

## **LESSON 5: GETTING ORGANIZED**

### **Goals/Purpose**

This lesson provides some concrete steps to structure your group. Its purpose is to establish group norms and to agree on decision-making.

### **Objectives**

- Come to consensus about group norms for behavior
- Explore different leadership roles within meetings
- Determine how the group will make decisions
- Practice making decisions as a group
- Identify individual and group strengths and skills

### **Total Time**

2 hours over 2-3 meetings plus team-building and get-to-know-you activities

### **Agenda/Activities**

- Introductions/Icebreaker
- Rights and Rules
- Skills Inventory: 'Organize' Fish Poster
- Dream Team
- Making Decisions
- Closing

### **Facilitator Preparation**

- Make a poster illustrating the roles in the Dream Team
- Make a big poster with the outline of a large fish eating a small fish
- Small fish cut outs on different colored paper (1 cutout per person)
- Discuss mandated reporting laws with your supervisor and prepare for discussing your role as a mandated reporter with the youth

### **Materials Needed**

- Sign In Sheet
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Art supplies
- Dream Team poster

### **Tools**

- TAP into your Strengths
- Dream Team handout
- Fish cut-outs

## **The Basics**

You will need to give your group some structure so that things run smoothly. This lesson includes suggestions for getting organized. You will need to agree on how meetings will run, how group members are involved, and how decisions will be made.

Every successful group involves all of its members in some way. Everyone is needed to create a safe environment, where everyone feels free to be honest, and can be himself or herself. You will also need people to count on to take turns filling different roles in meetings. Most importantly, you will need a few strong youth leaders to serve as a core organizing team; they will share responsibility for organizing the group and keeping it on track.

Although most groups are started and guided by adults, the adult's role is to encourage young people to take the lead. The youth and adults work together and share decision-making. As the group becomes more established, the youth are supported to assume greater leadership and increased decision-making power.

Working together in a respectful way is a big deal. It takes trust, and it takes practice. Some adults can do it easily; others find it hard. The adults need to be able to support young people making decisions and trying new skills, not do it for them. Young people may also find it strange at first that you really believe they have something to offer.

To help keep your group united and strong, we encourage you to use a consensus model when making decisions. Using consensus will allow you to explore possibilities and look for common ground - something everyone can live with. This will also help you build other valuable skills like public speaking, active listening and compromise.

### **Tips for Getting Organized**

- Ensure that youth have opportunities to take on different roles throughout the group's work together. You may need to encourage some youth to consider taking on a role they are uncomfortable with to gain new skills. This will involve preparing the youth to do so.
- Group roles work best when members assume the same role over a period of time where they can develop their skill(s) in a specific area before trying out a new role.
- Working with a small core group to plan helps build leadership within the group and makes the process more youth-driven and youth-friendly.
- Encourage the group to try out making decisions by consensus. Voting doesn't result in everyone being satisfied with the outcome. Even if you discuss this as a group when you determine how the group wants to make decisions, youth may feel disappointed when a vote "doesn't go their way."

## 1. Rights and Rules

15 minutes

Materials: newsprint, markers, Dream Team poster, copies of Dream Team handouts, index cards, pens

Every state has laws mandating professionals to report suspected child abuse, suicidal threats or if a person may hurt someone else. Before your first meeting with the youth, review local mandated reporting laws and discuss them with your supervisor. Get prepared to discuss your role as a mandated reporter with the youth.

a. First, brainstorm the definition of an agreement. We use the following definition: An agreement is a promise or contract that people make. Record all answers on newsprint, leaving room for the group's agreements below.

b. Then ask, ***what happens when agreements are broken?*** You may need to prompt youth by asking them to think about how they felt when someone didn't do something they said they would. Make sure your list includes loss of trust, hurt or angry feelings.

c. Explain we are going to create agreements as a group so we can work well together. We want to build respect so everyone feels comfortable participating.

Give each participant an index card and ask them to ***write down 3 things you want the people in the group to agree to – how you want to be together – what's allowed and what isn't.***

### Sample agreements:

- Be on time
- Let people speak for themselves
- Keep an open mind
- Be willing to compromise
- Have fun
- Youth clean up before leaving
- Be honest
- Don't stay mad
- Respect each other – NO putdowns, no interrupting

a. As a large group, take turns saying the agreements. Record each agreement on the newsprint. Clarify the meaning when needed (e.g. What is respect? How do you show respect?) Ask if they each agree to the 'Agreements' and then ask that they each take responsibility for living up to these agreements and 'calling each other' when they need to.

- b. Explain that you are a mandated reporter and that the law requires you to involve other adults in specific situations. Specify what those situations are and state that the goal is to keep young people safe.
- c. Ask for a volunteer to type up the agreements or a make a poster to hang at all meetings as a reminder of the agreements.

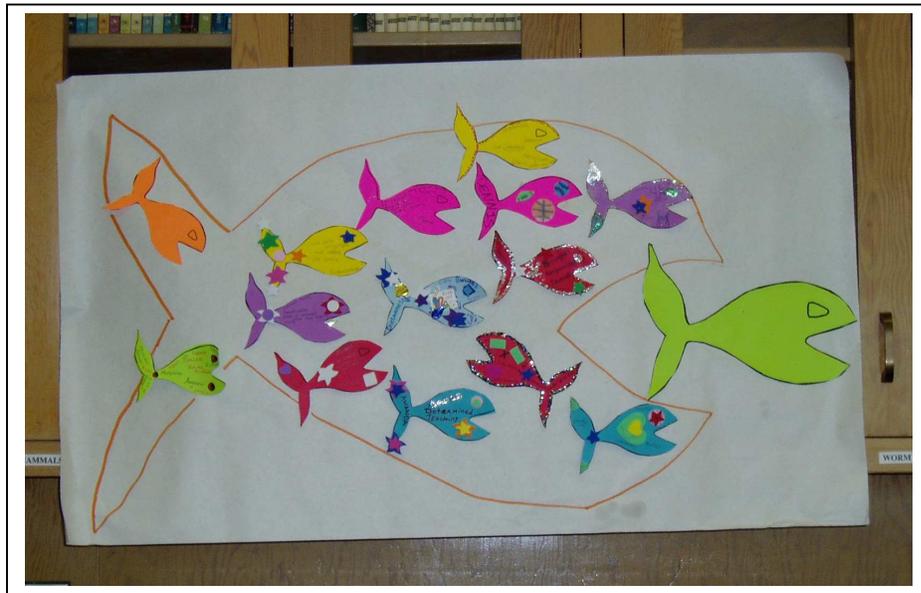


## 2. Skills Inventory: “Organize” Fish Poster

30 minutes

Materials: outline of a large fish eating a smaller fish, small fish cut outs, art supplies, tape

Before the meeting, post the fish poster so everyone can see it.



a. Explain that we all bring a lot of skills and talents to the group. We are going to spend some time identifying our individual strengths and see how these will help us in our organizing work.

Let each person select a small fish of his or her color choice. On their fish they write or draw their strengths, abilities, talents, interests and experiences.

You might need to help youth identify their strengths and skills. Here is a brainstorm of topics you can use:

- Talents (music, poetry)
- Hobbies
- Volunteer activities
- Special knowledge (e.g., written a school paper on an important topic)
- Computer skills
- Strong Writers
- Clubs or organizations that youth belong to
- Listening
- Creativity, energy
- Speak a language other than English
- Know community or school officials

b. Divide the group into pairs for youth to share at least one thing they put on their fish. Then, each pair takes a turn introducing each other's strength. After the pairs have gone, each person adds their fish ***inside*** the large outline.

c. After the outline has been filled in, ask the group:

- What do you see in the picture?
- What do you think the message is?
- Do you think the small fish alone have a chance against the big fish? How about together?
- What do you think this has to do with community organizing?

Make sure your discussion includes how individual talents, interests, experiences brought to the group, help the group, and shape what we do. Also, the small fish represent us as individuals. Alone, we might not have a chance making a change, but together we have much more strength and diversity. We rely on each other and need each of us working together to reach our goal.

### **3. Dream Team**

**15 minutes**

Materials: copy of the poem "TAP into your Strengths," Dream Team poster, tape, post-it notes, pens

a. Introduce the activity by reading out loud "TAP into your Strengths" (see Tools). This can prompt youth to think about their own potential unique contribution.

b. Then, explain that this is *their* group, and *they* are key to its success! Ask participants to ***write down one thing they want to contribute to the group.*** Tell them it can be something from what you read or something they think of on their own.

c. Next, explain that we need some structure to help things go smoothly and we also need each of us to make a contribution. So, here are some roles that other successful groups have used that might be helpful to us.

## DREAM TEAM

### **FACILITATOR**

Runs the meeting by directing people through the agenda

### **SCRIBE**

Takes detailed notes during meeting. Writes up the major accomplishments and goals for next meeting.

### **TIME KEEPER**

Makes sure that everyone sticks to the time schedule

### **PEACE KEEPER**

Reminds people of agreements.  
Keeps your eyes open for any conflicts or arguments.  
Gets the people involved to discuss the issue calmly.

### **GREETER**

Welcomes people to the meetings and helps fill-in latecomers without disturbing the rest of the group.

### **RECORDER**

Uses newsprint or chalkboard to help people keep on track of topics, suggestions, and decisions discussed at the meeting. Saves the paper to look back at later!

Use the Dream Team poster to go over the meaning of each role. Answer questions for each. It is a good idea for people to try out a role for 3-4 consecutive meetings so they can practice building their skills in that area, then they can rotate to a different role.

d. Give participants 2-3 post-it notes to go around room and sign up to take on different roles. Ask for a volunteer to make a schedule of who is doing what for the next month's meetings so you can keep on track.

As your group becomes more established, it will be important to form a core organizing team and identify 2 Lead Organizers who can take a lead in planning group activities as well as represent your group. It is a good idea to give youth opportunities to take on short-term leadership roles so they can explore and test their leadership abilities.

**Check out the *Leadership Development* section for more on what it takes to be a leader!**

## **4. Making Decisions**

**30-60 minutes**

Materials: newsprint, markers/pens, poster of consensus model

This is a very important topic so make sure you have plenty of time and energy for discussion. Since it can be a sensitive topic, and your group probably hasn't had a lot of shared experience yet, you might want to start out with an icebreaker and/or a team-building activity related to the topic. Some suggestions are the "What's in a bag?" activity and the "New Planet" activity, which can be found in the *Icebreakers, Energizers and Team-building Activities* section.

a. After your icebreaker, and team-building activity explain that one very important rule for a group is how we make decisions. We're going to spend some time talking about different ways people make decisions and then decide how we want to make decisions in the group.

b. Discussion:

- From the icebreaker/teambuilding activity, develop a list of ways groups made their decisions.
- Ask ***what other ways do people make decisions?*** (Make sure the methods below are included on your list)

**Majority Vote** Each person chooses the decision we like best and votes for it. For a simple majority, the decision with the most votes wins. For some decisions (like changing rules) 75% majority is better so the group has clear, strong support for the decision.

**Representation** A small group, such as a committee, is elected to represent the rest of the group and make decisions for them.

**Autocratic** The most powerful person makes the decisions, and that's that. Others participate by doing what they are told.

**Consensus** The group explores possibilities and looks for common ground – something everyone can live with. This keeps the group united and strong.

c. Discuss the pros and cons of each method.

- d. Ask, **How do we want to make decisions in this group?** (You might decide to have a general way to make decisions but also use a different method for 'bigger' decisions. For example, simple majority vs. consensus for 'bigger' decisions.)
- e. Come to agreement on how group decisions will be made.

### How the Consensus Model Works

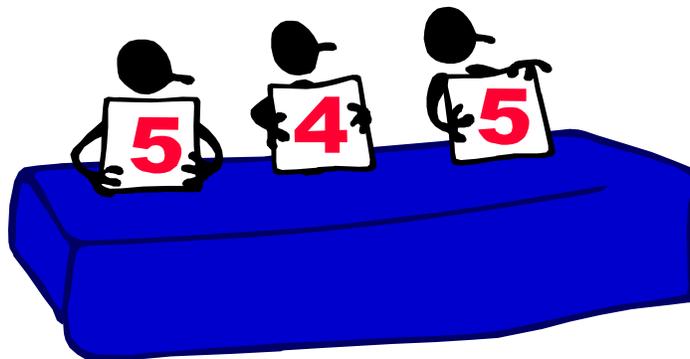
Encourage the group to try using consensus since it keeps the group united and builds other skills like active listening, public speaking, compromise and respect. Be aware that, at first, this model can be more demanding of the youth and the leader but it's worth the extra effort up front.

Here's a sample consensus model that others have used:

- 5 = I like it
- 4 = I like it but I have some concerns
- 3 = I have no opinion and I can live with it (I abstain)
- 2 = I don't like it but I will go along with it
- 1 = I don't like it and I want my disagreement noted in writing (The person needs to state what they don't like about the proposal.)

The way this model works, each person gets to 'vote' on the proposal. (Usually people 'vote' by a show of hands but this requires that people feel safe voicing their honest opinion.) If there are no 1s, your decision is made! If there are any 1s, continue to work toward another solution. Based on the concerns voiced about the proposal, come up with solutions that address those issues.

Tip: If you are going to introduce a consensus model to your group, make a poster to explain how the model that you will use works. Since youth are likely to be unfamiliar with consensus, the visual will help them understand the process and hopefully make it less intimidating.



# Tools – Lesson 5



# TAP Into Your Strengths



## Actions that increase trust, respect & commitment

Laughter and sense of humor

Everyone contributes (stay on task)

**Communicate clearly & to the point**

**Share opinions**

**Value different points of view**

**Cooperate**

Be open-minded

**Ask others for their ideas**

**Try new things**

*Listen*

**Share your strengths**

**Be true to yourself**

Lead by example

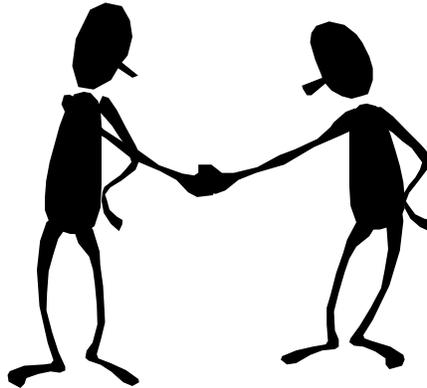
**Welcome challenges**

**Celebrate success**

*Basically, for a group to work well together, it is important to:*

- **Avoid arguing for your own decisions or choices.**  
Give your position as logically, clearly, & briefly as you can. Pay attention to the reactions of the group, think about them, & take them into account when giving your opinions.
- **Don't change your mind just to avoid conflict or disagreement for the sake of harmony.**
- **When a 'stand-off' is reached in discussion, don't get into a competition where someone must win & someone must lose.**  
Find the next most acceptable decision or alternative for the people who are disagreeing.
- **Remember that differences in approach and opinion are natural.**

# The Dream Team



You will need to give your group a bit of structure so that things run smoothly. Here is a suggestion to get you started.

Form an **Organizing Committee**. The committee will represent the core leadership of your group and will be responsible for facilitating decision-making, recruiting new members, and initiating Youth Power projects and events.

An ideal organizational committee is made up of 6 to 10 people. You will need:

- 2 Lead Youth Organizers with a **strong commitment to the group** to
  - Serve as contact people for the group.
  - Make sure that meetings run smoothly.
  - Take responsibility for the organization of your Youth Power group.
- 6 to 8 other members to
  - Be the youth to count on in your group.
  - Take turns filling the following roles in the group:

## **FACILITATOR**

Run the meeting by directing people through the agenda

## **SCRIBE**

Take detailed notes during meeting. Write up the major accomplishments and goals for next meeting.

## **TIME KEEPER**

Make sure that everyone sticks to the time schedule

## **PEACE KEEPER**

Remind people of agreements.  
Keep your eyes open for any conflicts or arguments.  
Get the people involved to discuss the issue calmly.

## **GREETER**

Welcome people to the meetings and help fill-in latecomers without disturbing the rest of the group.

## **RECORDER**

Use the easel or chalkboard to help people keep on track of topics, suggestions, and decisions discussed at the meeting. Save the paper to look back at later!