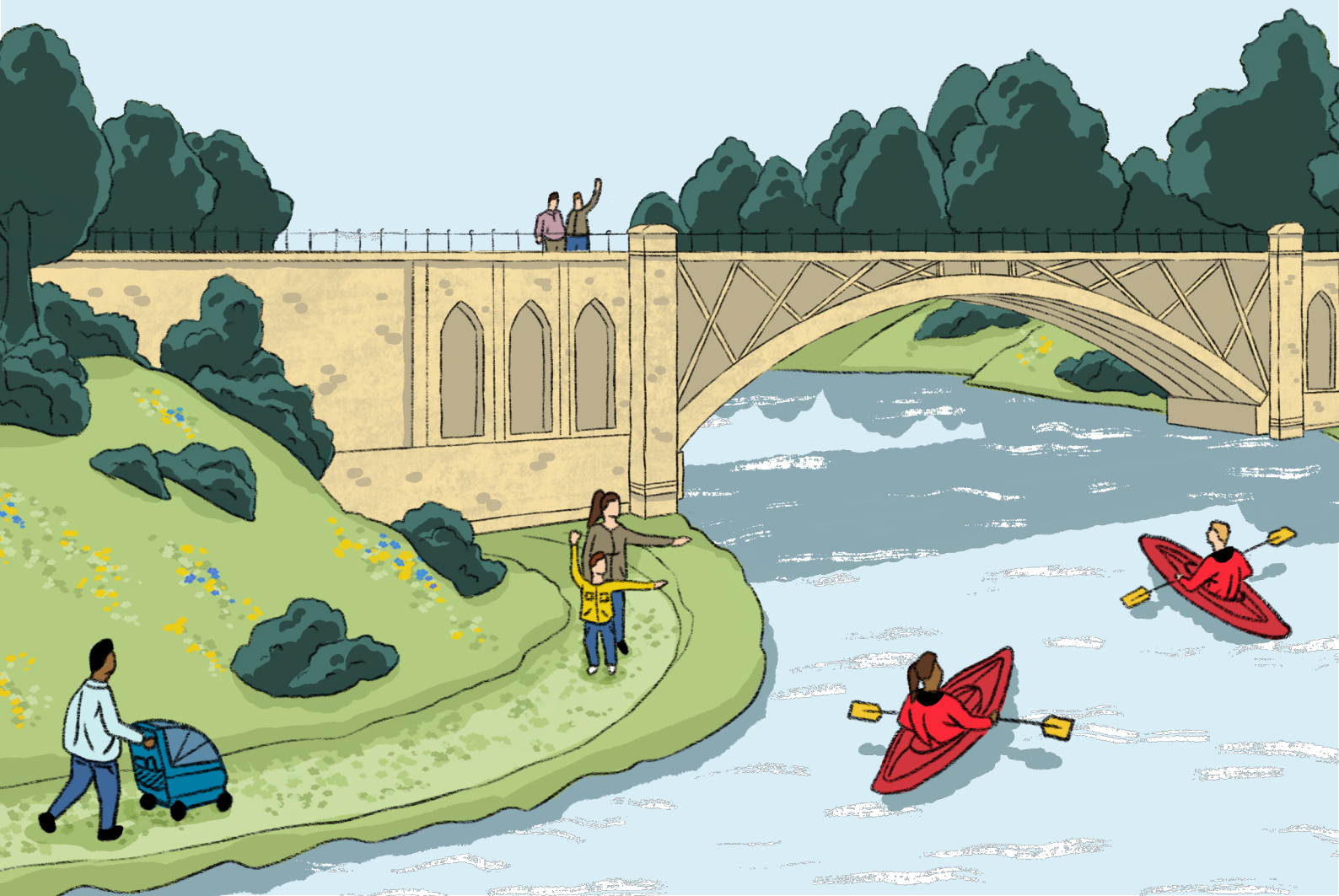


Facilitating inclusive sessions with Experts by Lived Experience



What do I need to do before the first session?

The basics

Make sure you have a venue which is accessible for the individuals involved.

Always develop a clear session plan detailing what you will cover, timings, methods you will use, and the resources you will need. Share an agenda with the group so they know what to expect.



More thoughts

There are many ways to help people explore an issue and share their views. Using creative and visual methods can help a group share experiences, develop ideas, and present its thinking.

A useful handbook is *The Art of Co-Design* by Kerr et al.



How do I help people to feel welcome?

The basics

Make sure you have your room setup and any tech working before people start arriving. This frees you to welcome people as they arrive. You can also introduce people to those who have already arrived to help everyone relax and get talking.



More thoughts

Welcoming can start way before the session. Think about starting to build rapport with people in any communication before the first session.

It's also important to think about the welcome for everyone, including people of different ethnicities, faiths and identities. Think about your session not clashing with times of prayer, meet dietary needs, and be sensitive to cultural needs. Ask people in advance what will help them feel comfortable in the space and session.



How do I start the discussion?

The basics

Having a 'check-in' or ice-breaker is a good way to help people hear their voice in the room and begin to share. You can use simple questions related to your gathering such as:

- How was your journey here?
- Why did you want to get involved in this work?
- Why is being in nature important to you?
- What's your favourite place to visit



More thoughts

Whatever question you choose to ask, it needs to be easy to answer as people won't have much time to think. Don't ask a question that might lead to people sharing personal information as it can make them and the group feel uncomfortable.

Always go first. That way you give people an example of what you're looking for. You can limit how much people share by asking for answers to be a few sentences. If someone goes off track, remind the group what you asked for.



How can I help people to work together?

The basics

It's a good idea to have a working agreement or set of ground rules. You can bring some yourself, such as:

- listen to others
- respect what others say even if you disagree
- maintain confidentiality

Ask if there are other things people want to add



More thoughts

You can ask the group if there is anything that will help them feel included and to contribute. For example, someone with a visual impairment might find it helpful if people say their names before speaking.



How do I manage the discussion?

The basics

- Remind the group at the start what they are, and are not talking about
- Acknowledge that there will be different opinions
- Stay neutral
- Thank people for their contributions
- Check your understanding of what's been said
- Keep an eye on the time and move on when you need to
- Refer to the working agreement if it's not being followed



More thoughts

Keeping on track is important but there may be times when you need to give longer than planned for something. Think about how you can get this time back, so you still finish on time.

You might be working with two distinct groups of people. For example, a group who visit a site and a group of staff. As a facilitator you stand in the gap between these groups. As far as possible support people to mix for discussions and activities. It can also be helpful to ask one group for a response to what the other has shared. This will help everyone to dig deeper into an issue and can lead to developing a solution together.



What can I do if one person is dominating the conversation?

The basics

This is a situation where you need to assert yourself as the facilitator to protect the process and the group. People will get fed up with individuals who dominate. They may also lose interest if they're not being allowed to contribute.



More thoughts

A simple intervention:

- 'Thank you, Alison. I just want to see if others have something to share'

If someone keeps dominating, have a clear and compassionate conversation in a break. Thank them for contributing but say that you want others to be able to contribute too.



What can I do if someone is not contributing?

The basics

Some people are naturally quieter and take time to process information or become confident to share in a group. Some will only share if they feel they have something worthwhile to share that is different to what has already been said.



More thoughts

If you notice that someone is not contributing, don't put them on the spot. Instead ask the whole group if there's anything anyone wants to add. If someone is still not contributing, have a chat in the break. You can ask if they're okay, that you've noticed they've been quiet, and if there's anything you can do to help them contribute.

Think about changing the methods you're using, perhaps inviting individuals to write their views or answer a question by writing on a post-it which can be shared by placing on a wall or flipchart. You could split into small groups or work one-to-one and act as an advocate.



What can I do if people disagree?

The basics

Reassure the group that disagreement is okay. The work will be richer if there are different opinions. It's important to stay neutral as a facilitator and help people to understand different opinions.



More thoughts

Disagreements can escalate into arguments. It's important to step in quickly in a calm manner. Try to tease out the reasons that lie behind what each 'side' has shared. This can help build understanding and diffuse the situation.



What can I do if someone gets emotional?

The basics

Pause. Take a breath. Say what you see. Reassure.

- 'Let's pause for a moment. John, I can see that's affected you. Do you want to share anything, or take a break?'



You could also call a break to give an opportunity for you to chat with John. If John is happy to carry on, check in with him at the next break.

More thoughts

Responding in these situations can be tricky but gently stepping in means that people will feel safe and valued.



You may also find that these moments bring the group closer together and make it more supportive.

What can I do if someone is dismissive?

The basics

This situation is where your Group Agreement can come into play. Step in and remind the group that part of the agreement is to respect one another. It's also a good idea to try and uncover what's behind the behaviour:



- 'Can I just remind everyone that we agreed to show respect for one another's views, even when we disagree. Richard, you came across as being dismissive. I'm interested to know why that might be.'

More thoughts

This is a situation where you need to use your position as the facilitator to protect the group and the process. When you intervene in these these situations, people will feel safe and build their trust in you.



What about 'awkward' silence?

The basics

The question here is, awkward for who? It might only feel awkward to you. Silence can be a good thing. People need time to reflect and think about their responses. Don't be afraid of silence. Of course, if it carries on, you'll need to come in but do it gently.

- repeat or rephrase the question you asked
- 'Does anyone have something to add? If not, we'll move on.'



More thoughts

It's important to give enough silence. Sometimes if a person asks a question, and nobody responds within a couple of seconds, they move on too quickly. This can lead to frustration and people becoming withdrawn because they feel you don't want to hear from them.



How can I bring the discussion to a close?

The basics

Many conversations reach a point where they begin to repeat. That's a sign that you probably won't hear anything else of significance.

- 'It feels like we've probably exhausted that, so let's move on.'

It may be that you're running out of time.

- 'Okay, we only have a couple of minutes left for this section. Any final comments?'

You will need to wrap things up when you get close to the end of the session.

- 'We're very nearly at the end of our time today, and I know some of you have taxis booked. Any closing reflections on our time together?'
- 'We've covered a lot of ground this afternoon... Thank you so much for everything you've shared. See you next time when we'll look at...'



More thoughts

Closing a discussion, and the whole session, is another example of asserting yourself as the facilitator for the good of the group and the process.

Having shared an 'agenda' or plan for your time together, the group knows what to expect. If those expectations are not met, some people may start to become frustrated and begin to withdraw. At its extreme, people might feel that the process is out of control, unpredictable, and therefore unsafe.

