

Meetings – and how to run them

This section will give you some ideas about how to run better meetings. There are ideas here about:

- *the agenda*
- *setting up the room*
- *ice breakers*
- *chairs the meeting*
- *making meetings fun*
- *keeping to the rules*
- *involving everyone*
- *keeping notes*
- *finishing the meeting.*

The agenda

This is the list of things you want to talk about in the meeting. You can decide on the agenda before you get to the meeting – by asking people for their suggestions and putting these ideas on a list. Or you can agree an agenda at the start of a meeting – by putting people's ideas up on a poster on the wall.

Remember – an agenda does not have to use words. You can make a list using objects or symbols or drawings or photographs of the things you want to discuss at your meeting.

Setting up the room

People do not have to sit at tables to have a good meeting. You can decide how to arrange things. You can have people sitting round in a circle. Or have small groups working at different tables.

You can arrange people in different ways for different parts of the meeting – so they are all sitting together for some of the meeting and working in groups at other times.

It is probably good to start and finish the meeting with everyone together.

Ice breakers

It is a good idea to start your meeting with an ice breaker. Ice breakers are fun activities that help everyone to relax and feel happy about joining in. Here are some ice breakers we have used at the start of our meetings:

- ask people to throw a ball from person to person saying or signing the name of the person they are throwing the ball to
- ask everyone in turn to say or sign something fun they did at the weekend
- get everyone to say or sign one thing they remember from the last meeting

- play 'likes and dislikes bingo'. Give everyone a card with likes and dislikes on it. Get people to move around finding someone at the meeting who likes or dislikes one of the things on the card. See who fills the card out first. Give a prize.

Meetings will go better after a good ice breaker.

Chairing the meeting

The person who chairs the meeting makes sure that:

- someone is taking notes of the meeting
- the meeting picks up on ideas that were discussed at the last meeting
- the meeting keeps to time
- everyone who wants to gets a turn to join in and share their ideas
- the meeting discusses everything on the agenda
- people in the meeting stick to the rules
- the meeting gets its work done
- everyone agrees a time and place to meet next time.

The same person does not have to chair the meeting each time. You can share the job of being chair. One person can be chair for one meeting – then hand over to someone else for the next meeting. Or each person at the meeting can take it in turns to chair an item on the agenda. Or two or three people can share the job of being chair and do different parts of the job.

Making meetings fun

Meetings work better when they are fun. Meetings do not have to be all talk. Here are some ideas we have use for making meetings more interesting:

- get people to discuss ideas in pairs – then report back to the whole group
- present some ideas using photos or video or Powerpoint
- get people to work in groups to make a poster to show how they feel about an idea – then take it in turns to look at people's posters
- play 'pass the parcel' to work through the agenda. Wrap up little cards in layers of paper. Put a different agenda item on each card. Play 'pass the parcel' music. When the music stops, the person holding the parcel unwraps the next layer and tells the meeting the next agenda item. To make things more fun, you can also hide small prizes in the layers
- give people activities to do as part of the meeting.

Keeping to the rules

It makes sense to have rules for meetings – but you can decide what the rules should be. Here are some of the rules we think make for good meetings:

- switch off mobile phones
- no shouting
- no jargon – this means using words and ideas other people do not understand
- take turns – so only one person is talking at any time (unless it is a group activity)
- make sure everyone gets a chance to tell their ideas

- listen to an idea before joining in.

Involving everyone

Good meetings involve everyone who is at the meeting. Involving people who find it difficult to sit still or listen or talk can be hard. Making meetings fun can help. We have also used some other ideas for involving everyone in meetings:

- ask people to bring a supporter or a buddy who can help them join in and stay involved
- use signs, symbols, pictures and objects to stand for the ideas you are discussing in the meeting
- give people 'traffic light' cards to use during the meeting. Each person needs three traffic light cards – green for go, red for stop and orange for wait. People can hold up the green card when they are happy for the meeting to carry on. They hold up the red card if they disagree and they want to say something different. They can hold up the orange card when they are not sure and they want an idea to be explained more carefully
- have a 'no jargon' rule. When anyone in the meeting uses words or ideas that other people do not understand, the meeting has to stop until the idea is explained and everyone is happy to go on
- have lots of little breaks in the meeting. Meetings can stop for a drink or something to eat or to let people move about or use the toilet.

Keeping a record

You will need to keep a record of your meetings. This usually means that someone at the meeting writes down notes as people give their ideas. You can ask a supporter to do this for you.

To make this easier, you can decide only to write down the main things that are agreed – and the things you do not agree about so you can remember to discuss them again another time.

In our meetings we have kept other kinds of records. You can:

- make a video of the meeting to watch later
- put big sheets of paper on the wall so you can draw big pictures on them to remind you of the ideas that were discussed
- type notes into a computer – you can show these words and symbols on a screen as you work to remind people what you are discussing.

The records from meetings are sometimes called 'the minutes'. Each time you have a meeting, it is useful to go through the minutes from the last meeting to:

- remind people at the meeting what you discussed last time
- catch up on any new things that have happened since the last meeting
- deal with any items that did not get discussed at the last meeting.

Finishing the meeting

Make sure the meeting finishes on time – people will have other places to go and things to do.

Before the meeting finishes, make sure everyone has said what they want to say. Agree a time and a place for the next meeting. Thank people for coming to the meeting and for giving their ideas.

Our *Reference Group* helped us to develop these ideas – as well as helping us develop better *ways of finding out* in our research.