



Podcast 9

How to connect to people & pick up the mood in the room?

There is no easy and clear answer to this question, there are no algorithms on how to connect. Sensing and feeling the group comes with experience and with knowledge about myself in the group – how do I behave, whom do I react to, what is my starting point in an intuitive understanding of emotions. The only way to become fluent in this complex understanding of a group process is a significant number of days spent working with groups as a leader/instructor/facilitator.

On the other hand, there are some techniques which may help to discover the group process and understand emotions in the group.

- 1) We can connect with the group while presenting the aims of the workshop and establishing the rules of cooperation. The group always starts with some tension, clarifying as a trainer what will happen, what is not going to happen, helps the mind of participant to rest – it builds some security in the group. Also introducing yourself as a trainer – increases security, you can decide how deep you present yourself. Normally participants will model on you how deep they talk about themselves.
- 2) During the workshop - try and check in regularly on your emotions. How is your mood changing when you enter the room? Sometimes you cheer up from the idea that you need to leave home for the group, sometimes you might respond with sudden tiredness, and you can immediately connect it clearly to the group. Other times it might be less clear where a positive or hard feeling is coming from. Your emotions can be both – signs of your mood or signs of group process. You can reflect well once the session is over and you are once more on your own. You can learn what are your own reactions to the specific processes in the group. You also need to observe the group in different settings. Observing, reflecting, seeing your own changes in your mood, in your physical sensations or in your energy levels, will help you to understand group process. This important task will not be easy at first, but with time and experience you will gradually improve.
- 3) A useful tool to understand group processes is called “the opening circle”. You ask participants to share something about themselves, in the range they feel to answer. The content of the question should be adjusted to the subject of workshop.

Here are some examples for the beginning:

“How are you? What are your thoughts and feelings about coming to the workshop today?”

“Where is your attention now?”

“How was your mood this morning?”

“What has happened on your way to the workshop?”

We can ask symbolic questions as well: e.g. “What weather/color/animal are you right now?”

You can start the day with an opening circle and finish with a closing circle. You can ask participants to share their struggles, successes or reflections about the work, especially if you feel hidden tension in the group.





“Are there any struggles? Any needs? Any hard-to-express needs?” If you create a safe space for people to talk, they will cooperate and you will be able to better understand the process and the group.

- 4) To prepare yourself for the workshop – work on the script/scenario. Take the diversity of the group into consideration. Research the group needs. Make an effort to find representatives of the group, talk with them. Be curious about people. This is how you can connect. Create exercises and choose a topic suitable for them. If you are starting to work with groups, this can be the easiest way to sense the group.

The main source of tension in groups often is the leader himself/herself.

The trainers’/facilitator’s role is difficult, and it is easy to make mistakes, for example by being too quick for the group or being too slow, giving too much or too little attention to some participants. Maybe it is not possible to avoid mistakes completely. Being aware of your own mistakes, how they can affect the group and reacting to them - can be useful to understand group process and building the connection with the group.

