

## FACT SHEET

### Encouraging network participation

**This fact sheet provides guidance to help networks develop meeting ground rules that support participation and sharing of professional perspectives.**

#### About MHPN networking

MHPN works with mental health practitioners to improve interdisciplinary collaborative practice within local communities.

To help achieve this aim MHPN supports locally-based practitioner networks to meet regularly to share ideas, learn about other disciplines' perspectives and expertise, and ultimately improve referral pathways.

Network membership is voluntary and members often include; psychiatrists, GPs, psychologists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, and other practitioners involved in delivering primary mental health care.

#### Networks are self-determining

Networks are self-determining and make decisions about:

- > the practitioners from within their professional community that are eligible to belong
- > their group's purpose
- > the content to be covered in meetings.

Making decisions like these will help inform current and future members' expectations about participating in each network.

#### Promoting a safe and open networking environment

MHPN encourages network members to develop some general agreements or ground rules that will provide a safe and open environment for network participants to engage with each other.

The network coordinator, as part of their role may lead the group in formulating the ground rules.

#### What are ground rules?

Ground rules set the behaviour and participation expectations that the group has of individual participants. Having clear and shared ground rules aims to encourage productive involvement by all group members.

#### Benefits of ground rules

Within the MHPN meeting context, establishing and agreeing on ground rules may have a number of benefits, including:

- > helping to provide a comfortable environment where every person feels safe in sharing and listening
- > assisting to establish healthy boundaries
- > agreeing on an acceptable standard of behaviour
- > sharing the responsibility of managing behaviour amongst all group members, rather than this task becoming the sole responsibility of the network's coordinator
- > developing a process to help resolve any issues that may arise within the group.

#### When should ground rules be set, reviewed and communicated?

While it's probably preferable to set ground rules as part of the first meeting, this task can be undertaken at any time.

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Groups may decide to review the rules annually, monthly or at each meeting – there's no right or wrong answer.

Once the rules are agreed it is important that they are made available to all current and future members. This can be done by placing a print out of the rules next to the Attendance Sheet, attaching the rules to the meeting invitation or by noting them at the beginning of each meeting.

### Tips for developing ground rules for your group

MHPN appreciates that many coordinators and group members will be experienced in developing group ground rules and encourages use of these skills.

The following aims to provide a few examples of how networks may approach the task of setting ground rules:

#### > Brainstorming

*Step 1:* The coordinator introduces the activity by outlining the rationale or benefits for developing ground rules.

*Step 2:* The participants brainstorm to generate a list of potential rules or guidelines, with the coordinator facilitating to encourage open discussion involving all members.

*Step 3:* The group comes to agreement on ground rules.

*Step 4:* The ground rules are recorded.

#### > Led discussion

*Step 1:* The coordinator pre-prepares a list of common ground rules (could be written on whiteboard or on butcher's paper). These may include:

- > Respecting people's time by arriving and finishing on time.
- > Turning mobile phones to silent.
- > While encouraging debate, opposing ideas are challenged respectfully.

> Confidentiality is maintained, in so far as whatever is discussed within the meeting will not be discussed afterwards.

> Listening respectfully.

*Step 2:* The group accepts or rejects each of the identified ground rules and adds any others.

*Step 3:* The ground rules are recorded.

#### > Coordinator generated ground rules

Network coordinators are often familiar with the needs of their network.

In this option, the coordinator develops a list of ground rules and circulates these to the group for their input and feedback. The ground rules are then accepted or amended.

Adding "setting/reviewing network participation ground rules" as a meeting agenda item may start people thinking about the topic prior to the meeting.

### Need more information?

Many practitioners who participate in MHPN networks are also members of their relevant professional college or association, each of which have rules and codes that help inform their members' conduct.

Referring to these may provide some assistance in setting ground rules for meeting participation.

MHPN's project team can provide advice on options for setting and communicating ground rules. Contact your project officer directly or on 1800 209 031 for assistance.

MHPN's [Meeting facilitation tips fact sheet](#) may also provide some additional guidance. It is available from [www.mhpn.org.au](http://www.mhpn.org.au).

### Want more information? Contact MHPN

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