Ground Rules for Interacting with Others

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The following list of items was prepared to assist individuals in understanding the basic ground rules to follow when learning or working with others in a group, whether that be in a classroom, at work, or in the community. The group is encouraged to read through and discuss this list before beginning to work together.

As some individuals may be less familiar with the following behaviours it may be helpful, from time to time, for other members, the group leader, or the facilitator to share examples of what may be considered more appropriate and less appropriate behaviour.

- **Group Purpose:** When individuals come together or meet, they need to be clear about the group's purpose, topic of discussion, activity, responsibility, or problem/challenge.
- **Preparation:** Group members need to be on time (preferably early) so they don't hold the group up. They also need to have completed any assigned homework or pre-meeting work. Finally, they need to bring all related paperwork, equipment, etc., so they can participate effectively.
- **Attention:** All communication devices such as cell phones should be turned off. Private personal discussions need to cease, as do other activities that will distract members from their work. Group members need to give their attention to the subject at hand.
- **Group Leader:** If a group leader is present, group members should follow his/her direction. If no group leader is present or identified, then the group needs to decide if it wishes to informally select an interim leader.
- **Housekeeping:** There are a number of housekeeping items the group needs to discuss before it starts to work on a specific task, such as: how long will it spend on a specific item; and how often it should meet; what specific steps, if any, will be followed in the discussion; how will the group work together or apart (in smaller groups); what role will different members play; who will record the group's decision, where will the record of decisions be stored and who will be informed about it; and what information should be kept private and confidential.
- **Participation:** All members of a group have opinions. They need to be allowed reasonable time to share their opinions. All participants need to show respect for the opinions of others even if they do not agree with them. Group members need to be courteous and polite, and should encourage or assist others to contribute to the discussion.
- **Active Listening:** Group members need to actively listen to the views of other individuals and ask respectful questions in order to better understand what is being shared. This will help them better understand how others see things differently than they do. Group members need to allow other members of the group to complete their thoughts by not interrupting them.
- **Tools, Techniques & Procedures:** Many different tools, techniques, and procedures may be used by a group to problem solve and/or make decisions. Depending on the issue, it may also be very beneficial for group members to review relevant documents and reports, investigate, and/or conduct research. They may invite stakeholders, consultants, and other relevant parties to assist them as they move forward. The best solution is usually found when all members participate, cooperate, and show respect in a solution-oriented, caring and logical manner.

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- **Process:** Group members should help keep the discussion and activities on topic. They should try not to repeat what has already been said. They should help to ensure the process goes smoothly by being part of the solution and not the problem.
- **Criticism:** Negative criticism and debates with others is discouraged, but positive constructive criticism is encouraged and critical to the best outcome. Keep in mind that some people can be offended when other group members disagree with them, so please be diplomatic. Participants need to keep in mind that how group members speak or present something (e.g., tone of voice, body language) can have a greater impact on the position of others than what they actually say.
- **Professionalism:** Never make fun, joke, ridicule, threaten, yell, or put others down. This behaviour can impair communication, reduce group effectiveness, and destroy relationships. It is also very discourteous and unprofessional.
- **Solutions:** To arrive at a group decision or recommendation, it should be understood that not all members of a group will agree. However, it is important to do one's best to find solutions that everyone can live with. The group needs to predetermine the level of agreement that is needed in order to make a decision or develop a recommendation.
- **Advisory Role:** In some group decision-making processes, it needs to be understood that the group's role is to be an advisor to a higher authority such as an elected official, supervisor, manager, president, board, owner, etc.

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