

Eliot Institute Small Groups

1. Small groups provide a forum to discuss the material presented by the speaker, and where campers get to know each other through sharing and discussion.
2. It is customary to have groups of about 8 people with a healthy mix in the areas of gender, age, and geography. Spouses or partners will not be assigned to the same group. A facilitator - usually an experienced camper - will be appointed ahead of time. The names of the members of each group are in the camp roster. If your name is excluded or included in error, please let the small groups coordinator know right away.
3. Campers are strongly encouraged to attend all group sessions. If you do not want to attend group meetings at all, or if unusual circumstances obligate you to request a change from your assigned group, please inform the small group coordinator on the first day of camp. If a situation arises that prevents you from attending a specific group session, please inform your group facilitator ahead of time.
4. The small groups meet for about 75 minutes after the coffee break that follows each morning talk by the speaker. The group ends its meeting around noon, when parents need to pick up their children. At its first get-together, the group decides the location of subsequent sessions, keeping in mind weather changes and mobility of members.
5. It is customary during the first session to develop confidentiality guidelines and to have a check-in period, when campers will tell something about themselves, why they come to Eliot, and what their expectations are of the camp and of the group. A short check-in at the start of each subsequent session for any camper with a "hot" issue has often been helpful. All conversations are totally confidential unless designated otherwise. Topics of discussion in the group do not have to be confidential as long as personal anonymity is maintained. The group can fine-tune these guidelines as it sees fit.
6. Groups may decide to start and/or end each session with a short ritual, such as a moment of silence, holding hands, a group hug, a mantra, or a chant. It is best if such a ritual is kept brief, and is not imposed on those not inclined to participate.
7. The usual communication guidelines of not interrupting others, not dominating the discussion, and being active listeners all apply. The group has wide latitude in deciding what topics will be discussed.
8. Historically, some groups develop greater levels of intimacy than others do. There is no one "right" way for a group to conduct its activities. Each group will find its own approach with the help of non-invasive guidance from its facilitator.
9. Any criticism of others, including the speaker or the program, needs to be done in a constructive, caring, and gentle manner.

Guidelines for Small Group Facilitators

1. Try to keep a smooth flow of discussion going. If everything comes to a complete standstill (rarely happens), ask a question of any group member.
2. Be very sensitive not to push your own agenda on the group. One complaint we have heard from campers in the past is that facilitators "forced" their own issues or style of discussion on the group. In addition to that, if you have significant criticism of the speaker, the program, or the camp leadership, an appropriate place to discuss these issues is the facilitators meeting (see below).
3. If you are too passive and let matters drift, one or two campers may then dominate the discussion to the consternation of the rest of the group. Such situations need gentle intervention by the facilitator, possibly by asking another member of the group for input.
4. No one should be forced to participate in the discussion. If a quiet person is gently asked their opinion but still does not want to participate, their privacy needs to be respected. They could be approached again at a later date. One approach that may provide greater opportunities for participation is to occasionally go around the circle.
5. Encourage group members to talk about themselves and their own feelings, but be aware that sometimes discussions become "gripe" sessions exclusively. If that happens, try to steer the discussion to a more positive theme. Discussions do not have to always follow the program theme as long as the group agrees on what it wants to discuss.
6. If a group member looks to be in distress, you may want to talk to him/her alone afterwards. If you feel uncomfortable doing that, please relay that information to the Small Group Coordinator or Dean, who are also available to discuss with you any sensitive or confidential issues that may arise in the small group and/or facilitator's meetings.
7. There will be a daily meeting of all the facilitators at 1:00 PM. If the theme speaker attends the meeting, it may last up to an hour. If he or she does not attend, it could be as short as 30 minutes. We may have questions for discussion by the groups distributed at these meetings.
8. Remember the mobility limitations of members when you decide on a meeting site.

Thank you to Munir Katul for creating this information page.