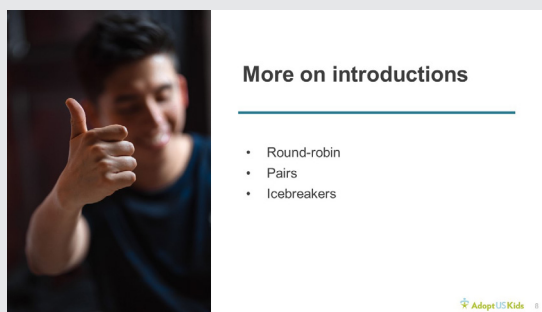


## Say

Introductions are really important at every meeting, even when the group is well established. They allow new members to feel welcome and encourage everyone to participate. However, sometimes groups can get stuck at introductions, and before you know it, half the meeting is over before you've gotten into any of the planned discussion. This can happen when there isn't enough structure around the introductory period of the meeting. If people aren't sure what or how much to share, you can end up with everyone telling their life stories or every bad thing that happened to them this week.

Consider bringing a logbook to every meeting. You can open the meeting by recording who is there, then go around the circle, asking each person if they have a question or topic they would like discussed. This not only gives structure to the introductions at each meeting, but it also helps you direct the meeting's agenda and keep track of trends in attendance and common issues or themes, etc. Over time the logbook becomes a historical record for the group.

Asking each member at introduction if they have anything they'd like to discuss gets everyone, even those who share less often, to engage at the very beginning. It gets all the topics and questions out on the table, giving you a guide for how to lead the discussion for the rest of the meeting. It can also prevent members from launching into the thick of their challenges right at the beginning and dominating the conversation before everyone has had a chance to share what they hope to discuss. It can reveal themes and trends over time that you would not necessarily have noticed. The logbook helps you stay organized and can guide you in what topics you'd like to dive deeper into or schedule specific training sessions around.



## Say

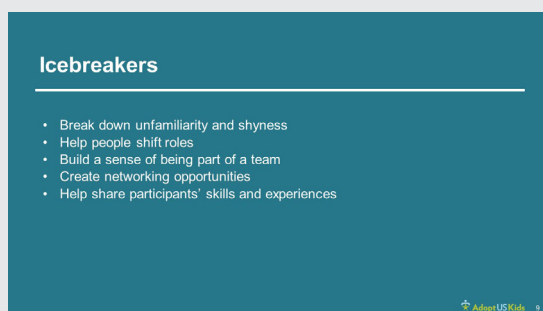
There are many ways to do introductions, but first introductions are critical and must be done thoughtfully. Many leaders will use these first introductions to put people at ease and set clear expectations around shared learning. One way to do this is for the leader to take the lead in introducing themselves and modeling what other members should share:

“My name is \_\_\_\_\_. My family makeup is \_\_\_\_\_. I wanted to start a group because \_\_\_\_\_. At this first meeting, I hope to \_\_\_\_\_.” Each member in turn responds to the prompts, which should be posted on a flip chart page.

Or, you can ask members to pair up and get to know each other for two to three minutes per person, and then have each pair take turns introducing each other. Some prompting questions include:

- What’s your family makeup?
- How did you hear about the group?
- What do you want from the group?
- What are the top two topics you hope we get to in the next few meetings?

Finally, you can combine introductions with an icebreaker.





## Say

A lot of people have strong feelings about icebreakers, but these activities can do a lot of good. Getting people up and moving around can help to quickly break through shyness and nerves. With icebreakers that do not involve movement, the prompts to think about or share something in a new or unexpected way can also open people up. Many people need a specific invitation or opportunity to put aside the worries and demands of their day-to-day life in order to immerse themselves in the self-care that a support group can offer. And the silliness that icebreakers are known for can loosen people up, allowing them to shake off the roles that they play at home or at work.

By participating in a well-executed icebreaker, the stage is set for developing a sense of belonging and for starting the process of supportive networking. Let's practice an icebreaker that has been tested over time: Parent Bingo.



## Activity: Practice icebreakers



## Do

Share Handout 1, “Icebreakers for Groups.” Let participants know that there are many icebreakers that work well, and that now everyone is going to practice the Parent Bingo activity.

Distribute Handout 2, “Parent Bingo,” and tell the participants to talk with everyone, getting the first names of people whose experiences match each of the boxes. If possible, have prize(s) for winner(s). Determine in advance what is a win, and decide if there are multiple categories of winners (such as five in a row, four corners, full card).

Allow 5 to 10 minutes for the activity, depending on the size of the group.

## Say

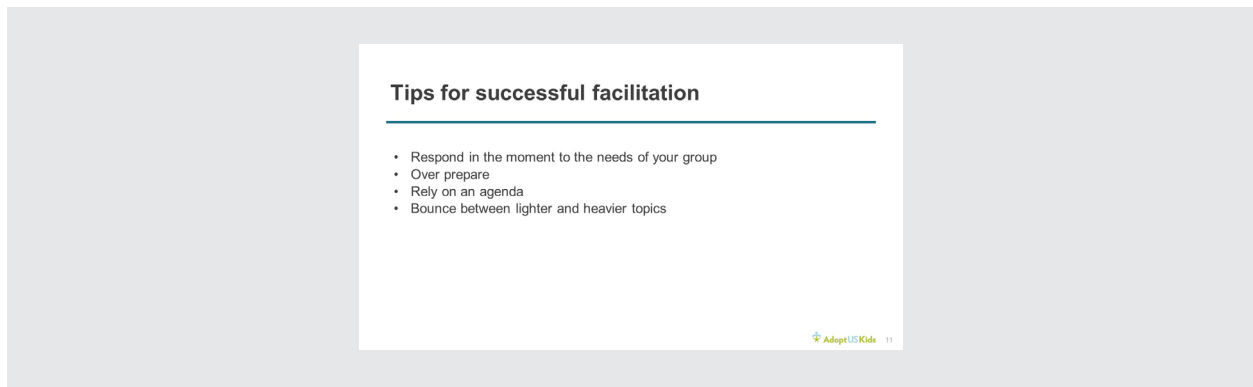
So, let's have some fun! You each have your bingo card. Mix around the room, talking to one another and sharing your experiences. Note people's names in each box on your card that describes something about them.

## Ask (after the activity)

What do you think of this activity? Did you discover shared experiences? How do you think it would work in a group you will lead?

## Break (10 minutes)

## Facilitation success (20 minutes)



## Say

Facilitation is a skill that needs to be honed. Here are some tips to keep your meeting moving and keep folks coming back to your group.

First, remember that you are there to serve the group. If your idea or strategy for leading the group meeting isn't hitting the mark, change it! And change it now, even if it's in the middle of your group. By being ready to pivot according to the needs of the group, you will be seen as a skilled leader and the group will be encouraged to follow your lead. Have more materials or ideas ready than you think you'll need, so that if something is not working, you can try an alternative.

Use your agenda to keep the flow going. Balance a structured discussion with space for open dialogue, and make room for all voices to be heard and all members to feel valued.

One strategy for ensuring that this dialogue happens is to go around the circle and ask each participant to identify one question they have or a concern they'd like to raise. As leader, make note of each, recording who the speaker was. Ask everyone to limit their contribution to no more than 60 to 90 seconds. Once all members have had a turn, you can move back and forth between easier and more difficult topics, beginning with any that are raised by more than one person. Make sure everyone feels comfortable participating, and ask for input to ensure that the group feels that the ideas and decisions are theirs, not just the leader's. Support each contribution and remain open minded.



### Establish group norms together

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## Say

This first meeting is also the right time to determine group norms and expectations. It is essential to include your members in this discussion. As the saying goes, if they plan the battle, they won't battle the plan. Leaders will want to engage members in a discussion about what ground rules or group norms should be agreed upon to make for a safe, supportive environment.

## Ask

Let's brainstorm some essential group norms. What would you include?

## Do

Reinforce or offer the following:

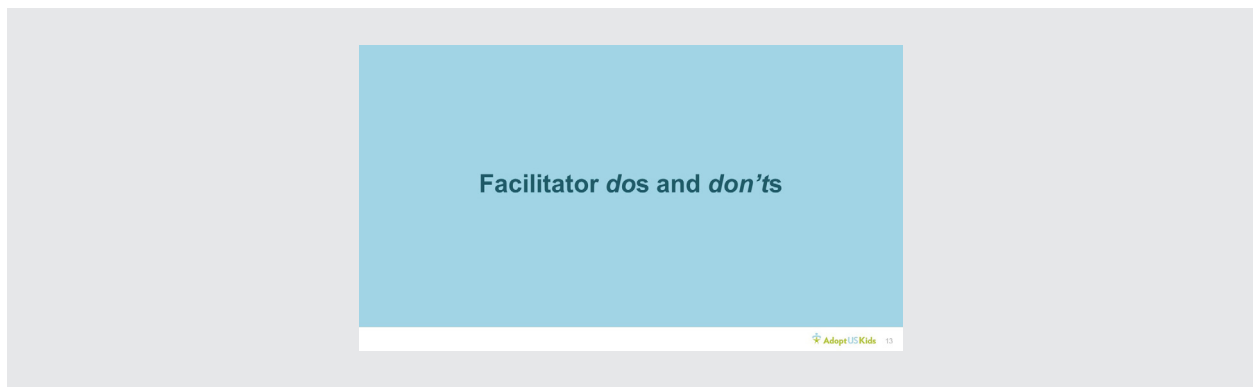
- Confidentiality. What is said in the group stays in the group. Learning points can be shared outside, but only with non-identifying information.
- Respect. Only one person speaks at a time and the group is attentive.
- Judgment-free zone. All are here to learn together, but not all start in the same place. Members should feel safe to share their beliefs and feelings without fear of judgment. This is how we learn and grow.
- Timing. This is also a good time to discuss how the group wants to honor start and stop times, knowing that there are a variety of accepted cultural norms around this.
- Mandated reporting. It is also essential that mandated reporters who are leading groups inform members of this status and clarify regional rules and expectations.

## Say

Many groups will create a flip chart page spelling out the agreed-upon group norms and keep it visible at all meetings. This makes it easier for the leader to refocus members when necessary. In addition, some leaders will include confidentiality statements at the top of a sign-in sheet to verify confirmation of this agreement as they track attendance.

Some group norms are used by almost all groups, but many are very specific to a particular group. A great example of this is how the group wants to handle starting and stopping on time. It's essential that you discuss beginning and ending times with your group and come to agreements about how to accommodate everyone's needs. Some groups need hard starts and stops. If that's your group, let people know if you are comfortable with being available after and between meetings. Encourage lingerers to continue their conversations over a cup of coffee, etc. For other groups, finishing the discussion takes the priority, even if this means going past the scheduled end. As long as the group norms establish what *your group's* approach is at the outset, you should be able to meet everyone's expectations and needs. Do check in periodically to see if they have shifted.

## Facilitator dos and don'ts (30 minutes)

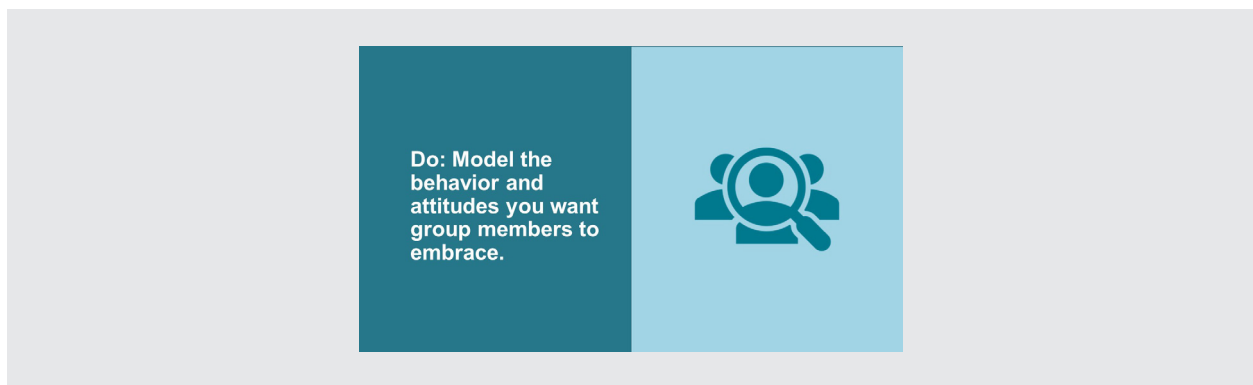


### Say

You're never going to have a playbook to handle everything that happens in a meeting, but there are some things you can do to help get your group facilitation off on the right foot.

### Say

Let's talk about some things that group facilitators should definitely do.



## Say

If we want our members to be actively engaged, positive, and curious, then we need to model that behavior ourselves. Group leaders set the tone for the group, each and every time. Your members look to you to know how this group is going to work and what is and is not permissible in the group setting. What behavior or attitudes should we model for our members?

## Do

Reinforce or offer the following:

- Having a non-judgmental attitude and approach. You want people to come to the group knowing they can talk about their challenges without fear of being looked down on for their lack of knowledge or for their inability to cope with something that may not bother someone else. You also want to show that you are actively listening and validating the feelings of all members in the group.
- Being hopeful and positive. It's also important to lean into hopefulness and positivity. I'm sure I don't have to tell you that it's hard work to be a parent, especially to a child who has experienced loss and trauma. Parents are often responding to very challenging things with their kids and it can be easy for groups to slip into a tone of frustration or despair. If people feel hopeless, it's really tough to keep going. As the group leader, part of your job is to maintain a hopeful, positive attitude. It sounds simple, but it works wonders.
- Being solution focused. One way to build on hope is to ensure that you—and others—keep thinking about solutions to issues raised. That doesn't mean you need to solve everything (sometimes people just need to vent), but you can guide discussions about how to make a situation better. Bring your curiosity to this, too. Being curious about causes of problems, options that have been tried, and others' experiences can lead to more possible solutions. And this can help the group remain hopeful.

**Do: Use  
encouraging body  
language, words,  
tone of voice.**



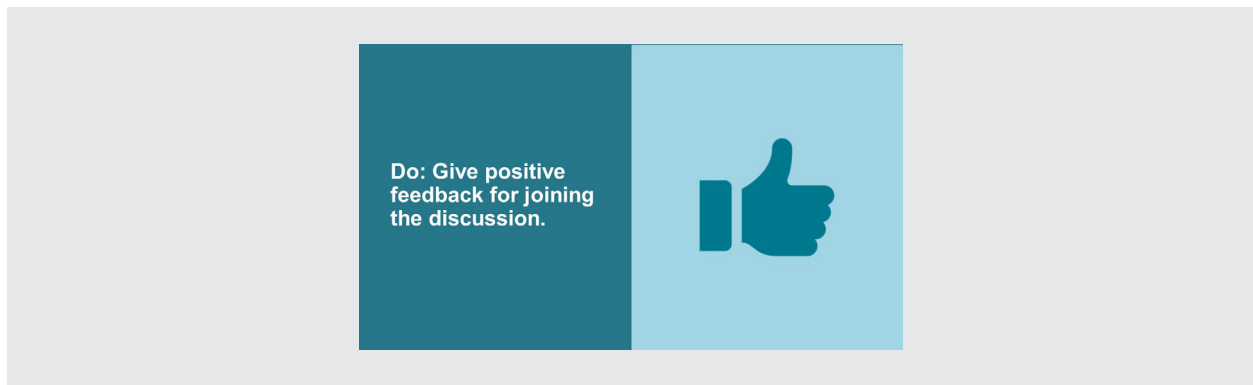
## Say

Leaning forward, nodding, and making eye contact all tell the person speaking that you are *really* listening to them. Sometimes, the tone of what we say or our body language can undercut the meaning of the words themselves. Be aware of your tone of voice and your word choice, too. All of it matters.



## Say

In that same vein, be aware of the body language and reactions of others. Are some or all leaning backward? Avoiding eye contact? Do their responses sound clipped or more quiet? If this happens with multiple attendees, you need to think about what may have happened. If it feels right, ask the group if everything is OK. Or you may need to change topics or give a brief break. If it's something happening with just one person, take note and check in with them privately after the meeting. Paying attention to subtle cues can help you avoid challenges in group dynamics down the road.



## Say

When people participate, let them know that you appreciate it! Let people know that you value their participation in smaller, simple ways. Saying “great point ” or “thanks for being vulnerable with us” shows you are glad they shared and encourages them to do it again. Over time, as you get to know your group, you’ll probably learn who needs encouragement and who doesn’t.

Everyone communicates differently, and some people are less comfortable speaking up in group settings. But that doesn't mean that they aren't engaged in the discussion. Try to find ways for quieter people to engage in the discussion without being the center of the group's attention. What are some ways you could encourage those who are quieter to participate in the conversation?

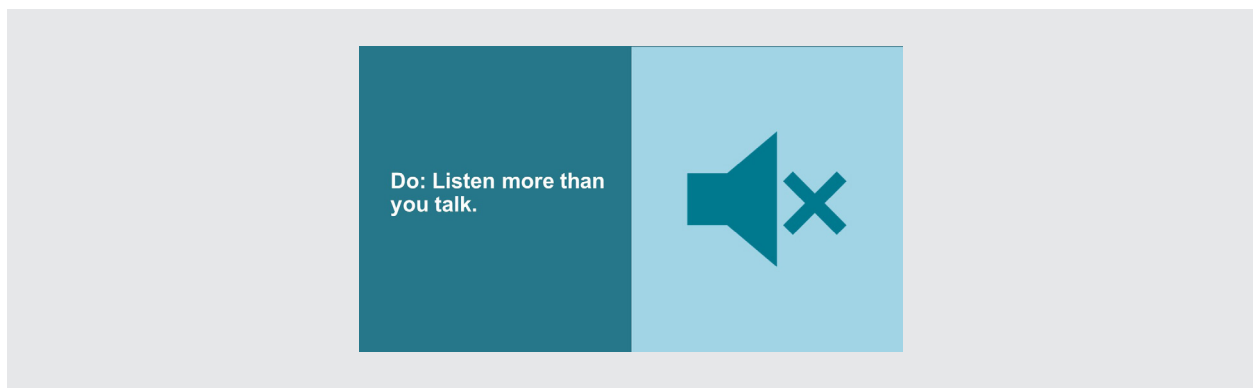
## Do

Reinforce or offer the following:

- Separate into smaller groups or pairs for part of a discussion
- Provide a way for thoughts to be shared in writing
- Offer to speak with them separately

## Say

Everyone benefits when you accommodate communication styles.



## Say

You're the group facilitator, but that just means you're there to guide and support the conversation, not to do most of the talking. Be sure to encourage others to provide ideas, resources, and feedback. Ask open-ended questions; they encourage more organic conversation among members and teach them more about one another. For example, ask group members to tell you about their week rather than asking who had a good week.

**Do: Be aware of and control your biases.**



## Say

This is a hard one, but so very important. Everyone has biases. It's critical that group leaders know themselves enough to be aware of their own biases and check themselves routinely. Ask yourself questions to get to the bottom of your own thoughts and feelings. You can't always get rid of biases, but you can prevent them from controlling how you react by being honest with yourself.

We all know about racial and ethnic biases, but let's talk about some of the others that may come up in groups. Can you think of biases you or other leaders might have that could affect the group?

## Do

Record responses on a flip chart.

Reinforce or offer the following:

- Assuming that people who speak up less are less interested or interesting
- Assuming that younger people in the group are inexperienced or less knowledgeable than other members of the group
- Thinking that first-time parents will be overwhelmed by a sibling group
- Assuming that large families are problematic

## Say

Now let's talk about some of the things you should really try to avoid as a facilitator.



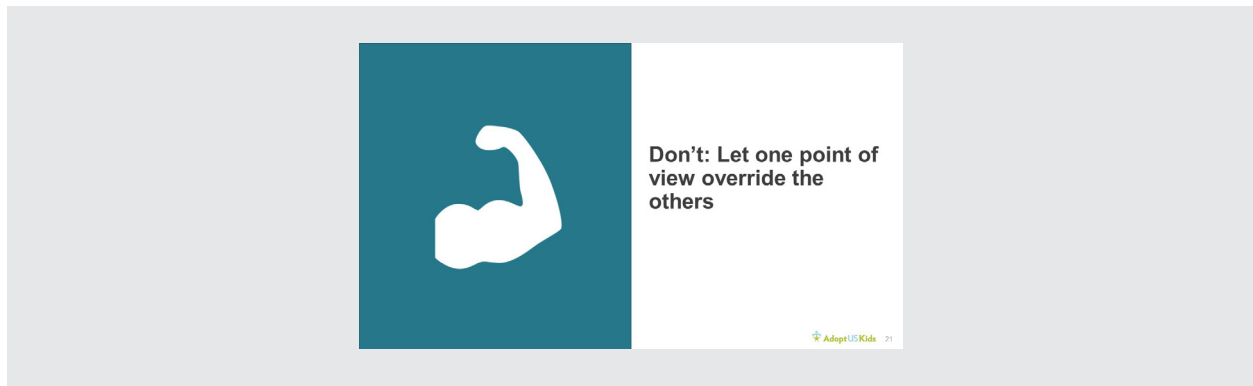
**Don't: Let one or a small group of individuals dominate the discussion.**

Adapted from Kids 20



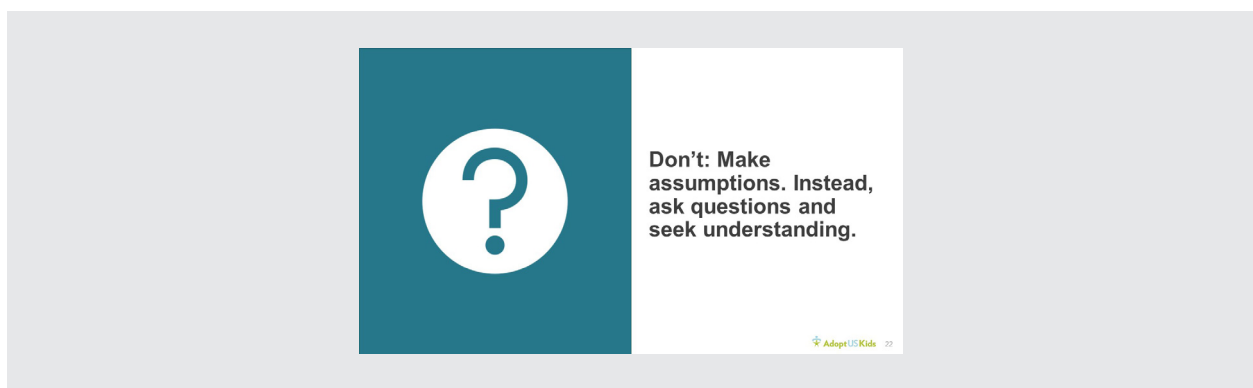
## Say

Some people tend to dominate discussions. Those people usually don't mean any harm and may not be aware that they are taking over. They may just be enthusiastic and you don't want to stifle that. It's important to watch for one person or a group of people speaking much more often than others, and to make sure everyone has a chance to participate. In Module 4, we'll dig into some ways of gently handling those personalities that tend to dominate.



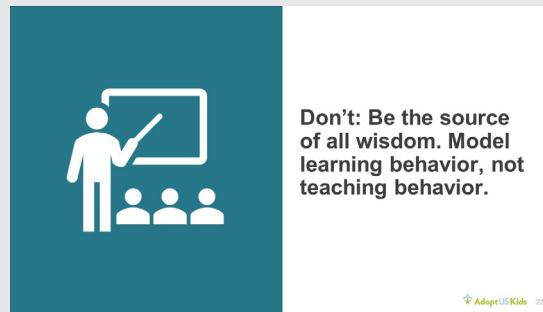
## Say

It can be easy to accidentally let the loudest or first opinion be seen as the only opinion. It can be difficult for some, especially those who are less likely to speak in groups in general, to offer a different perspective when it feels like the whole group disagrees with them. Make space for other points of view and encourage your group members to do the same. One way you can do this is by carefully offering a point of view that differs from the one being shared (e.g., “Have you thought about...” or “Another perspective on this is...”).



## Say

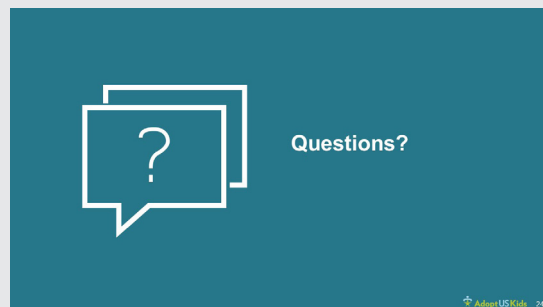
This goes back to how important it is to be aware of and check your own biases. If you're having a negative reaction, start from the idea that everyone has good intentions and ask clarifying questions, especially if you find yourself having a strong reaction to something or someone.



## Say

As the group leader, members will naturally look to you for answers. You don't want to give the impression, though, that your answers are *the* answers, or that there is only one way to handle any given situation. We know that each family and each child is unique, and what works for one doesn't necessarily work for others. As we talked about earlier, facilitators should be a "guide on the side, not a sage on the stage." Model this behavior by asking questions of members and always showing curiosity about new approaches.

## Review and close (5 minutes)



## Say

By now you should have a pretty complete picture of what your group will need to get started and to grow into a sustainable support for foster, adoptive, and kinship families. In our next sessions, we will dig deeper into effective facilitation and talk about how to handle some common challenges and complexities.

Don't forget to tap into the many discussion guides and tip sheets that AdoptUSKids provides on the professional resource pages for ideas and templates. We want you to be successful and have worked hard to give you the tools you need!

## Icebreakers for Groups

- **Foster/adoptive parent bingo.** Use the attached template and adapt categories for your group. Distribute the “Parent Bingo” handout to all and instruct the participants to talk with everyone, getting the first name or initials of people whose experiences fulfill each of the boxes. If possible, have prize(s) for winner(s). Determine in advance what is a win, and if there will be multiple categories of winners (five in a row, four corners, full card).
- **Birth order fun.** Have the group divide up by birth order—oldest, youngest, middle, or only. Each member should find a partner who shares the same family position and share common experiences, characteristics, etc.
- **Name tag mixer.** As each person comes into the room, give them someone else’s name tag. Tell them to circulate around the room introducing themselves to people and trying to find the person whose name tag they have. When they find this person, tell them to find out three things about them so that they can introduce them to the entire group.
- **Childhood experiences.** Tell participants to get in small groups (of about three) and have each person share a childhood experience that had a positive or negative impact on them. If there is time, they should talk about how these early experiences affect their approaches as foster/adoptive parents. Be careful about what might trigger participants.
- **Distraction banishment.** As participants enter the room, ask them to write down up to three things that are on their minds from their home, personal, or work lives that may distract them during the meeting. Make sure they realize this list should not include stresses related to foster/adoptive parenting—after all, that’s what you’re here to talk about! Then ask each to place this list in an envelope, seal it, write their name on it, and place it in a box outside the room (to be picked up at the end of the meeting.) Remind them that you want this time to be useful for everyone and outside distractions will take away from their participation and enjoyment.
- **Would you rather.** The group leader tosses a ball to someone in the group and asks a question of the person who catches it. After answering the question and explaining why they chose that answer, that person tosses the ball and asks the next question. Here are 20 to start with:
  1. Would you rather go into the past and meet your ancestors or go into the future and meet your great-great grandchildren?
  2. Would you rather have more time or more money?
  3. Would you rather have a rewind button or a pause button on your life?
  4. Would you rather lose your vision or your hearing?

5. Would you rather work more hours per day and fewer days, or work fewer hours per day and more days?
6. Would you rather go alone to a movie or to dinner?
7. Would you rather always say everything on your mind or never speak again?
8. Would you rather read a great book or watch a great movie?
9. Would you rather be the most popular person at work or school or the smartest?
10. Would you rather spend the night in a luxury hotel room or camping surrounded by beautiful scenery?
11. Would you rather be a kid your whole life or an adult your whole life?
12. Would you rather have x-ray vision or magnified hearing?
13. Would you rather work in a group or work alone?
14. Would you rather be stuck on an island alone or with someone who talks incessantly?
15. Would you rather hear the good news or the bad news first?
16. Would you rather have nosy neighbors or noisy neighbors?
17. Would you rather be too busy or be bored?
18. Would you rather be a little late or way too early?
19. Would you rather spend the day at an amusement park or lazing on the beach?
20. Would you rather babysit a crying infant for a day or have an unwanted houseguest for a week?

## Parent Bingo

In this icebreaker activity, give parents and caregivers time to talk with each other. As participants learn more about others in the room, they write the names of the people who fit the descriptions in each box. After the activity, ask for volunteers to talk about what they learned about each other.

Adopted through foster care	Has an open adoption	Has a foster or guardianship parent	Has child or children of a different race than yourself	Has three or more children in their home right now
Is a single parent	Has a child with a developmental disability	Has successfully advocated for their child at an IEP or 504 meeting	Has had a child in out-of-home placement	Is able to find humor in even the most challenging times
Has lived experience as an adopted person or foster care alum	Practices yoga regularly	<b>FREE SPACE</b>	Adopted internationally	Has birth and adopted children
Knows what ACEs stands for	Has a child who is medically fragile	Is good at self-care	Has a child with a brain injury	Has a unique parenting strategy to share with everyone
Adopted a sibling group	Adopted an infant	Grew up with adopted, foster, or kinship siblings	Works in child welfare in some capacity (other than parent role)	Is caring for grandchildren or other relatives



***Toll-Free***  
**888-200-4005**

***Email***  
**info@adoptuskids.org**

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