

NOTES ON LEADING A COURSE

The following represents one model found useful for conducting courses. The description of the model is divided into three parts: 1) Assumptions; 2) Concepts; and 3) Course Format.

1. Assumptions

When conducting a course, the following five assumptions should be made:

- a) A course is a teaching-learning experience. It should be enjoyable as well as educational.
- b) Participants wish to apply this learning to their work situations.
- c) Contracts for participation in a course are different from contracts for participation in a therapy group. Whereas the former emphasizes a cognitive and skill building experience, the latter involves disclosure, vulnerability, and change.
- d) Impact matters regardless of intent. If participants experience microaggressions, their reactions need to be acknowledged and responded to as a valid emotion.
- e) A useful course combines theory, experience, and application.

2. Concepts

In planning for and implementing a course, the following concepts have been useful:

- a) **Boundaries:** Boundaries, defined as "in" from "out," help identify what is possible regarding time, focus, role, goal, and participation. For example, at the very beginning of a course, the boundaries are defined by introducing goals, roles, and time frames, and by inviting members to share their expectations for learning. By clarifying these boundaries at the beginning, a learning process, marked by clarity and mutuality, can be set in motion.
- b) **Task-Maintenance:** Task refers to work on particular goals; maintenance refers to the extent to which we are aware of and respond to the feelings generated by the task work. For example, too much emphasis on the task risks losing the interest of participants, while an overemphasis on feelings risks losing work on the task. A validation of the contract and a clear sense of boundaries help to blend task and maintenance.
- c) **Phases of Group Development:** Courses move through and out of phases. In the beginning there is orientation of people and task, in the middle there is the bulk of the learning, and at the end there is a review and a critique. Phases of group development help us to further appreciate events in our courses. For example, a poor orientation at the beginning can lead to confusion and miscommunication in the middle phase. Or, a lengthy orientation can result in unnecessary limits on middle phase work. Finally, a shortened evaluation at the end can deprive participants of valuable opportunities for catharsis and perspective and can deprive leaders of useful feedback for their professional development.

- d) **Feedback:** Feedback can be delivered as direct input or request, or expressions of emotional reactions. Critical feedback and negative reaction can be painful to receive but can serve as a valuable contribution at the same time. When participants share a critical feedback, evaluate the meaning behind the communication and consider making appropriate changes in the moment or in future courses. Conference Co-Chairs are available for you to process difficult feedback afterward.
- e) **Management of Disturbances:** In this context, a disturbance refers to a situation in which a participant, because of very strong feelings about an aspect of the course, appears unable to work within the course framework or blocks others from doing their work. When this occurs, there should be an attempt to integrate this person into the boundary of the course. **If, however, you are unable to reintegrate this individual, consider asking him/her to withdraw from the course. The Conference Committee is available to assist the chairperson in any such effort. Please be in contact with the Association staff who will be able to locate a Committee member immediately.**
- f) **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Feelings of disenfranchisement and marginalization interfere with participants' ability to learn and get the most out of your course. In the fall, course faculty will receive and should thoroughly review the "Guidelines for Creating Affirming Group Experiences" to engage in inclusive practice. You are, however, not expected to be perfect. What matters is your sincere desire and effort to be inclusive combined with openness and humility to acknowledge missteps.

3. Course Format (Program Agenda)

In developing a course, try to blend theory, experience, and application. For a full-day event, time may be organized in the following way:

30 minutes	Orientation, including introduction of people, task, and role, and a sharing of expectations by participants.
70 minutes	Presentation of theory or concepts that provide a framework.
70 minutes	Demonstrations or discussions in small groups which emphasize application of concepts.
70 minutes	Sharing of examples of applications in a large group.
50 minutes	Critique (oral and whole group).
	Discussion of continuing education material.
10 minutes	Critique (written).
	Completion of participant evaluations.
Total 300 minutes	