

ACTIVITY

OVERVIEW OF HOW GROUPS DEVELOP

People:	Ideally everyone in your group
Time:	1 hour
Resources:	This activity sheet and a place to meet

Why should we do this?

In our experience many groups go through the same stages of development and it is very likely that your group will as well. It can really help your group to be aware of these stages beforehand so you understand what is happening as your group changes and how best to deal with any tensions.

How to do it:

This is a pretty simple exercise to run, you just need someone who is happy to run the activity and a copy of this infosheet for each group member. The person running the activity needs to have read and understood the infosheet beforehand.

1. Firstly give people 10 minutes to read through the stages of change infosheet you can find on the next pages of this document
2. Then have a 5 minutes discussion to allow people to ask questions to ensure that everyone understands it
3. Then choose two of the stages which feel most relevant to what is happening in your group. If all feel important, set another time to talk about the others.
4. For each stage you've chosen discuss the following questions: (15 minutes for each stage)
 - What's going well in this stage for your group?
 - What is challenging?
 - What activities or discussions could help this to go really well?
5. At the end take 15 minutes to agree one or two activities that you will do as a group to help with the stages you are currently in.

You may want to repeat this activity at different stage of your group's journey and it can be useful to share it with new people when they join your group.

It is also useful to give a copy of the infosheet, or re-run the activity when new people get involved with your group.

Infosheet overleaf...

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Infosheet: How groups develop

All groups tend to go through the following stages:

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing
- And a fifth, when a group comes to an end, of Mourning

All of these stages have possibilities and challenges. It is good to understand that they are common to most groups and it isn't that your group is failing in anyway. In fact it is a natural part of group development and you can progress through them positively by:

- Developing shared aims that help you all pull together
- Working out how to carry out activities successfully
- Building trust with each other
- Developing the best way to work together effectively in a way that is enjoyable
- Understanding how best to overcome challenges

Groups can move back and forth between different stages as you take on new tasks, or new people get involved. There is no set order to these stages, and you may find you are in more than one at once! Understanding these stages helps you to view what can feel confusing, upsetting or destructive in meetings as a necessary part of successful group life.

The following outlines the stages in more detail, if you have been involved in groups before you may recognise some of these stages.

Stage 1: Forming: "We are all on our best behaviour!"

In the forming stage you come together with others to form a new group.

There are three main areas of group life that need considering:

- What's the purpose of the group and what are we here to do?
- How will we work together - what structures will give clarity and form to our work?
- Who's here - how will we have fun, trust and care about each other?

If possible give each one some attention as soon as you begin as this can help your group start off in a good place. See the other activities in our healthy groups section to help with this here: <http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/healthy-groups/>

At the start people can be unsure of the culture of the group so, often:

- Behaviour may be driven by a desire to be accepted by the others so people tend to agree if possible
- Group members may behave quite independently
- People focus on being busy with routines, such as group organization, who does what, when to meet each other, etc.
- Individuals are gathering information and impressions – about each other, the scope of the task and how to approach it

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We all behave like this to a degree and it can feel so natural that we often don't even realise we are doing it.

This stage can feel comfortable and we feel very positive about how wonderful our group is. We may look at other groups and can't believe why people have ever moaned about being involved in groups as it all seems so easy. In reality, this paradise only exists because differences or disagreements are still out of sight.

Here are some things that help your group to go through this stage in a positive way:

- Take time to find out why each person is here, and create group aims or objectives which include everyone's vision, this helps you all to have a shared sense of purpose
- Get to know each other more deeply than in the first introductions
- Use Inner Transition exercises to find out what people care about, what they're like under stress, how the group can help each person to contribute and grow
- Agree structures that help the group to work well, for your group and your meetings
- Create group agreements about how you want to work together, particularly around decision making
- It's important to recognise that these things take time, and there may be a pressure to start doing stuff really quickly
- Can you find some simple things to do early on so you get the feeling of achieving things and figuring out how to work together, as well as giving time to creating clear agreements for how to work together?

Giving attention in the forming stage to all the aspects of group life - what we do, how we work, and getting to know each other - creates a sound foundation for your group to be able deal with the later stages.

Storming - "We all have different ideas on what should happen"

In the storming stage, there is enough trust for people in the group to disagree with and challenge each other. For people who don't like conflict this can feel uncomfortable, but it's a good sign that there's enough safety for people to be more honest. This stage is necessary to the growth of your group, but is often where groups fail as people feel like the group is falling apart, where in fact it is working out how operate.

The storming stage can often have the following features:

- Tension, struggle and sometimes arguments occur
- People who have taken on responsibility or leadership roles are challenged
- Different ideas compete for consideration
- It can be contentious, uncomfortable and upsetting to members of the group who don't like conflict

Handled well, this stage can help your group to develop a much greater level of self confidence and trust in each other. Weathering the storm together creates a sense of resilience - that we can meet challenges and stay together.

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The following tools and practices can really help your group to get through this stage successfully, it really helps if you have a good facilitator and that the group agrees and understands why these things are important:

- Create an atmosphere where each person can share their opinions and views without being interrupted
- It can help to go round the whole group hearing views about an issue so the discussion doesn't become an argument between a few people
- The person facilitating the discussion needs to be neutral in relation to any issues where there's a disagreement - if they take a side it's like pouring petrol on the flames!
- You may want to bring in a skilled facilitator if things are feeling really stuck or charged
- See if you can come to a shared understanding of what the disagreement is about, it may be that there are structures not yet in place which can simply be sorted out (for example, how decisions, or how the agenda is decided), or it may be more personal and charged
- Pay attention to how you are communicating, different people express themselves in different ways, slow down the communication, even repeating back what's been said to make sure the whole group hears each statement accurately, it's surprising how much we think we've heard, but haven't!
- Be patient with each other
- Keep coming back to your shared purpose and what it means to you - this where the group should have unity
- If you are in a disagreement about purpose that cannot be resolved it may be that some need to leave the group, this often happens in the storming stage, and is OK

This is an excellent time to focus on group building to ensure that people can get to know one another and build the level of trust. Ideally the group addresses issues such as what their shared purpose is, how they will function independently and together, and how responsibility, accountability or leadership will work. This can make it possible for group members to move beyond the "I" issues to the "we" issues that will be worked on in the norming stage. This is all easier to do if you have setup a good foundation in the forming stage.

Norming - "We work out how to work together"

As you come out of the storming stage this is where the norming stage begins shape how your group will operate into the future.

The group gets clear on its goals and how to make them happen. There may be new decisions made about structures - roles, procedures for meetings like agendas, decisions and chairing. There may be new agreements about how to work together, developing the code of conduct or how to balance the different aspects of group life. This may sound similar to the forming stage, but the crucial difference is that people now feel able to express themselves honestly, as relationships have developed to that level.

It can really help to do some training together - a workshop on how to run meetings, or something where you deepen together such as a Work that Reconnects event. This helps the group to come to shared understandings, and to bond more deeply.

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Some people may have to give up their own ideas and agree with others to make the group function, some people may have left the group. In this stage, all group members move towards sharing the responsibility and commitment to work for the success of the group's goals.

What helps the norming stage to go well?

- The group becomes clearer about what it's here to do - its shared purpose
- There are more decisions about principles of how to work together to make a respectful and enjoyable feeling to the group
- Some people may leave if they can't accept the new decisions the group is making
- Find a way to honour their contribution and wish them well to achieve what they really care about somewhere else
- There's a feeling of the group coming together, of belonging to something exciting and with possibilities

Norming and storming warning!

These often happen together - as conflict comes up, new agreements are found that everyone can live with. And as agreements emerge, people find they want something different. It can feel disturbing if you get to somewhere peaceful and then there's more conflict. Usually this is a normal part of a group settling into working together. The key thing is to focus on how to resolve this conflict in a positive way that is acceptable to as many people in your group as possible.

Performing - "We are effective and get things done easily!"

With good skills, commitment, tolerance and probably some luck, groups go on to reach the performing stage where they:

- Are competent and motivated, with each person understanding their role and task
- Can function as a unit with good communication and understanding of collaboration
- Make decisions as a group and hold people accountable for their responsibilities
- Include differences and disagreements in a constructive way as a healthy part of group life
- Celebrate their achievements together and value the contribution of each person
- Pay attention to the longer term aims of the group, moving between times of activity and accomplishment, and times of reflection and development

Repeating the stages

Most groups will go through the stages many time times as new tasks and challenges come up. For example

- When new members join there will be a new forming stage to include the views of who's joined without losing the valuable work which has gone before
- As the group grows more competent and confident it will probably want to take on more ambitious tasks - some may be happy with this, and others may prefer the old way
- Is there a way for everyone to get what they need - including by creating a new group?
- The group may grow beyond its original purpose, and need to evolve its structure

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In Transition the Initiating group usually comes to an end and hands over to a Core group (even if many of the same people continue)

Mourning - "We are happy or sad to be finishing"

Whenever someone leaves the group, and old structure ends and something new begins. And at some point the whole group may decide its work is done. It's good to mark these endings, to create a sense of each person's work being valued.

What helps this stage to go well:

- For one or more people leaving - take time at a meeting to remember and appreciate what they've brought to the group. Make it a celebration, give a gift, or a card
- If the whole group is ending - have a shared event to celebrate all the group has done, with photos, a shared timeline of events and people, a shared story-telling or some other celebration
- Have space for each person to talk about their experience of being part of the group, this may include sadness about the ending, a loss of something important in their lives
- Acknowledge the difficult times and how they were handled. How did they help individuals and the group to grow?
- Recognise what new seeds or projects are emerging as a result of the group's activities that will go forward even as this group comes to an end
- If the group has assets or knowledge find a way to pass them on which honours the group's purpose

Making a good ending together helps all the members to take away warm memories, a sense of connection, and feel valued and complete.

More support:

For more support and information on developing healthy groups go here:

<http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/healthy-groups/>

Check out the 7 essential ingredients of Transition here:

<http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/>

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