

# Final Group Facilitation

📅 Thu, Feb 23, 2023 11:52AM ⌚ 1:04:30

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

group, members, facilitators, support, experiences, plural, community, culture, behaviors, people, person, folks, shame, membership, belonging, guidelines, important, safe, boundaries, safety

## SPEAKERS

C I

---

Hi everymany, and welcome to the 2023 Plural Positivity World Conference. Today, we're talking about safer support groups, facilitation for belonging, inclusion and empowerment. 'Safer' because we cannot guarantee that our groups are safe, but we can learn how to create and maintain groups in a way that is safer for both group members and the group facilitators, creators and moderators. Have you ever noticed that plurals start a lot of groups? This is great. Sometimes we don't have facilitation experience. We want to encourage our community to deliberately create atmospheres that create "that encourage learning, healing, recovery and growth. Whether we have experience, instruction, or mentoring in groups" in running groups or not, we all might want to improve our groups, including those looking to create groups from the ground up. This session covers broad strokes of how to create, maintain, facilitate and improve support groups, with a safe culture and community in mind. We'll talk about why we want and need support groups, the importance of safety and security in support groups, facilitating safer support groups, and touchstones for supportive group agreements, and a bit on how to take care of yourselves while running a group. We hope this session will encourage our community to be mindful about the groups we create, help group members contribute as moderators and facilitators, and redirect unhelpful behaviors in support groups that already exist in the community. This presentation will briefly mentioned self harm, retraumatization, shame, some toxic group behaviors, and some problems caused by idolizing organizers or facilitators. We're also going to mention issues with the group culture in itself, such as group gaslighting, excluding group members, and we're going to briefly touch on the topic of banning group members with as little disruption to the community and culture as possible. We touched on some of these issues in our 'The Importance of Belonging' session in 2022. Feel free to take notes to help with memory, but it may be helpful to know in advance that we plan to make the slides available and the link will be at the end of the video. We are the Crisses a polyfragmented quogenic system who figured out that we were plural in 1986. We've created, run and facilitated a variety of in person and online support groups, workshops and ongoing meetings, including queer support groups, business meetings, board meetings, business workshops, coaching groups, conferences and conference sessions. All while being an autistic, introverted, wallflower geek. Often it was one of those "This needs to be done and somebody's got to do it., so it might as well be us" thing. We're giving this session because, given the therapocalypse, we figure the next important step in for the DID and plural community will be in person meetings and support groups. And we would like to help educate group organizers and facilitators to help ease the learning curve and help folk have a better experience. There's no way to cover everything there is to learn about creating and running groups. So we're going to talk about group safety, and how facilitators and group members can be safer in their support groups. We

figured that we should make sure everyone is using the same meanings for some of the words that we're going to use today. The primary role of a facilitator is to assist group members in participating in the group. For our purposes here, a facilitator is anyone who has power or control in the group or its structure. It can be a support group facilitator, a Facebook group owner, a moderator and administrator. Or for example, a game master for an all-plural role playing game, or the party host for a plural conference effort " after party. Someone who can approve or ban if needed, or operates in a smaller approver privileged circle of group members. Some larger groups have several levels of facilitation, with roles and privileges assigned to several group members. A group member or participant in this presentation are the general members of a support group. System in this case will refer to the plural, DID or OSDD system in the support group in question, regardless of who or how many are fronting. For purposes of a plural support group, generally the whole system is the group member. System member will refer to any particular resident within that group member's system. We define safety or safer as threat reduction. We reduce social threat so members feel comfortable sharing experiences and thoughts without fear of judgment or harm. For in person meetings, we increase physical safety by carefully choosing a physical location or screening members and put other safety measures in place to prevent harm or violence. When we provide a safer environment, members feel supported, respected and empowered to participate. Facilitators can only do so much to ensure safety. Members still need to maintain their boundaries and be savvy about potential threats. But we try to provide an environment where folks can relax their boundaries and hypervigilance so that they may get a respite and experience healing. By security, we mean the predictability and stability of a group. When we provide clear expectations and guidelines for behavior, consistent structure and routines, we help build trust within the group and foster safety. We also provide security by taking measures to reduce external threats or risks, such as screening members or protecting confidential information. Community is the overall plural and DID / OSDD big umbrella community. Any who are many, by which we mean two or more. By support groups in this presentation, we mean small intimate groups, perhaps up to 20 or so bodies in the group. Smaller groups are easier to manage and screen for, and they may meet at a set time, whether in person or virtual. Support groups can provide a much more intimate environment than larger groups, and hold fellow members accountable towards specific system or group goals. Most of these groups will meet at a specific time, members are usually screened in some way, and the group hopefully cannot be stumbled onto by new people without permission. It has some layers of privacy and trust. Community groups are larger groups " harder to manage, screen and ensure the safety of. Some groups number into the 1000s, are usually available at all hours online, or can also be time limited, such as in person conferences. Our recommendations are fairly open ended and can serve as inspiration for groups of any size. Please realize that the larger a group is, by extension, the more lurkers and non-participants there are, and the less private and secure it is. We're also not directly addressing meetups here. But again, much of what we talk about in this presentation can be adapted for more casual public meetings. A meet-up usually doesn't include specific membership screenings, and for safety's sake, we usually recommend they take place in a public place such as a park or restaurant. Members meet for a while, then generally go their separate ways. Since these are less safe, it's good to make sure a trusted friend knows where you're meeting up with people, or go with other local plurals you already know. We have some suggestions about in person meetups in our resources.

A culture is a complicated social system, comprised of shared principles and beliefs that helps reinforce belongingness and operates within agreements and a code of conduct to give members predictability and security. It's hard to point to anything and say "That is culture" because culture is more the operating parameters of a given system, not the system itself. A school system is not a culture, but the school system has a culture. So culture is one subsystem within the school system. Thus, when you create a support group, it will develop its own culture. You can influence that culture

by the group's agreements and how they're enforced, or how you role model the agreements and principles. However, your support groups culture is also informed by the members of the group. There are other cultural influences. Ironically, your group's culture is also a subculture of the surrounding cultures in which your support group operates. More about that later.

So why do we want or need support groups? What does it do for us and for the community? What should we expect to be getting from our support group experiences? Support groups provide an opportunity for members to connect with others who might understand us, share similar experiences and help us feel less isolated and alone. They offer a space to share feelings, challenges and triumphs, providing emotional support and encouragement. They allow us to hear similar experiences and help normalize and validate our own experiences. We can learn new coping skills and strategies in a support group, to help us manage our lives. They provide an opportunity for personal growth and discovery. When done right, support groups can lead to improved mental health and wellbeing. A welcoming and inclusive group fosters a sense of community and belonging, helping members feel more connected to others and our environment. Groups we join can provide community role modeling. We can all use examples of well run communities to inspire our internal community. We may also come from toxic family, school, in-patient and work environments, and lack clear examples of how a community can be run in a supportive and positive way. So safer support groups can inspire hope, and set examples for safe, secure, high trust environments that give internal communities traits or ideas to emulate. We can't promise that our support groups will be safe, but we can avoid common pitfalls and craft our support groups to maximize safety " to maximize safety. Support group members may have experienced traumatic events in their past, and similar experiences can increase our overall anxiety, panic or hypervigilance, a process called retraumatization. Those of us with trauma may become triggered and have flashbacks " traumatic memories, emotions or partial sensations associated with a past traumatic event. Trauma is physiological. When our sympathetic nervous system is activated, we may have a full panic reaction such as fight, flight, freeze or fawn. We can react in ways that are out of proportion to the present situation. In the middle of a panic reaction, we may feel like we're re-experiencing our trauma. And even if we could consciously realize we are triggered and reactive, it's very difficult to untangle the present reality from the activated physical and emotional memories from the past, so that we don't react to them. Retraumatization is the aftermath of our nervous system becoming at " activated in this way. Having activated flashbacks can reinforce our nervous system's hypervigilance, erode our res"resilience, and leave us ready to panic again. Basically, being retraumatized can throw our whole system into disarray. As group facilitators and members, it's good to be aware that working with survivors makes retraumatization a common pitfall of interacting in group environments. If the main goal is to support people in recovery, we don't want to retraumatize them in the process. The safety of support group members is a top priority to prevent retraumatization. A new traumatic experience can significantly increase disabling symptoms of trauma and mental distress. Some people end up needing crisis supports, or have increases in self harm and hospitalizations from retraumatization. It's possible for triggers or incidents in groups to cause people to go in-patient. We have more opportunities for retraumatization on people-per-body basis. Different headmate may have experienced different traumatic events. More group members means more system member individuals may witness something graphic or troubling. Stirred up traumatic experiences can interfere with functioning and quality of life, including difficulties with interpersonal relationships, employment and self care. Retraumatization can delay recovery and processing traumatic experiences and decrease the effectiveness of therapy, self work and self care. Avoiding retraumatization is also important for the community as a whole. Unsafe support groups can lead to discord " not the group, not the group, the the application " but lead to discord, isolation, shame and mistrust in the community. Thus, we want to make sure to minimize folks becoming retraumatized in the group environment. A good

mixture of preparation, group guidelines and the emerging group culture can foster an environment that lowers the chance of retraumatization and creates a culture of support and consistency, to help group members prevent and learn how to handle when they have been retraumatized, whether it happens in the group or outside of it.

Here's some signs and tips that group facilitators may need to recognize toxic behaviors by group members, and how to address them. We're going to use our own headmate names in the examples, so we're talking about ourselves with permission. Some members will interrupt, talk over or compete with other members. It's one thing to share one's experiences, but it's important not to allow folks to one-up each other or compete for attention in the group. In real time groups, a facilitator needs to step in and remind members that it's not their turn, that the other member wasn't finished speaking, or to validate the member who was pushed aside. You can say "Crisses, since you've already shared several times, let's hear from someone who hasn't shared yet." Some folks take a stance on everything. Facilitators need to curb dominant or aggressive behavior, such as constantly distracting, derailing or redirecting conversations, or imposing personal opinions on others. Something we might say is "Buck, since we've already heard from you, I'd like to let someone else respond to Faun this time." Another issue can be when folks get very uncomfortable with a topic and attempt to redirect the conversation to something else, which can feel dismissive for someone who just poured their heart out. It would be appropriate to say, "Justin, I'm sorry to interrupt you. We need to get back on topic. Faun shared something really important and heartfelt. Perhaps members want to respond to her." Keeping what we say objective and in the frame of being helpful to everyone, rather than naming the unwanted behavior or judging the person who is taking up too much space. If a member gets triggered, there may be personal attacks, name calling or blaming other members for various experiences or feelings. To handle this, I might pull someone to the side or ask them to step out of the room and let them know. In an ideal world, I'd say something like "I got the feeling that you were upset when Dreal shared her insecurities as a parent. Insecurities don't make her a bad mother. Can we take a breather for a moment to calm down? We would like to stay here with y'all until you're okay to go back inside." Notice that I'm not shaming them, threatening their belongingness in the group or abandoning them outside. We're willing to sit with them in their timeout to help them co-regulate and help them ease back into the group again. We all have our moments we aren't very proud of.

It make it back to facilitators that there has been gossiping or sharing confidential information outside of the group. We address deliberate sharing of identifying information later. Survivors often have poor boundaries and may overshare personal or graphic information, contact people without permission outside of group, or otherwise cross boundaries. We can speak with other facilitators and determine whether it crosses a line or not. As it's likely everyone in the support group is a survivor, we would take privacy and unwanted boundary violations pretty seriously. We would likely contact the person outside of the group. But if it's revealed during group time, or as the group is starting, we'd ask the person outside and again present the facts. "A group member mentioned you are " you shared their phone number with someone else in the group. Are you aware of this?" And take it slowly and carefully from there. Sometimes there's one or more members who have lost patience with empathy with, or empathy for, a group member, and we might notice them actively withholding support or empathy from a specific member. These can be micro aggressions intended to subtly shame or ostracize someone from the group. A member may lavishly comfort one member and be cold towards another, to reinforce that they are holding a grudge. If the group is in person, it may show in the body language as they literally turn their back on someone, roll their eyes or make impatient or annoyed sounds while someone is sharing. Another way this happens is if they're repeatedly "trivializing or being dismissive of or making light of another member's experiences or

feelings. This is definitely more obvious and can be dealt with in a similar way to someone who is personally attacking someone. I'd pull them aside and say, "Nikki, I saw you rolling your eyes while Star was talking. Is something going on between you and Star?" While our examples are more appropriate for live support groups, we can still use similar tactics to redirect and address toxic behaviors in online and asynchronous groups such as forums or Discord communities as well. If we see someone assertively questioning, or grilling another group member, or challenging something someone says, or one upping everyone, we can pull them aside into DMs and say something like, "I saw how many questions you asked Lissie in that conversation, and I'm wondering what's going on with that." Or "I noticed a pattern in your behavior that has me concerned. Is now a good time to talk about it?" Whenever possible, point to guidelines, group rules or group agreements and indicate what is bothering you by pointing to something objective or factual. We don't have to assume what's going on, but we can share our observations without judgment. There are also problematic group-wide behaviors to be on the lookout for to create a safer and more supportive environment for all members. Basically, these are tricky cultural issues and require some systematic changes to the group culture, changing how the group as a whole operates. The best way we know to change a group's culture is by empowering the folks in the middle to lead changes. In a support group, we're talking about the experienced group members who are not facilitators. These folks have been around a while and are generally more comfortable, their belonging usually isn't at risk, and they don't hold the keys to the space or the power to remove members. Members in the middle can have a lot of influence over changes that groups need to make, both for the membership in general and for the facilitation group. We'll give some examples. When group management is entirely top-down, members may feel excluded from important decisions about the group or feel like things are being done to them rather than for them. This lack of mutual support and validation among group members can be very disempowering for survivors who are routinely disempowered. Some members may feel deliberately left out or marginalized, even if they're not. The first step we'd take is being transparent about the need for changes. Change from the middle requires buy in. If everyone involved can see the problem, agree that changes are needed, agree on what the changes are going to be, how they will be rolled out and are empowered to make changes in how they participate, things will go much smoother, regardless of what the issues are in the group. Enlisting experienced group members first before rolling out changes ensures that the people most familiar with your group's history and culture are totally in sync with the facilitators, and can role model changes to newer or transient group members. Groups may develop power and control issues. Facilitators can be too permissive, so that members lack accountability or direction, or facilitators can be over controlling, micromanaging or shut down group input. Groups are there for group member benefit. Everything being top down can stifle the group, and more top down changes won't help. Middle members can assist with shifting power and control back to the membership by responsibly leveraging power and control offered to the membership, leading conversations, and role modeling more empowered participation. Most importantly, they can help with changes while also safeguarding the culture of the group. Members in the middle are less likely to exploit power and control through misunderstanding the group culture or purpose. Working together, facilitators and middle members can help disempowered members develop into empowered members. When members engage in behaviors that are triggering or harmful to others, such as making jokes about traumatic experiences or oversharing graphic details without warning, we know that there are boundary problems in the group. We would meet with middle members and discuss the issue, with a goal of coming back with a guideline that they as members and us as facilitators think would work. Then introduce it to the general membership and ask for input before deployment. Let the middle members be transparent that they were part of forming preliminary changes and/or give them credit for their help. Some groups develop a culture of shame, blame or guilt, use open threats to ban members to control group behavior, ban members in secrecy, or have a culture of making fun of recently banned members. The members generally notice these things, and this can be really hard to repair. The middle members, unfortunately, have already learned to walk that line and likely aren't feeling able to be very authentic if the banhammer is being

used frequently to control the group. It's still possible to restore faith and trust in the facilitators with top-down humility, and sharing vulnerability with the group. In this case, middle members would be pulled in for a private apology first, and discussing a plan for restoring faith. The folks at the top are likely going to have to prove they really changed. Occasionally, middle members may be a problem. They have big egos, or using the group as a platform promoting their ideas, agendas or beliefs. The group has gotten away from the facilitators and from the new folk too. If they feel threatened, these big egos may throw some weight around and threaten to take their friends with them and leave. You can always try working with the middle members. They may be frustrated as well. They may lead — we might lead a conversation with "We want to encourage everyone to participate equally and make sure that no one feels excluded or overshadowed. So let's make sure we're all working together to create a supportive environment where everyone feels valued." Both encouraging idolization and idolizing people, or hero worship, are very human traits, and hopefully issues we can correct before they get out of hand. Sometimes folks look up to group facilitators more like a fan base. These fans have elevated their idol, and the idolized person is pressured to perform perfection, which is very inauthentic. At best, the hero makes a mistake, falls from grace. And many, many, many famous people have fallen into this pit and their fans end up disenfranchised.

At worst, the fans are devastated after they've invested their own identity in their idol. The idol proves that they're only mortal and fallible, and their fans crash with them. In a community with a lot of shame, c-PTSD and attachment trauma, this can be very devastating. We recommend that people choose very specific traits of those they admire to work towards, rather than invest their own identity in that person themselves. People are imperfect. And then if a person falls from grace, we can still keep the admirable traits we adopted. If we emulate our idols too closely, or they crash too hard, we may be ashamed to have fallen for them and having elevated them on a pedestal. Some group facilitators or community leaders might encourage idolization, and folk in the community who are looking for signs of hope may attach to them. Please be careful out there. Change from the middle here is as important as ever, but it may need to be preceded with some personal humility and admitting that you, if you're the idol, are far from perfect. You'll regain a lot of spoons in the process, which is one benefit, but the fans may resist or be disappointed. But it's better than them crashing. There are other potential factors that may be more group specific or cultural, and can be encouraged or allowed to get out of control. By being aware of these behaviors, facilitators can take steps to address them in a productive and empathic way, to maintain a safe and supportive environment for all members of the group. Learning about cultural humility, and how to be more inclusive to the perspectives and beliefs of different people, can bring a protective factor that helps to open up echo chambers. We don't have to believe what others believe to respect what they believe. Or — nor do we all need to have the same beliefs in order to support each other. Cultural humility recognizes that no matter what I think I know about your culture, I do not know your specific experiences of your culture, nor how that affected you. And if I don't know your culture well at all, I cannot presume to understand anything at all. It's best to ask, to be curious, to backburner what I think I know and truly listen. Only you can tell me what your experiences are. This is also true within cultures I claim membership to. My experiences of, say, queer culture are very different than someone else's experiences of queer culture. I will never learn what they experienced if I talk over their experience. An echo chamber develops from a group where members share very similar core beliefs, and a lack of open mindedness and flexibility, where members are resistant to new ideas or feedback. These ideas and beliefs aren't always correct and can come — become very entrenched in the group's culture, leading to resistance to change and being corrected when ideas or beliefs are based on false information. Dependency on these cultural dogmas can limit growth and learning for the group members, as well as hinder progress towards recovery and healing. Gaslighting, which in its shortest definition is manipulating someone into doubting their own perceptions and experiences, is harmful and can

erode trust and safety within a group. Group facilitators can identify gaslighting, and work to prevent it. In a group setting, we might see a group member pressured by others about what they're experiencing, feedback that their experiences aren't true, that something they think happened did not happen, that they should question their member memories or experiences, or that their experiences are too crazy for membership in the group. These are warning signs of gaslighting, and moderators can step in and replace it with respect for people's subjective realities. The members went through whatever they went through, and they have their feelings and needs about it. Support the person being attacked, and remind other members that we don't push our realities, beliefs and ideas on others or erase people's experiences here. In almost every corner of our community, our groups can do better to support and raise up the voices of multiply marginalized individuals. Most plurals, whether or not we have DID, are part of an oppressed minority simply by being plural. But so many of us also struggle with neurodivergence, transmesia, class oppression, medical negligence, racism, economic hardships, housing insecurity, addiction, incarceration, victimization, trafficking, and more. While plurality may be one of a few last frontiers of systemic oppression and epistemic injustice to get any recognition from society at large, this is no excuse to turn our backs on anyone else left behind, or multiply marginalized individuals who are plural and seeking our support.

We've heard it said that to right oppressions and injustices, we can look to our most marginalized within our cohort. And if we serve them well, we serve everyone well. In some cases, it may be difficult to reach out to the populations that need us the most, such as our brethren who are imprisoned. So we can take every opportunity to include and cherish those who do show up on our doorsteps and take them in, give them a place to belong, ask what they need, and what they need change so that we can support them. If a minimum of 1% of the general population is plural, we can look around the room and know who is missing. We're glad to watch this conference reach more people across language barriers. What other barriers can we dismantle? We can find out by being humble, asking questions, and listening. Maintaining a diverse and healthy group dynamic requires acknowledging and valuing different perspectives and experiences, and creating a safe and inclusive space for all members to share. This can help group members feel seen, heard, understood, and foster a sense of community and support. As we open up to more marginalized people with diverse experiences, we may hear things we've never heard before, find out more about what plurality looks like in other communities and cultures, and discover frameworks, treatments, symptoms and signs that we didn't even conceive of before. We need to believe people and accept that their point of view matters to them, and meet them where they are. We don't have to agree or experience the same things to be respectful of one another. Medicine, science, spirituality, religion and beliefs are not set in stone. Things change every day, and it can be helpful to remain curious and open and accept that not one human being on the planet knows everything.

Let's talk about some of the actual issues involved in running safer groups. What do we need to keep in mind as we form and improve our support groups? One thing is we need to ensure a balance between safety and support to provide the best possible environment for our members. It can be tricky to balance between creating a safe versus a supportive environment for members. A safe space provides security and reliability and helps members feel comfortable sharing their experiences, vulnerabilities and struggles. A supportive environment encourages growth, healing and resilience. They're not exactly the same thing. And each group member may have different needs for safety and support, even within their own system at the same time. Safety can be change-resistant. It can be helpful for members to be clear when they need to feel safe and need reassurances, rather than recommendations or ideas, to make changes. There's a value in sharing our stories and narratives, but narrating what we've been through may not be safe for others. This is why there ends up being

safety rules around trauma dumping. But perhaps our community can come up with better ideas than completely silencing the narratives. Some members may need more support or reassurance in order to feel safe and comfortable sharing than what we're providing for them. Certainly, if they see toxic behaviors, or people getting harassed in groups, they may not feel safe sharing or speaking up. As facilitators, we personally always want to create a culture of safety in our groups. Lately, this also includes deliberately fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. By setting a good example, we behave in accordance with the culture we want to develop in our communities, following the ethics, principles and values that we want the group to foster and cultivate. This is important because the group's culture, policies and facilitators' approach to guiding dialogue all impact the balance between safety and support. Create a culture with harmony between setting boundaries and allowing room for vulnerability. We may introduce this idea by saying "In this group, we can explore different ways to interpret information, but we cannot challenge people, their identities, beliefs, or experiences." An example of this principle might be "Are you sure that strong, upright wrinkled pillar is a tree trunk? What if it's an elephant leg?" Some topics may evoke divergent opinions and worldviews. It's helpful to remind group members that diversity is important, and it protects against shutting down open and honest communication. It's not just okay to have different experiences and opinions. It's wonderful. Continuously evaluate the group's culture and adjust as needed to ensure that your group remains supportive and safe for all members. A major measure of success in achieving safety and security is how comfortable and reassured group members feel.

Have you decided that you might want to be a group facilitator? In this section, we're dealing with the facilitation role. What the skills are that a facilitator uses, what facilitation is during a group discussion, conflict resolution, facilitator self-care, and lastly, developing the guidelines for your group. A major goal of a support group is to use conversations and sharing stories and ideas from our own personal lives to foster connection, change and healing. The whole reason the role is called facilitator is because they're the group members whose role is to facilitate or enable the discussion to take place. Here's some examples of skills that help facilitate conversation. We actively listen to each participant, showing empathy and understanding. We also encourage group members to take turns truly listening to each other, and to validate each other's experiences and perspectives. We monitor turn taking to ensure that each participant has an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings, and that no person dominates the conversation. We may reflect or summarize a part of a member's share or the day's topic, to ensure that everyone is on the same page – especially good if someone zoned out, or after returning from a break if the group strayed off topic. We can also help members reframe negative or unproductive statements, to encourage positive and productive communication. We can provide feedback to participants, either in the moment or after the session, to help them improve communication and participation in the group. We do what we can to create a safe and supportive environment, including setting and maintaining clear boundaries and ground rules for the group. This includes reinforcing the group culture, and what behaviors are acceptable and not acceptable in the group, and ensure the group members understand these boundaries. It's okay to say, "Mickey I think that may be outside our group's guidelines. Would you like to reframe that?" We model healthy behaviors and positive communication to help participants learn. In addition, we prevent and address conflicts or disagreements that arise. We also may help participants find productive ways to work through them. It's important to manage conflict, spoon drain and toxic behaviors, to honor group members' time, keep them safer and achieve the group's purpose and goals. Groups are all about belonging. Many of the folks in this community have relational trauma, and we can't state strongly enough how important it is to safeguard people's sense of belonging. A good portion of emotional dysregulation for folks with DID and OSDD and other complex trauma issues is from being shame triggered. Shame monitors threats to belongingness. And when shame is triggered, it can spiral quickly out of control. We'll address this along with the power to ban members



on the next slide. We suggest to work from a point of view of getting permission. Check in with people, be careful not to judge or label behaviors, or berate members. We would not threaten folks membership in the group to try to get them to behave within the guidelines. We no longer believe in using belonging as a stick to try to coerce better behavior from our group members. Either someone is a member of our group, or they are not a member. Facilitators build trust by extending trust, by managing our own behavior, and holding space for participants to express their feelings and needs safely. Often, folk need some time to get their own needs heard and feel validated, and still welcome and safe. We encourage group members to share their thoughts and feelings in an open, non judgmental, honest and respectful manner, and listen to others with empathy and understanding. In addition to role modeling self reflection, we may ask group members to reflect on their own behavior and to take responsibility for their actions. Be careful how you frame this, as there may be some trigger phrases around it. It can be carefully framed in the group guidelines and easy to read or copy/paste to remind group members of it. Something in the guidelines that can be read aloud such as "We ask all group members to consider their own personal behavior and the behaviors of those in their system, and to take responsibility for how we conduct ourselves in the group. Please consider how your behavior appears to others and how you would like your needs to be addressed." Conflict resolution strategies such as compromise, negotiation or mediation can help resolve conflicts in a constructive and respectful manner. We encourage you to address conflicts as soon as they arise or come to your attention, to prevent them from escalating and causing potential harm to the group dynamic. We can empower group members to address conflicts themselves, rather than relying solely on the facilitator to resolve them. This helps to build a sense of agency and self advocacy within the group. As we mentioned, we've come to realize that belongingness is exceptionally important especially in this community. So we want to make a special note on banning or banishing members from the group. We don't want to go into a lot of detail on this topic here, as this will be a public presentation, and information like this can be exploited. Also, it's hard enough to have someone have to tell someone that they're not a good fit for the group and try to let them down gently. Shame is a normal emotion that monitors threats to belongingness. It can also cause emotional flashbacks to other types of shame, and these can trigger shame defenders — emotionally reactive headmates. We go into this in our 'Let's Talk About Shame' presentation. Shame can be triggered by any threat to our belonging in community, including any form of ridicule—ridicule, embarrassment, being singled out, openly punished, harassed or any ego attack. When we have problems in any comm—community we belong to, whether online or offline, plural or otherwise, there's a chance to get triggered and spiral out of control. How communities handle and reduce shame for their members is very important, which we also went into in our 'The Importance of Belonging: Community Versus Support, and How to Make It Happen' presentation. Both of these sessions are from our 22 — the 2022 conference. As facilitators, banning is our most final and powerful tool to manage our groups. But if we're not careful, it can also be seen as an implied threat. If we use it lightly, then other group members may feel threatened and react with a deep fear of making a mistake and being exiled from the group. This stifles one of the most important reasons we have support groups in the first place — our ability to share with vulnerability. Group members will stick to acceptable topics and stop taking risks, and they won't gain the same benefits that they could have from their membership. We want our group members to feel safe and secure, to be able to reveal who they are and what they've been through, and to be allowed to express big feels safely without the threat of punishment. So we need to proceed with caution when considering who to eliminate from our group and how to go about it. Protecting members' sense of belonging and security is important. It's usually pretty easy to tell when someone is an authentic group member and has, for whatever variety of reasons, overstepped boundaries, caused issues and warrants attention by the moderat—facilitat—facilitation team. There are a range of possible issues here, such as someone making truly honest mistakes, emotional dysregulation, amnesiac barriers, poor boundary respect, being bigoted, biased, prejudiced, racist, and various other types of non inclusion. And of course, there's our beloved unruly rebels and other headmates. No sarcasm — we love rebels. Sometimes they spot something we don't and act out.

Often there's a real issue, but their methods often lack finesse, and might require toning down or redirection. In these cases, we suggest leveraging any other means necessary before using banning. Reserve it as a last resort. We would want to pull the person aside and hopefully explain what we saw and ask more about what's going on. And if we did decide that banning is the answer, we would want to reassure remaining group members as soon as possible after that, that the situation is regrettable, that other measures, offers of assistance and chances were given, and that we're going to have to work to heal and reaffirm belongingness for the whole group. We personally would consider mentioning to group members which policies were violated — not how they were violated. We would do our best not to talk about anybody who's not present. We would make clear whether any policies need changing. And also we would hope to own any mistakes that were made by ourselves, our group facilitators or our moderators, as well as how we'll try to avoid similar situations in the future. The other case that we had banned someone is very toxic. These are verified trolls who target our community and communities adjacent to plurality, such as trans and autistic or other disability activists. We wouldn't accuse anyone of faking being plural. It's also entirely possible these folks are authentically plural and still plural-phobic, or bad actors within our groups. Thus, rather than someone in the group trying to fake-claim a member, it's not about whether or not this member is or is not plural. It's about whether or not they're deliberately doxxing or leaking confidential information about group conversations, or group members outside of the group with an intent to harass, stalk, threaten, expose, or otherwise violate and harm group members. So we would approach this group with huge cautions. They're crafty, they're very internet savvy, and they deliberately infiltrate community spaces to cause harm. That's all we want to say about this here. If you and your moderators agree and verify that someone fits in this group, ban them without regrets. We would still turn and explain to our group members that we have evidence, privately explain to any members exposed via evidence what was leaked about them, and let group members know that that person is not welcome and will not be returning. Again, as with any shake up of membership, reaffirming belongingness and safety will probably be necessary. Facilitators can take care of themselves, and by doing so model healthy behaviors for other group members. Maintain and take advantage of a list of resources. Not only do you get to take better care of yourself, you can recommend the resources with authority because your system has already used them. This list might include referrals to counseling services or support groups outside of the current group, hotlines, warm lines and more. We can also seek support from other facilitators, colleagues or professional organizations outside of the group to ensure our own wellbeing. By attending other groups and getting advice or feedback on our own facilitation skills, we can develop our skills as a facilitator. Facilitators may be clear about what they are and are not comfortable with in the group, and communicate these boundaries to the members. When we maintain clear boundaries and set limits, others learn to take care of their own better as well. If facilitators are spending their spoons with one-to-one time, or getting constant contacts outside of the group, they will not have as much attention in spoons for the group as a whole. We recommend that facilitators be mindful of their own experiences and triggers, and learn to manage their emotional responses in the group. We're there to hold space for others, although we're certainly not perfect and have our own feels. So if we do have a meltdown, it may be good to alert another facilitator and take a timeout, or use containment or distraction techniques and seek support outside the group. We are — if we're not actively facilitating our group, because we have lost our neutrality or detachment from the emotional space, and no one else can step in, then it can affect how safe it is for other members to continue to share. As part of facilitation, we mind our language, tone and body language and strive to create a safe and respectful environment that fosters open communication. We're facilitating communication and participation. And if we also participate, it's good to be careful not to be overbearing, take up more than our share of group time, and to filter our emotional content so that we're not disrupting the safety of the group. Also, genuinely apologize for a mistake without over-apologizing. We're all works in progress, learning as we go.

As facilitators, when we handle our own self-care, monitor a safety plan, and maintain our own equilibrium, we build more resilience to deal with challenging situations in the group. Presence, compassion, trust and gratitude can go a long way to help us protect our spoons, and be proactive handling any emerging issues in the group. If you do make a mistake after apologizing to the group, also seek out self-care for any potential shame triggers or spirals that might come out “ come up for you as well. It's good to have a plan in place for how to address harmful behaviors “ ideas of what signs of escalation to look for, how to redirect a group that's going off track, and how to approach group members to address issues before they escalate. By creating a safer atmosphere where we are empowered to step in and correct issues that might get out of hand, and knowing in advance what we plan to say or do, can help us feel more prepared. Our confidence running the group will also help other group members feel more at ease.

One of the roles of facilitators is screening support group members, and this can help to ensure a safer and more supportive environment. Keep in mind these guidelines are mainly meant for small support groups, and membership might be much more relaxed or open for larger groups, where it would be much too much work to screen members that closely. In the interest of not wasting anyone's time, a support group might have a clear statement of the purpose of the “ and the goals of the group, so that prospective members can self-select whether they are even interested in applying. This also gives us a guidepost against which the remaining screening factors can be checked. What questions are asked, criteria for membership, the number of steps or amount of effort should all match the goals and purpose of the group. If a support group is specifically for people with, say, OSDD, then folks with the DID will simply “ hopefully “ not waste anyone's time trying to apply. Establish clear criteria for membership such as age range, having hit certain system growth milestones, or whether the group is suitable for crisis issues. Gatekeep in service to the support goals of the group. An advanced group will want to attract more members ready for advanced topics. And a transition age youth group might have members from ages 17 to 22, or whatever y'all decide fits your group. We recommend clear membership boundaries that serve a specific purpose. You may want an application process which can include questions about the individual's needs, experiences and goals for joining the group. This process might include an interview by someone on the facilitation team. If someone already knows the member, you might have a different facilitator interview them. Depending on the type of group, reference or even background checks may be desired to ensure the safety of all members. Consider the needs and safety of existing members when screening new members. It's important to consider how they may impact the current group dynamic and whether they would be a good fit for the group. For example, in a small support group, you may not want partners in committed relationships in the same group together. An ex joining a group could be a huge issue, or a boss, or coworker. These members may not be able to be as authentic or share as fully as other members, and in a 10 body group, that's a big issue. It's a lesser issue in larger groups, but can still impact how comfortable folks feel posting or sharing information. Be transparent about the, the screening process, what's involved, and why is it necessary and where the person is in the process. We never want to say no to a potential group member who is applying in good faith, but sometimes we need to say no and hand them a list of alternative resources or groups to consider. If your screening process involves asking current group members whether they are comfortable with the applicant before they're accepted, let the applicants know this. This probably would be a wise move in the small group. Make accommodations for those who may meet the criteria, but have barriers to participation. Also, since you may have to turn folk away, connect them with other resources that could be of help, so they don't feel ostracized or abandoned. Let people down in a neutral and helpful manner. You might say, "I'm sorry, we have to decline your application. Someone in the group said they know you and it would impact their ability to share with the group. Here's some other groups and communities we think would be great a great fit for you. If those don't work out,

please reach back out to us, and we'll see if there's anyone else we can connect you with." Regularly monitor, review and tweak the screening process to ensure that it meets the group's goals and purpose. As your group culture and needs change, your group may grow. A youth transition group may turn into a young adult group. Change the criteria. Also, your group may reach capacity, so you may close the group and stop accepting applications and instead keep a waiting list. Groups will always have attrition as people's needs and availability change. They move out of area, or they have different abilities or priorities. If your group drops below a certain number, it may lose momentum, or the members may agree to open it up again. And you can then contact folks on a waiting list to continue the screening process.

Given everything we've discussed, when we want to start a group or evaluate our groups, we want to look to our guidelines to ensure they both include and empower group members to create a safer support group. We can ensure that our guidelines tackle both what we want from our members and limit the things we don't want by checking our guidelines against some clear signposts. Establish clear boundaries and ground "rules for the group, such as confidentiality and avoiding aggressive language or behavior. Also, regarding contacting members outside the group. As an example, an in person group may have a policy about cell phone use. Some group members may be nervous that someone is recording or not paying attention. However, other group members may need to fidget in order to pay attention. Groups have different policies, and it's good to check in with members to make sure they're comfortable with them. Some groups may have ways to encourage active participation from all members, regardless of background, belief or experiences. Look to ways to foster open, respectful and honest communication and remove barriers to individual participation. Some groups have specific guidelines around trigger topics and how to approach the topics in a safe, respectful and supportive manner. How can we ensure that our groups are not accidentally harming members and that we can also share vulnerability, be authentic and release shame by shining a light on our secrets. More vulnerable group members may need the agency to opt out of known problematic topics. When in person members might preface a deeper share with an idea of what the share will be about, and check in whether or not it might be a problem. In online text base groups, we like content notifications, where you can state the topic and folks can opt out of revealing the information, such as labeled spoilers on Discord. Not every group or community is the right fit for every potential group member or attendee. Someone who knows they're very sensitive might not opt to be in a group that has open shares and no notifications. And that's okay. Thankfully, our support groups don't have to be all things to all people. Outline steps for addressing conflicts or toxic behaviors and how to report or handle behaviors that are outside of the guidelines. Who do they report behaviors to? Is there an alternative if that person needs to be reported? How will these issues be addressed? Lay out the measures that may be taken if someone acts "acts outside of group behavior guidelines, such as being approached by a moderator for a discussion, whether they may be asked to take a break from the group, that someone might be banned if a behavior breaks certain rules, and how repeated issues with specific group members will be handled. As we're talking about plural and DID systems here, it may be important to discuss shared responsibility for headmates as well, and whether a whole system will be responsible for a specific headmate acting out of alignment with group agreements. Remind members and facilitators to take care of themselves and seek support if needed, including providing outside resources or additional support for members who may need more, such as being able to talk to a facilitator alone, crisis lines, referral to counseling services, or some support groups that may better fit their needs. Review the guidelines regularly with the facilitator team, and occasionally with group members, so they can be updated to reflect the needs and opinions of all group participants.

In summary, support groups provide a valuable source of belonging, comfort, security and healing for plurals, especially those dealing with trauma, disabilities or social isolation or oppression. This is why it's important to create a safe and supportive environment that promotes healing and helps individuals avoid being re-traumatized. To foster a healthy support group environment, members and facilitators can partner and be mindful of toxic group behaviors, redirect members who act in ways that disrupt safety and security, and work together to strike a balance between safety and support. Support groups can empower group members when we all reduce conflicts and toxic actions in be €œ in favor of modeling healthy behavior. Facilitators can involve members in creating guidelines and resources that foster a safe and inclusive environment. And we can all remind group facilitators to practice self-care to ensure their own wellbeing. This is how our community can, can create powerful support groups that foster resilience and promote healing for all group members. And here are the resources. This slide deck and extra notes are available at [kinhost.org/movement](http://kinhost.org/movement) in the Taking Action: Group Facilitation Tips section. Check out our substack newsletter at [unitedfront.substack.com](http://unitedfront.substack.com). We have courses at [pluralityresource.org](http://pluralityresource.org) and coaching services available through [liberatedlifecoaching.com](http://liberatedlifecoaching.com). And we look forward to hearing about your success stories in creating and improving support groups going forward. Thank you for attending. Have a great conference and please take great care of yourselves. And let's all build a community that takes care of each other externally as well.