

Planning and delivering a Training Event



 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS'
COUNCIL

mentality

promoting mental health

Section Three Planning and delivering training 1

Faith communities should be places where people feel they belong, and where people's mental health needs are recognised and met. People involved in spiritual and pastoral care can play an important role in improving the lives and spiritual well being of people with mental health needs, and may well have mental health needs of their own. Through discussion groups or other training events on mental health issues, people can be encouraged to come together to share ideas, challenge misconceptions and learn about mental health from one another.

THINGS TO THINK THROUGH BEFORE THE EVENT

You first need to think about what you are trying to achieve, whom the event will be for and how you will publicise it. Issues to consider include the following:-

- Clarify and agree what you are trying to achieve and whom the event is for.
- Decide whom it is best to involve. Are their people in your church or community who have first hand knowledge of mental health, either as service users, carers or professionals? If they are not already involved, invite them and/or seek their advice. Involve mental health service users.
- Decide who is best to lead the event. If no one experienced in leading the kind of event you want to organise is available, seek help from your diocesan lay training department, a local branch of **MIND** or **Rethink**.
- Discuss practical matters like the best venue, time and publicity.
- Encourage group facilitators to think through their own prejudices and expectations of the event and make sure they are clear about the boundaries of their role. They need to be alert to the signs of mental distress, provide a safe and welcoming environment. They should not attempt to diagnose a problem, or assume a therapeutic or counselling role.
- Plan how to support each other during the event and how to take care of those who participate - mental health issues can be distressing.
- Talk to mental health service users about the anxieties they might have coming to an event and find out from them what would help.
- Work out who people can get in touch with during or after the event for support and debriefing.
- Consider how best to follow up the event with participants.

Case study: In the Diocese of Guildford pastoral listeners volunteer to be available after an event. People can talk to them in confidence about any concerns they might have, how any issues raised might have personally affected them and their need for information on specific topics. The volunteers are all people who have completed the *Christian Listeners* training course, provided by the Christian Healing Centre in the Diocese, or chaplains and clergy with counselling experience. Guidelines are provided beforehand so that role boundaries are clear, how to refer people on to specialist services if necessary and what action to take if there is an emergency.

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Know your participants

When preparing for an event, think about the following:-

- How many participants will there be?
- Who might they be?
- Do they know each other?
- What is their relationship with one another, e.g. do some have authority over others?
- Are they used to a workshop format?
- Have they come together just for this event, or are they in an on-going group?

- Have they discussed mental health issues before?
- How much time is available?

Your answer to these questions will affect the structure of the workshop, what introductions are necessary, how you divide the group up and how much time you allow for each exercise. They will also affect how open you can expect participants to be with one another. Remember that a local church group that has an on-going life is very different from a one-off event where initially nobody knows anyone else.

Consider safety issues

It is important to ensure that you consider the safety of all participants in terms of:

- **Physical safety:** Consider overall health and safety issues relating to the venue being used and the event taking place. Tell all participants about fire regulations and procedures in the case of fire, including exit and assembly points.
- **Mental and emotional safety:** Plan ahead for any possible eventuality so that you are able to deal with people's anxieties, and help participants cope with emotional distress by offering support and understanding. It is important to be able to look after anyone who feels vulnerable or emotional during the process of telling their story and help them feel secure. Mental health service users may have worries about issues such as confidentiality and respect for difference. Ensure that ground rules are established at the beginning of the event.

A common concern among people planning work on mental health is the issue of someone becoming distressed and displaying aggressive or disruptive behaviour. Remember that this is very unlikely, and that it is most important to avoid reinforcing stereotypes about people with mental health problems being associated with dangerousness and violence.

You need to be sensitive to possible antecedents of aggression or distress that might include increased restlessness, loud talking or irritation. A person might also say that they are feeling angry or upset. Ways of dealing with potentially difficult situations include:-

- Avoiding what might seem like threatening or aggressive behaviour
- Behaving calmly and keeping composed

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- Keeping at a distance that enables the person to feel comfortable, standing slightly sideways
- Talking to the person as an individual
- Acknowledging the person's distress
- Remembering that your own disquiet can instil anxiety in others

Together with another group facilitator you should consider taking the person out of the situation as soon as they are ready to leave.

Publicising the event

Publicity depends on whom you are trying to attract. For existing groups it may be sufficient to place an item in newsletters or bulletins. For larger or one-off events, for example to mark **World Mental Health Day** in October, you might consider distributing information to local self help groups, hospitals, surgeries and health centres and churches of all denominations. You might also consider publicity through the parish magazine, libraries, local media and mental health voluntary agencies.

Organising the venue

You will want the environment within which you run the event to be as comfortable and well equipped as possible. Things to bear in mind include:-

- The number of rooms you might want to use
- The seating arrangement, for example an informal set up is often preferable

- Whether you will want a flipchart, felt tip pens, blu tac
- Will you need an overhead projector and screen, or a VCR, CD-ROM, DVD player, laptop and projector
- Coffee or tea at the beginning, during and/or end of the event and water throughout

Delivering the event

At the beginning

- **Allow time for introductions**

Before the main activities begin, there should always be some kind of introductory exercise, even if participants know each other quite well. The aims of the workshop should be explained, together with an outline of what is planned.

- **Include everyone**

The language you use as a facilitator can influence how participants contribute to the group. Use words that include and respect everyone and convey the sense

that you have not made assumptions about participants. For example, if someone who has experienced a severe mental health problem gets the impression that you assume no one has a history of mental ill health; they are unlikely to be open and honest about themselves.

- **Set ground rules**

Outline the **ground rules** for individual and group behaviour. You could ask participants to think about the conditions under which they feel they will get the most out of the experience, and generate the **ground rules** from this

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discussion. If time is short, outline some **ground rules**, and write them up on a flip chart as a reminder to participants. You can invite agreement, questions for clarification and additions.

Be sure that the following are included in ground rules:

Confidentiality: people should be assured that the information they share will not be misused. Whilst it is usually acceptable to discuss in broad terms what has happened in a workshop, it is important that information or comments are not attributable to an individual.

Setting boundaries: Each participant is responsible for deciding how much they tell others about themselves. Whatever boundaries each participant sets are to be respected by the rest of the group.

Speaking for ourselves and avoiding generalisations: Participants should avoid using generalisations about people or speaking for others. Encourage, 'I think, feel, believe, experience' statements rather than 'people with depression do, think etc,' statements.

Respecting differences: Participants are there to hear and understand different experiences and perspectives, rather than try to convince others that their view is the only correct one.

Timekeeping: Punctuality is extremely important and groups should begin and finish at the times stated on your programme. If for any reason time has slipped it is acceptable to negotiate an extension with group participants.

However participants' other commitments must be respected.

Ways of working in groups

Discussion sessions can be run in many different ways but certain key principles apply whatever your approach. The most important way to ensure a fruitful experience is to use a variety of methods. You might want to combine a presentation

of information to generate group discussion, exercises with people in small groups, sharing personal stories or describing case studies to keep interest and attention going.

Methods and models of working

Keep discussions moving

Questions are part of your strategy as facilitator and a valuable way of achieving the aims of the workshop. Be clear about the purpose of each question. Try to frame questions in such a way that everyone can be involved. Good questions enable participants to explore feelings, values and beliefs, and to be challenged and encouraged –not daunted or embarrassed.

- Avoid questions that have a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer
- Avoid sweeping generalisations such as ‘*what do you think about people with mental ill health*’

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- Choose open-ended questions such as ‘*what do you know about?*’, ‘*how did you feel about discussing...?*’, ‘*what steps should we take next?*’

Thought-sharing

This is a creative way of generating lots of ideas in a short time, and allows maximum group participation. It can be used to produce common definitions and terminology, or to gain an insight into the diversity of opinions and experience of those in the group. It is good as an icebreaker, or in groups where individuals find it hard to contribute. Write ideas up on a piece of flipchart paper, clarifying points as necessary.

Small groups

These are effective for exploring, identifying or clarifying ideas and feelings. They allow every member who wishes to speak to be heard in a less threatening situation. A good way to organise this is to get people sitting at small tables of say six –eight people to encourage discussion and the sharing of personal experiences. A facilitator on each table can help people keep to task.

You can also get people to work with their neighbours in twos or threes to discuss ideas without having to move seats. Give people a clear direction for focus, task and length of discussion and let them know if any feedback will be required. This can be good for discussing difficult topics initially.

Reporting back

Although formal reporting back from each group can be tedious, it is good for participants to compare notes with what has been discussed in each group. A useful approach is to ask each group to select a maximum of between four and six main points, written up on flip chart paper, for everyone to see.

Deal with conflict

Most people do not like conflict and are uncomfortable grappling with it. Christians may find it especially difficult if they perceive disagreement as being in conflict with their beliefs. There may therefore be a tendency to try to resolve disagreement quickly. This can mean either that things agreed on are so vague as to be almost meaningless, or that disagreements are hidden by refusal to talk about them. Help people to disagree with people’s views rather than the person who holds them. One of the richest and most challenging parts of an educational process is that of explaining in detail what we mean and believe, and listening to someone else do the same. Discussions may often be dynamic, emotional and hard to handle. That is why it is important to take steps to make people feel safe and accepted.

Conflict can be destructive if it involves only a small proportion of participants and excludes others. The overall aim of any discussion should be to keep everyone

involved, open, searching and questioning.

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Bringing the event to a close

Each workshop or discussion group needs a clear, comfortable conclusion. Some of the issues you will need to plan for are:-

- Time for wrapping up, summing up what has been achieved
- Reviewing what ground has been covered
- Reflecting back on what conclusions if any have been reached
- The offering of a meditation or prayer is sometimes appropriate
- Providing participants with a short evaluation form that asks for participants views e.g.:-
- Has today helped meet your needs?
- How far did the session achieve its aim?
- What worked well, was most helpful?
- How will it assist your ministry
- What did not help, was least helpful?
- What other related themes would you like covered in future events?

You may want to get feedback after individual sessions. If however you are running a series on mental health issues you might want to evaluate the whole unit at its conclusion. The most important consideration however is to use evaluation to inform future planning.

After the event

Debriefing after an event is useful, especially while impressions are fresh. All of the facilitators should plan to stay on after the event finishes for a maximum of half an hour to talk through any issues. If service users have been involved they should also be offered the opportunity to feed back on the event at this time and be offered support if needed. The lead facilitator should make a note of any important points, as these will inform the planning of future similar events.

References

1. These guidelines have been adapted from those in Webster A (1994) *Discussing Sexuality – Workshop resources for Christian Groups*. Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality.
2. *The Creativity Toolbox: A Practical Guide for Facilitating Creative Problem Solving Sessions*. Team Talk Consulting Ltd. (sales@teamtalk.co.uk)