

Adult Religious Education Course Facilitators' Handbook

First Unitarian Church of Hamilton
170 Dundurn St. S.
Hamilton, Ontario

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Where to find things

- ê If required, a key to the building is available from the A.R.E. contact person. We suggest you leave doors open (the procedure is shown on a sign on the door) until most of your group has arrived, then lock the doors again unless there is another group meeting at the same time. Anyone late can buzz at the main (side) entrance or knock.
- ê Light switches for R.E. area are at the head of the stairs to the basement (in the northeast corner of the building) to the right inside the door. The light switches for the foyer are to the right of the second door. Lights to the sanctuary are to the left just inside the doors. Classrooms have their own lights.
- ê Washrooms are located just off the foyer and in the R.E. area just past (west of) the kitchen.
- ê If the area is cool, please ask Bill Fulton to adjust the thermostats. As a last resort, space heaters are in the Administrative Assistant's office under the desk.
- ê The photocopier is in the Administrative Assistant's office. The key that unlocks outside doors unlocks inside ones too. The password to use the photocopier is 8923#. The machine is normally on energy save but if it is turned off, the on switch is near the bottom front on the left hand side.
- ê The telephone is in the kitchen by the door nearest to the R.E. area.
- ê If you wish to provide refreshments, coffee supplies are in the kitchen. Locks are opened with the church key (you may have to supply the cream).
- ê Dishwasher instructions are on the door just above the dishwasher. It needs to be turned on 20 min before using. Please do your dishes if there are lots; if there aren't many, then leave them stacked neatly in the tray on the left hand side of the dishwasher.
- ê Flip chart paper and markers are in the volunteer office, on a shelf under the desk. Easels are in the R.E. area just past (west of) the kitchen door.

- ê Candles are in the cupboard (lower) just to the right of the double sink in the kitchen. Matches are in a small drawer in front of the small sink (near coffee supplies).
- ê The administrator has “do not disturb” signage. See her if you feel that you wish to use them.

To do list

1. One week before the course begins, phone and remind the participants of the course starting date.
2. During the course, if it should be necessary to reschedule a session, the facilitator will make that decision and see that the participants are informed in time.
3. At the end of each session, please see that:
 - a) all furniture and supplies are returned to the proper place
 - b) all candles and matches are extinguished and in a secure place
 - c) all lights have been turned off. Lights on the outside of the building are automatic.
 - d) kitchen cabinets are locked and dish washer is turned off
 - e) all doors are locked
4. At the end of the course, please return the completed evaluation forms to the A.R.E. mail box near the washrooms in the foyer. Your contact person will have given them to you with this list

We would greatly appreciate feedback from your perspective. For example:

- a) did you feel adequately supported by the A.R.E. committee?
- b) if you were given a curriculum to use, was it satisfactory?
- c) do you feel the participants enjoyed the course?
- d) did you enjoy the experience of facilitating?
- e) would you be willing to do it again, for the same or a different course?
- f) do you have any suggestions for further courses or
- g) any other comments.

Tips on the Facilitator's Role

As a facilitator, one strives to create an environment which is supportive, fair, open. This encourages those participating to risk being vulnerable—to experience and share life at levels where meaning and conviction grow. There is, of course, no magic set of rules which will make this happen, but we would like to share a few suggestions from our experience:

1. Plan to be at all the sessions. If you are co-leading the group, let the participants know in advance whenever possible if one co-leader cannot be at a session. Changing leadership involves rebuilding the group's interrelationships—a process which cannot be circumvented.
2. Know the course outline. Having a clear sense of what will be covered in subsequent sessions can ease the decision as to whether a topic should be discussed in depth at the time it arises or deferred to another session.
3. Arrange for materials, supplies etc. to be available when needed. This is a part of creating the environment for the group by avoiding the mood shattering disruptions of searching for pencils, paper or resource materials in the midst of a session.
4. Plan to arrive before the group. Not being there at the time the group is forming raises anxiety as to whether there has been a misunderstanding of time or place, as well as anxiety for the leader's well being—has something gone wrong? Making a commitment to begin and end on time is a basic element for building trust.
5. Arrange for the meeting space. The importance of having a comfortable meeting space of appropriate size which will not be interrupted by others cannot be overstated. Let people know in advance when changes are necessary.

6. Help the group to get to know one another and to develop trust and rapport. Even persons who have known one another a long time are strangers as they share new aspects of their lives with one another. Consciously building trust and rapport is an essential component of every session. It is helpful to invite people to share a high or low point of the week at the beginning of each session, or to speak of something personal of which they are proud.
7. Encourage group members to let the group know when they will be late or unable to attend. An unexpected absence raises a host of concerns and questions. A group cannot function effectively while speculating on the reasons for a person's absence. Our caring for one another is too important to risk misunderstanding.
8. Watch for side conversations which can be disruptive to the group. Invite those involved to state their comments to the rest of the group and proceed accordingly. This is a basic requisite for building trust and rapport.
9. Strive to keep an individual or small group from dominating a conversation. What's really going on? Has the occasion "released the flood gates" on a topic of great concern? Is someone afraid of where the session may go? Are there individuals who feel threatened and who see no other way to keep control? Uncovering a hidden agenda can be a key to new understanding.
10. Help the group to keep focused. When a member or members continue to wander from the topic, the rest of the participants often become frustrated and lose interest. Suggest that one topic be addressed at a time and that the new topic can be added to the agenda for a later time. Be sure to come back to that topic.
11. Encourage people to share ideas and experiences. This is not a demand from the leader, but an invitation. The group experience is richer and more helpful when everyone participates. When people never share, the group stalemates. A non-participating member can sometimes passively control the group as others become suspicious of that person's silence.
12. Guarantee the right to pass. It is important for group rapport and trust that persons not feel pressured into sharing more than they feel comfortable or ready to reveal.
13. Support group trust by having participants agree to keep personal confidences that have been shared within the group. People do not like having "their story" retold elsewhere.
14. Listen to the group and encourage clarification. As a facilitator, try to hear the questions behind the one posed. Pay attention to new agenda items and interest. Put-downs or "dumping" on someone's ideas shatter group trust and rapport.
15. Risk asking "tough questions". Such questions can help to clarify a confusing issue or to gain insight into incongruity. Tough questions often encourage the first step toward new understanding and growth.
16. Seek a balance in your own participation. This balance is dynamic. In the early sessions, encouraging others' participation is usually far more fruitful than inadvertently being the one everyone turns to for the "expert" view or answers to tough questions. As the members build assurance and develop a greater respect for themselves, the facilitator can often share more freely from his or her own personal experience.
17. Relax and enjoy the group.

—Roberta and Christopher Nelson
in *Parents as Resident Theologians*
Used by permission

When Individuals Dominate the Group: Some Strategies

by Judith A. Frediani

It can be a facilitator's nightmare. Whether in an adult RE program, a support group or a working committee, one individual can dominate the group by commanding an inordinate amount of the precious time available, usually by talking for excessively long periods of time, talking too frequently, and/or taking off on tangents. Often the other participants suffer in silence but suffer they do, as does the effectiveness of the group's work. Facilitators have primary, but not sole responsibility for addressing these situations.

If you have ever been a teacher, parent, or other caregiver of children, you may agree that "discipline" is 95 per cent prevention (an unscientific estimate, I admit). Because I believe this principle is equally true with adults, most of the suggestions below are designed to head off problems rather than confront them. However, there are also strategies for confrontation when it is necessary.

1. Group Covenant

It is invaluable for any group, whatever its primary focus, to agree on expectations for behaviour in their work together. Whether you call those written expectations covenants, agreements or guidelines, they include a range of issues such as arriving on time, keeping confidentiality, the right to pass, "no put-downs", etc. Ongoing groups like standing committees can review and renew their agreements annually, or whenever new members are added.

a. Short-form covenanting. A time-efficient way to help a group agree to guidelines is to prepare a draft on newsprint before the first meeting and ask participants to respond. Invite them to add, delete or modify until everyone understands and accepts the expectations.

b. Long-form covenanting. Have the group generate its guidelines from scratch. Although it takes a little longer, it is more participatory and may foster more of a sense of ownership. One approach is to say something like: "Think of a time when you were a member of a productive and safe group. What would make this group productive and safe for you?" List responses and encourage discussion until consensus is reached. Then ask, "What do you think should happen if our behaviour is not in keeping with our agreed-upon guidelines?" Discuss.

c. Why bother? A group covenant provides at least three benefits.

1. Expectations are clarified so that misunderstandings are less likely.
2. The agreement makes it clear that everyone, not just the leader(s), is responsible for the effectiveness and enjoyment of the group experience.
3. The guidelines provide a valid and specific reference for addressing problematic behaviour. Leaders or participants can speak to a group member privately or within the group about their concern that a behaviour is not in keeping with the agreement.

2. Begin on time. End on time.

As a facilitator, take this responsibility very seriously. Promptness sends two important messages:

- a. "We are a group that means what we say. We said we start at 7, and we start at 7."
- b. "This is a group that respects my time and my needs. The leaders said we would be done at 9 and we are done at 9. (And can go home to our families!)"

Treating the group and the guidelines with respect fosters other expressions of respect within the group.

3. Model brevity.

Leadership is not license to ramble. Make sure your thoughts are organized and succinctly presented. In check-ins and other sharing, be sure you share for *less than* the allotted time for each person.

4. Talking stick.

Many groups use a “talking stick” (or feather or whatever) which one must be holding in order to speak. This device discourages people from spontaneously (and repeatedly) sharing their thoughts out of turn. It clearly gives the floor to one person at a time and encourages shared responsibility for participation, since the speaker, not the leader, must decide who to hand it to next. (If it is placed in the centre of the circle after each speaker, participants, not leaders, must still take responsibility for whose turn it is.)

5. Passing a Watch.

Check-ins can consume much more time than planned. If the group has agreed to a number of minutes for each person’s sharing (such as 2 or 5 minutes), pass a watch with a second hand around the circle. Each person times the person next to them, and gently signals them when their time is almost up. As a facilitator, you go first. This device is only appropriate if the group has agreed to limit their sharing to a certain time period. And, of course, common sense should prevail if someone is sharing a particularly painful or otherwise sensitive experience. In groups with a history of saying they want a short check-in and doing a long check-in, this is a consciousness-raiser that often does not have to be repeated to be effective.

6. Timed Agenda.

It is almost always helpful to post an agenda at the beginning of any meeting. People like to know what they are doing and where they are going. Next to each item, suggest a time and do an agenda check with the group to get their agreement. This is no less important with support groups than with board meetings, although the former will likely have a much less detailed agenda than the latter.

Use the timed agenda to enlist the whole group in taking responsibility for the process. If they fall behind in the timing, say “I’m concerned (or “I notice”) that we are behind our agreed-upon schedule. What do you suggest we do about this?” Let the group make suggestions. Usually, they volunteer that they need to be more focused and self-disciplined, particularly if you ask, “Shall we extend our meeting time by 45 minutes?”

Be aware that the group may decide that it really needs to spend the entire time on one activity. If this is the consensus of the group, then it is what they should do, as long as it is an intentional group decision. Responsibility, not inflexibility, is the goal.

7. Small groups.

People like to talk. One way to give everyone a chance to talk within a limited timeframe is to divide participants into groups of two or more to share. When the whole group re-gathers, the small groups can share according to the time you have allotted—from as little as a word or phrase to a written report.

Use the promise of small group time to interrupt lengthy discussions or sharing, suggesting that the small group exercise will be a more appropriate place to share that story, etc.

8. Unfinished business list.

Post a sheet of newsprint on which to list people’s questions and concerns that cannot be addressed in the program without derailing the schedule or focus of the group. As people go off on tangents that are important to them, but not germane to the task at hand, interrupt politely, affirm that their issue deserves attention, explain that we cannot address it now, write it on the newsprint and promise to return to it. Be sure to return to it at the time you have set aside (end of session, end of program, whenever).

9. Levelling the playing field.

Some people are quick to speak up; others need time for reflection. Some are comfortable competing for the floor; others are not and will not. The result is that a few people consistently speak first, more often and at greater length. But only if the discussion mode is “survival of the fittest,” (that is, most verbally aggressive). Below are some techniques to equalize opportunities to speak.

a. Reflection. Before putting a question or topic before the group for discussion, ask them to reflect silently for a minute (or two). Then ask the question. Do not allow anyone to break this silence except to ask a clarifying question. Then break the silence by calling on someone who has not spoken at length or by using one of the options below.

b. Taking turns. Suggest that the group go around the circle with each person sharing briefly who wishes to do so. Start with someone who does not dominate.

c. Ask that people who have not shared go first. Remember, this is an invitation; it should not feel coercive or put anyone on the spot.

d. Body language. Watch for body language indicating that someone wants to speak, but is hesitant to compete for the floor. Call on her or him in an encouraging way.

e. Eye contact. Try not to make eye contact with the person or persons who have been doing too much talking. It is a green light for them to speak. (It is surprisingly hard to avoid looking at the person you have come to expect to speak out.)

10. Process check.

Schedule a 5 to 10-minute group process check at the end of each session or meeting. Ask, “How was our process?” When you introduce this concept, make it clear that a process check is not an evaluation of the leader(s), but an invitation to everyone to reflect on their own participation and their experience of the group process as a whole. A process check encourages self-awareness, communicates that everyone shares responsibility for the process, and gives people an opportunity to voice their concerns or frustrations.

11. When all else fails.

Usually participants are reluctant to confront each other and look instead to the facilitator to handle dominating members. If preventative strategies have failed, try these interventions:

a. Interrupt. Don’t be afraid to interrupt a speaker in front of the group. To let him or her go on and on is to disrespect all the participants. Examples of respectful but firm interruptions:

- “Excuse me, Frank, but I’m concerned about the time.”
- “I’m going to stop you there, Mary, because I’m concerned that we are moving off our focus.”
- “Frank, can you summarize your point in 25 words or less, because we need to move on.”
- “Mary, is this an issue we can put on the Unfinished Business list? We can’t address it right now.”

Usually people respond by cooperating, and usually if the facilitator is willing to interrupt garrulous behaviour, the garrulous become quieter, the quiet become bolder, and a rough equality evolves.

Remember to appeal to the group guidelines and the agenda as objective references for behavioural expectations.

b. Speak to the person privately. When a participant is really not responding to preventative strategies or gentle confrontations in the group, speak with him or her at the break or after the meeting. You can be more candid in private.

- Use “I” statements to state the problem: “I am concerned about staying on our schedule.” “I am concerned that not everyone has an opportunity to speak when some people speak at length. It is my responsibility to bring everyone into the process.”
- Name the participant’s behaviour if the person doesn’t acknowledge it. Be specific. “Frank, are you aware that you interrupted Mary, John and Louise when they were sharing? We agreed as a group to listen to each other respectfully.”

- Give him or her an opportunity to voice his or her concerns. “Mary, how is this group working for you? You seemed frustrated tonight. Is there something you need from me or the group?”
- Try to enlist the person’s help in agreeing to a solution. Affirm him or her and appeal to his or her sense of fairness. “Frank, I value your participation in this group, and I need to be respectful of everyone’s time and needs. What do you think I should do when someone repeatedly interrupts others?”

Hopefully, the participant will acknowledge his or her behaviour and modify it in the future. If the behaviour continues unabated, it is likely that the person is not merely needy or thoughtless, but seriously hostile. Confronting him or her may cause him or her to leave the group. This is his or her choice, and if you have treated him or her respectfully, you should not feel that his or her decision is your failure.

The Adult Learner

The Adult Learning Process: (Andragogy)

Adults do not learn well in the school atmosphere of their youth. Malcolm Knowles, a distinguished adult educator, provides some conditions for adult learning to occur: a climate of mutual respect and trust, a warm atmosphere, respect for dialogue, and learners who are inquiring, learning as much as possible in their own way and at their own pace. The teaching role becomes a set of methods for facilitating self-directed learning in the learner.

The premise for the change from pedagogy to andragogy is a very simple one; it says, in essence, that no one can really teach adults, but can merely provide opportunities for adults to experience learning. Therefore, teachers become facilitators and learning becomes active and experiential.

The Adult Learner Model

1. **Learning is an experience, which occurs inside the learner and is activated by the learner.** The learner, not the teacher or facilitator, controls the learning. For adult RE, this means that people won’t sign up for courses unless they want to learn what they believe will be taught. It is very important to be clear during the first session about what will be taught, and how it will be done. If this isn’t what someone wants, you may be able to adapt to what suits them, or they may decide that this is not the right course for them, which is OK.
2. **No one directly teaches anyone anything of significance. Learning cannot be imposed.** People learn what they want to or are capable of learning, see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear. Therefore people may not learn what you think they will learn, but as long as it is meaningful to them, this is all right.
3. **Relevance.** The material being taught must have personal relevance and meaning to the learner. Therefore it is important to try to establish this, by using examples that relate to the participants’ experience. This can also be done by asking the participants to share and/or to create meaning.
4. **Learning is a consequence of experience.** Doing something is far more effective than being lectured to.
5. **Learning is a cooperative and collaborative process.** Interacting with other people increases the learning process. Give participants a chance to share, do small group activities.
6. **Learning is an evolutionary process.** It may take a long time to learn something new.
7. **Learning is sometimes painful.** Giving up old ways of behaving and thinking are hard, especially in front of a group. It involves risk taking and therefore it is up to the facilitator to create a safe

- atmosphere. Not everyone will learn at the same pace, therefore the facilitator must allow people to learn at a pace that is right for them. It is a careful balance of encouraging growth, but not pushing.
8. **One of the richest resources for learning is the learner.** Allow lots of opportunities for sharing. This will promote the learning of the person sharing, and also add rich resources for everyone else,
 9. **Learning is both emotional and intellectual.** People are feeling beings as well as thinking beings. In order for a group to be optimally successful in its endeavour, people must come before the purpose. The purpose can only be achieved if there is harmony in the group. It may sometimes be more important to stop working on the purpose or the content of what is being taught, and to deal with the feelings of the group.
 10. **The process of problem solving and learning are highly unique and individual.**

Some Hints to Make an Adult Learning Group Successful

1. **Establish safety.** On the first meeting, let everyone know what to expect, give people a chance to get to know everyone else (remember, this is one of the main purposes for people doing RE), and set some rules for the group. This is best done with lots of input from the group, but should include such things as confidentiality, everyone having a chance to speak, not interrupting others, start times, finish times etc.
2. **Use more than one way to present material.** Not all learners are alike and what works for one, won't work for another, so try presenting things in different ways. If you are using a UU curriculum, it may well already be designed for this.
3. **Include everyone.** People usually come to adult RE programs to learn something about a topic that interests them. They usually already know something about the topic and can add greatly to the group. Some people are more talkative than others, but it is up to you as the facilitator to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share if they want to.
4. **People need breaks.** Adults, like children, can only sit still for so long and can only take in so much information. After 1½ to 2 hours, people stop taking much in. Therefore it is important, if your program goes longer than this, that you have a short break. This can be a break to get some refreshments, or just a quick stretch break.
5. **Get help if you need it.** If you are having trouble with the group, things don't seem to be going well, you're not sure if you're doing the right thing etc., speak to a member of the adult RE Committee to get some assistance or just to get some feedback.

To Facilitators of Adult Religious Education Programs

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate one of our Adult Religious Education programs.

We hope the accompanying list and information will make it easier for you.

Each course will have a member of the A.R.E. committee designated as your specific contact person. He or she may not necessarily join the course, but is responsible to support you throughout. Ask him or her for anything you need beyond what's outlined below.

We hope that his or her support and the accompanying information will help to make your experience a very satisfying one.

ARE Course Evaluation

The Adult Religious Education committee wants to provide courses that expand the participants' knowledge of our religion as well as assist them in their spiritual development. Please take a few minutes to complete this form so that we can improve and schedule courses that you will find helpful. We have left the evaluation open-ended so that we can fully consider your opinions.

Course _____

1. The organization of the course was:

2. The materials and handouts were:

3. Was the fee appropriate, too much or too little?

4. The scheduling of the course was:

5. The room and other facilities were:

6. During the course I generally felt:

7. If I were to lead the course I would:

8. My other suggestions are:

9. Other courses I would like to see offered are:
