agenda gap

Facilitator Orientation Guide

Wellstream

The Canadian Centre for Innovation in Child & Youth Mental Health & Substance Use

Facilitator Orientation Guide

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Introduction to Agenda Gap

The purpose of this Agenda Gap orientation is to walk facilitators through the core components of Agenda Gap, to allow our team to learn and hear about the experiences that facilitators bring to their role, and to provide an overview of how Agenda Gap workshops are delivered. It is important to note to the orientation group during the introduction that this a co-learning program, and being an expert is not required. This orientation models the structure of an Agenda Gap workshop.

Workshop Framework

Workshops follow a framework that includes the following elements*: Welcome, Connect & Open, Frame, Activities, and Connect & Close sections.

*The facilitation guide also includes additional resources in the appendices, including a series of how-to-guides to assist groups in developing their project plans in the third phase of the program.

Welcome
Ask participants to introduce themselves and respond to one of the following check-in questions:

- Thinking of 'super power' as a strength that sets you apart, what is your personal super power?
- What is your favourite creative outlet?≈

WHY DO WE DO A CHECK-IN?
Relationships are key to the successful implementation of Agenda Gap. Beginning the workshop with a welcome that allows each person to be heard and to share interesting aspects of themselves and their ideas helps build comfortable, safe group relationships.

Connect & Open (slide 3)

Following the Welcome, the workshop begins with a Connect & Open. This provides an overview of the upcoming workshop content and recaps the previous workshop. The Connect & Open helps determine the group's intention for the meeting and gauges their level of subject knowledge. As the program progresses, this element serves to garner feedback about activity preferences and clarify concepts from prior workshops.

Look forward:

- Provide an overview of the Agenda Gap approach
- Outline program themes, topics, and activities
- Describe the role of an Agenda Gap facilitator
- Learn about the key themes and practices of Agenda Gap

Gauging Knowledge: Ask everyone to share a skill they believe is important to working with youth on the topic of mental health.

Frame: The Agenda Gap Approach

The Agenda Gap program uses a strength-based and community-engaged framework for policy change that transitions through four phases. Each phase enhances core competencies in mental health promotion concepts and application while building capacity for action.

Watch "Mental Health Promotion" Trailer

Agenda Gap Phases

1st phase: Fostering relationships and building knowledge
2nd phase: Bridging knowledge with action planning
3rd phase: Partnering to realize action plans for youth-driven policy change
4th phase: Ongoing connection to sustain and monitor impacts

Cohort Stories: East Van

By design, the Agenda Gap program fosters an environment that supports youth-centered policy change. The nature of this change will look different for each group.

The East Van cohort of Agenda Gap involved a group of youth from different grades who attended a local high school. They identified racism as a key factor impacting mental health for youth in their community. With the support of the facilitation team and a network of adult allies, the group launched a campaign calling on school board trustees to amend the Vancouver School Board anti-racism policy to better reflect and respond to youth's expertise and needs. The youth went on to create a teacher-sponsored BIPOC student group, which became a legacy club through which they could continue their efforts. Following these advocacy activities, regular follow-up with allies and the Agenda Gap team supported the group in extending the impacts of their work beyond their initial advocacy engagement. Additionally, this ongoing connection with the facilitation team provided opportunities to maintain relationships and support the youth in their personal pursuits, including through assistance with resume writing, reference letters, and certificates of Agenda Gap completion.

Program Topics

The core program topics of Agenda Gap are: mental health promotion literacy, social determinants of mental health and equity, and youth rights as a platform for policy advocacy, including influencing systems and system actors.

Ask the group to share their experiences of facilitating or with the core topic areas: What are some lessons you have learned as a facilitator or participant? Of the core program topics, which are you most excited to learn more about?

Facilitators should aim to incorporate terminology associated with these topics in discussion with the youth whenever possible, to reinforce topic comprehension. These topics reflect complex ideas, which require time and discussion to apply.

Your Role as a Facilitator

Agenda Gap aims to create a unique space for youth that is distinct from their environments at home or school, where youth might feel disempowered. Think of Agenda Gap as a 'Third Space' - a protective intergenerational space where mutual respect, growth, and adaptive coping are fostered. In Agenda Gap youth should feel that they can express themselves authentically, that they have trusting relationships with those around them, and that they have the resources to advocate for mental health.

Together, the programmatic elements encourage Agenda Gap facilitators to:

- Embrace a pedagogy of co-learning.
- Adopt a co-leadership role to guide youth in identifying an actionable policy goal.
- Avoid directing decision-making, and instead focus on building youths' confidence in their own expertise and ability to make change.
- Trust in the process and youths' capacity to make change.
- Be committed to the interests of the youth. Bring in real-world examples that validate and build their expertise to explore their interests.
- In discussions, support the youth to make connections between program topics and their lived experiences. This is part of a strengths-based approach.
- Build partnerships with adults and other allies who can support the youth identifying and actioning policy change opportunities.
- Source evidence and other community expertise to support the youth in developing their policy change ideas.

Tips for Building a Youth-Friendly Third Space

AIM TO DISRUPT TRADITIONAL HIERARCHIES & BUILD TRUST

- Facilitators should work to break down traditional "classroom" hierarchies, fostering equity and relatability within the group.
- Challenge deficit-oriented narratives about young people, and instead help them recognize their capacity to create change and the value of their unique perspectives and experiences.
- When appropriate, sharing personal experiences can demonstrate empathy and connection to the issues raised by the group.
- Highlighting what you learn from youth throughout the program also helps build meaningful relationships.

GUIDE RATHER THAN DIRECT GROUP ACTIVITIES

- Aim to guide rather than direct group activities, role-modelling open-mindedness and acceptance of diverse viewpoints.
- Avoid making decisions for the group; instead, focus on building youths' confidence in their own abilities.
- Show your commitment to their interests by bringing in real-world examples that affirm their knowledge and by supporting them in exploring their passions.

CREATE A "NO PRESSURE" ENVIRONMENT

- Encourage youth to participate in ways that feel safe and comfortable—whether by speaking up, deep listening, supporting others, or contributing anonymously.
- Let guest speakers know in advance what makes the Agenda Gap approach unique, and encourage them to use casual, youth-friendly language.
- While the youth-led approach centers young people's voices and leadership, it does not mean they are expected to navigate the process entirely on their own. Encourage them to choose their level of involvement, and be responsive when they identify areas where they need help, especially during the change-making phase.

BALANCE SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS WITH LEVITY

- Balance serious discussions about mental health and illness with small talk, levity, and humour.
- While it's important to use group time intentionally, having fun together is also vital. Make space for joy and connection, and be ready to adjust programming based on the group's needs and interests.
- Set the tone from the start by bringing energy and enthusiasm to the Connect & Open activity.
- Don't be afraid to have fun or show your personality.

EXPAND NETWORKS AND ALLYSHIP

- Support connections between youth and adult allies working in school, community, and policy spaces.
- Before bringing guests into the space, prepare both youth and adult allies, and be ready to mediate to ensure everyone feels included and comfortable.
- Part of your role is to help youth see that adults can be allies—and help adults do the same—restoring trust in intergenerational collaboration and inspiring future partnerships.

FOLLOW THROUGH WITH CONFIDENCE

- It's normal to experience uncertainty and discomfort, especially during the third phase of the program, when youth begin realizing their action plans. Acknowledge this discomfort while maintaining confidence in their ability to create change.
- Offer reassurance and resist the urge to step into a more directive role. Instead, support them in breaking their goals into manageable steps, and trust in their process.

Activity: Getting to Know Mental Health

Ask the group to answer the question: How would you describe mental health to a friend or family member?

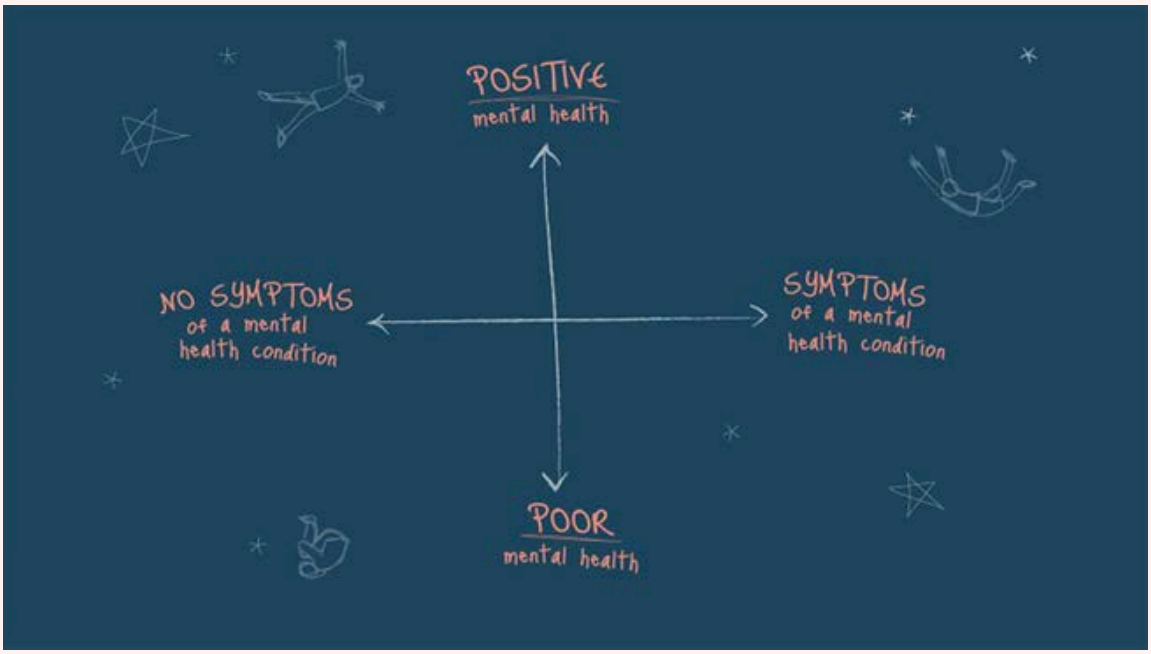
Share "Defining Mental Health" slide and review definitions. Prompt the group to reflect on which of these definitions best fit how they described mental health. Note that the definitions draw a distinction between mental health and mental illness.

Share slide and introduce the "Four Quadrants of Mental Health". (see next page)

In this model, mental health and mental illness are considered distinct but connected concepts. This model highlights that positive mental health, which involves social, emotion, physical, and psychological aspects of wellbeing, can exist alongside the presence or absence or mental illness.

The Four Quadrant model lays the groundwork for understanding that mental health and illness are distinct and that there are different approaches to responding to each. We have found this model helpful for understanding mental health promotion and why policy is an important lever that youth can engage with to improve mental health.

"Four Quadrants of Mental Health" - Continued from previous page



Key Principles and Practices

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Transformative Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) principles foster strong, respectful and lasting relationships to support co-learning, along with skills for self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships. These principles are woven through the Agenda Gap, including in Connect & Close activities and facilitator/ally interactions. The transformative component is generated by the relationships and skills gained by all participants to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive community. Relationship building amongst youth, facilitators, and community allies is the foundation of Agenda Gap.

Invite the group to share their stories of youth-led/centered facilitation - either from when they were youth or from past professional roles.

Key Principles and Practices (Continued)

STRENGTHS BASED APPROACH

Facilitators use a strengths-based approach to identify and build upon the youths' individual and collective strengths. The aim is to recognize, name and support the group's strengths.

Ask each person to share a strength others have recognized in them.

TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE INFORMED APPROACH

In Agenda Gap, we encourage facilitators to enact a Trauma and Violence Informed Approach (TVIA). Four Key Pillars of TVIA as applied through Agenda Gap are to:

- Understanding trauma, violence and their impacts on people's lives and behaviour
- Create emotionally and physically safe environments for all youth and facilitators
- Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration and connection
- Use a strengths-based and capacity building approach to support youth

Adapted from: EQUIP Health Care TVIC Backgrounder

Connect & Close

The conclusion of each workshop involves a Connect &Close activity. This portion is designed as a way to check-in with the group and solicit feedback about their experiences with workshop content and format. It also allows for a brief preview of the next workshop to inspire an intention to return. The Connect & Close activity is a key relationship building and SEL activity that often includes the learning and practice of a self-regulation technique that participants can incorporate into their daily lives.

Conclude the orientation session with two Connect & Close activities:

1. Share the mood meter screen and ask participants to annotate how they are feeling.

2. Ask the group to share a topic that came up in the that they are excited to learn more about.

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