



## **Twenty Tips For Co-Facilitating Batterer Intervention Groups**

### **Tip 1**

Co-facilitators should read continuously on the subject of domestic violence and batterer intervention. This includes attending trainings and seminars as often as possible. Regardless of how much experience the co-facilitators have, ongoing training is the best way to improve the quality of the program.

### **Tip 2**

Co-facilitators should appear equal in rank while conducting the group regardless of their training or experience. For example, if one of the co-facilitators is using the title Doctor, and the other is referred to by their first name, it gives the appearance of one having more influence and expertise. Even if this is true, it can be particularly destructive if the one using the title is male, and the group consists of heterosexual male batterers. It is very important for the co-facilitators to model an egalitarian relationship.

### **Tip 3**

Co-facilitators should make eye contact and be aware of the group members' demeanor at group arrival. This may seem obvious, but it can be overlooked when the staff is busy. The individuals should be addressed by name whenever possible. This will help prevent individuals from being able to hide behind the more vocal group members, and will allow the co-facilitators to gauge progress.

### **Tip 4**

Co-facilitators should keep small talk before, during, or after group to a minimum. This can be done pretty easily by simply encouraging the group members to review their handouts or homework. It will help avoid some of the manipulations and negative male bonding that is attempted. It seems more likely for the male co-facilitators to get drawn into small talk related to sports, fishing, news events, etc. Batterers will often, whether consciously or not, use this approach to avoid dialogue with the female co-facilitators.

### **Tip 5**

Co-facilitators should trade off duties such as opening, closing the group, collecting fees, cleaning the board, straightening chairs, completing paperwork, etc. This helps model a good partnership.

### **Tip 6**

Co-facilitators should meet at least briefly to discuss their group topic and strategy for each session. It does not matter how many times they have conducted the session. The planning

segment is just as important as the implementation. This includes debriefing after the group as well.

### **Tip 7**

Co-facilitators should follow notes from the curriculum, even if they have it memorized. Facilitating the group discussion from memory is not a good idea. The group can take many twists and turns that consequently allow important points to be lost.

### **Tip 8**

Co-facilitators should not walk out of the room or away from the discussion unless there is an emergency. If that occurs, or if someone has to leave the room for any reason, the group should be stopped briefly until everyone has returned. Walking away during a discussion, especially for a male co-facilitator to throw something away or refresh a coffee, can send the message that whatever the female co-facilitator, or what anyone else is saying, is not very important.

### **Tip 9**

Co-facilitators should stand or sit opposite each other, so that the group's verbal and nonverbal communication can be observed and confronted if necessary. This technique requires constant focus. For example, the female co-facilitator is talking about the topic when a group member shrugs his shoulders, or rolls his eyes; the co-facilitator can see the behavior and then confront it. Furthermore, the co-facilitators should be able to provide an appraisal of each group member's performance while in the group.

### **Tip 10**

When group members are describing their violent behavior, all minimizing, denying and blaming should be confronted. It can be stated in the rules and read aloud at each group. When the behavior occurs, the other group members should be coached to confront the behavior (so the co-facilitators do not always have to). Without having a stated rule or expectation, the group members will not likely assume this responsibility on their own.

### **Tip 11**

Both co-facilitators are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the group. For example, as the group is getting started, the female co-facilitator is in the process of enforcing a rule or something to that extent, when a group member starts talking under his breath to the male co-facilitator. The male co-facilitator should stop the individual immediately and then help reinforce what the female co-facilitator has said. It may seem obvious, but there are times when the male co-facilitator may be distracted and therefore innocently responds to the group member's question and/or comments. That is why it is important for the facilitators to be paying attention to what the other facilitator is saying or doing at all times during the group.

### **Tip 12**

The co-facilitators should always confront the blatant and the not so blatant sexism. For example, the female co-facilitator makes a statement and the group members seemed puzzled, but the male co-facilitator makes the same statement, and suddenly everyone understands. If this contradiction isn't addressed, it reinforces the subjugation of women. It can easily go unnoticed in a batterers' group. Instead, the male co-facilitator, and sometimes the female, could say something like "she just said the same thing so why didn't you hear it when she said it?" The group member should then be required to address the female co-facilitator; otherwise the group member remains dismissive to her, which is exactly what the problem was in the first place.

Also, there should be a limited number of examples of women in traditional roles such as: in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning, child care, and so forth, because they don't reflect equality.

### **Tip 13**

The female co-facilitator shouldn't always be the one to confront the negative remarks about women. Example: "You don't know my partner; she's always running her mouth about something she doesn't know anything about," or "The police always take the woman's side." Those examples are pretty obvious, but, sometimes they're much more subtle: maybe a look or a shrug. One way for the male co-facilitator to confront this is to say, "Aren't words like nagging and so forth putting women down?" or "How are these words affecting the equality and safety of women?" When confronted by the male co-facilitator, (at least half of the time) the group members could start to see the topic as a valid social problem and not something that the female co-facilitator is overly sensitive to. One way to help draw attention to the problem and help redirect the behavior is to establish a money jar, and each time someone makes a negative stereotypical remark about women, the group member is asked to put money in the jar. Any money collected could be donated to the local domestic violence shelter.

### **Tip 14**

The co-facilitators should never joke or use sarcasm about the use of violence. For example: the male co-facilitator repeats what the group member says "When you take your partner to a bar and all the women there know your name, you better find a new bar, wink, wink!" Or when describing his violence saying something to the effect of "you just slapped her but didn't beat the hell out of her." Whenever discussing violence it is always imperative to keep a serious tone, otherwise it can reinforce the use of power, control and abuse.

### **Tip 15**

The co-facilitators should be cautious about asking the group members what they think generally, or allowing them to express a lot of opinions. Batterers tend to have very different world views; hence one of the reasons they're in a batterers' group. Asking for opinions often provides a platform to talk about issues unrelated to the topic. It is usually better to frame questions or content in a way that helps the individual to think about the subject in a different light or perspective. For example, after watching a DVD the co-facilitator asks the group members to talk about how the man in the DVD was controlling or abusive, or that he seemed pretty confident and self-assured; why is that? It's best to ask questions based on the curriculum. If questions and/or discussion are too general, it opens the door for problems.

### **Tip 16**

Keep lectures to a minimum. Group members usually don't listen to them anyway. Co-facilitators' opinions have little place in a batterers' group. It is more important to establish a group that will help the individuals to feel comfortable enough to open up and talk about their controlling behaviors. They are less likely to do so if they think they are being looked down upon or judged. For example, a co-facilitator might be asked by a group member what they would do if their partner spit in their face? The co-facilitator could ask him to think back to a few minutes prior to the alleged spitting incident, and then ask what they were doing or thinking during this encounter, "Is there anything about your behavior that you are not very proud of, that you might do differently?" This technique helps to disarm the individual, without the co-facilitators thinking they have to scold the group member in order to maintain a respectful environment.

### **Tip 17**

To prevent collusion, praise should be limited. For example, he gets an answer correct or makes a helpful statement. Instead of stating in an animated way, “good answer, cool, great,” you might say okay or thank you, in a pleasant cordial way. Consequently, the group member is encouraged and shown respect, but doesn’t get undeserved accolades.

### **Tip 18**

Whenever an individual needs special attention before or after the group, both facilitators should work together. This should help derail the attempts at co-facilitator manipulation or splitting.

### **Tip 19**

Co-facilitators should give each other eye contact when one is speaking to help model respectful and attentive listening skills. This non-verbal communication is often observed by the group members. The behavior could be attributed to a variety of things; the co-facilitators long history of working together (taking things for granted), they may be new at working together, one could have less experience with the curriculum and/or group techniques, etc. Another issue is that sometimes the co-facilitators disagree with what the other is saying. Whatever the case, the facilitators should work out the details in a setting other than the group.

### **Tip 20**

Co-facilitators should always imagine that there is an outer circle of battered women around the inner circle of batterers. This is an easy, but sincere way of maintaining vigilance of the battered woman’s experience.

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