



Facilitation Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Best Practices for Facilitation

Facilitation is primarily focused on creating and empowering participants to be actively engaged in discussion; it's not simply a one-way delivery of information to an audience. As such, it's important to understand the balance between providing participants with information and context they need and letting them engage in active discussion. The following practices can help you find success in your facilitation.

Create “rules of engagement” for the discussion space.

Creating rules of engagement that both define what participants should expect out of you as the facilitator and what they should expect of one another is an excellent way to create a safe space for vulnerable conversations.

After introducing yourself to your group and giving them a chance to introduce themselves to one another (if appropriate), explain that you want to create a safe space for vulnerable conversation. Engage the participants in the process of creating these rules. You can start with a couple that you feel are important and let the participants build from there.

Create an empathetic environment.

When guiding conversations that revolve around vulnerable topics, it's critical to create an empathetic environment. Key to this is understanding that you may not be able to personally identify with the experiences of each of your participants, and that is okay. A facilitator does not need to share experiences with the participants; however, a facilitator **SHOULD** cultivate a safe space where everyone feels they can comfortably share their experiences and feel heard.

Prepare or bring a way to create a visual “cue” to the discussion questions.

Facilitation often takes place in a variety of environments based on the facilities available. Due to the discussion nature of delivering content, it's also quite amenable to different environments. Once you know the type of facility in which you will be delivering your program (e.g., gym, classroom, outdoors), plan to prepare or bring a way to create a visual “cue” for each discussion question you will have participants consider. If in a classroom with technological access, you can do this in the form of a Powerpoint. However, more often you may be in a space that does not have these resources. As such, you can bring a whiteboard and dry erase markers to write questions down or bring printed copies of the questions for athletes to consider.

Note: If you would like participants to engage in reflection that requires recording their answers, we recommend ensuring you have both paper and writing utensil for them to use, rather than relying on them to bring their own into the educational space.

Become comfortable with silence/pauses.

Participants, especially in larger group discussions, may be hesitant to share their perspective immediately. When asking a question, wait 10-20 seconds for a participant to speak up.



Additionally, if you are posing a new question they have not reflected upon, give them 1-2 minutes to think about it before prompting for responses in the larger group discussion.

Know the names of those participating and ask for a participant's perspective by name at times.

If you create a pause, and you are still unable to get participants to provide their perspective, you can call on participants by name to share.

Note: If you go to calling participants by name, it's recommended that you ask them to share the thoughts of a smaller group conversation rather than singling them out for their individual perspective. Participants often feel comfortable sharing a wider group discussion compared to personal examples.

Be aware of how much each participant is contributing to the discussion.

In discussion-based settings, you will quickly find that some participants will frequently contribute to the discussion while others are silent. Calling individuals by name to contribute can be a useful way to get those less engaged in the conversation. Additionally, you should be aware of how much time each participant is talking and try to call on a variety of individuals to provide their perspective.

Use both small group "breakout" discussion and wider group discussion.

In vulnerable conversations, participants are often more willing to participate and share in smaller settings first. Additionally, smaller group "pair and shares" allow for participants to feel less pressure to have a "correct" answer. It's recommended that small group discussions are no larger than four individuals to allow for everyone to have the chance to speak. It can be helpful for the facilitator to walk around while small group discussions are occurring and help provide prompts or clarifications if needed.

Once you give participants the chance to reflect on a discussion question in a small group, you can bring the conversation back to the larger group to ensure diverse perspectives are heard. Large group discussions also give you a good gauge, as facilitator, where the conversation has gone and how to link the discussion to the next part of the program.

Show participants that you are actively listening by summarizing what they said before moving forward.

One demonstration of active listening to your participants is summarizing what they say before moving forward. This can look like an affirmation of a statement shared (e.g., "Ashley, it sounds like your group feel like body talk most often shows up in comments about the style and fit of uniforms), or it can be a link to another area of discussion (e.g., "Thanks for sharing, it sounds like you all identify with the idea that we see several examples of body talk in the media, including articles about uniform rules, sport commentators, and articles being published about female athletes, in thinking about these examples, let's move to the next discussion question...").



These summarizing statements can also help keep you track of how the discussion is moving along and any areas where you may need to provide clarification for participants.

Have grace with yourself!

Facilitation is a SKILL. While it might be easy to discount it as simply asking questions, it takes work to prepare for a facilitation and to ensure participants are actively engaged in the conversation. Preparing for the facilitation to the best of your ability can help ease nerves about the experience. Additionally, vulnerable topics can create additional nerves, as most facilitators want to ensure they honor the gravity of the conversation. Ask your participants to have grace with you and be willing to correct yourself in the moment. If participants highlight an area in which you made an error in the conversation or failed at making them feel safe, be humble and willing to apologize and correct.

It can often be useful to start each facilitation session highlighting that you are entering into this space with the intent to create a safe space and positive impact. You can tell participants that you welcome corrections or conversation if you are not successfully doing this, as you will make mistakes. Priming participants with this statement of vulnerability yourself often leads to both open dialogue and that willingness for them to offer grace if you misstep.

Be prepared to offer grace to yourself. No one facilitates conversations perfectly. Go into the experience with a growth mindset and aim to learn from the experience.



Lessons Learned from USA Volleyball NTDP Implementation

Provide parents and athletes with communication about the program prior to implementation.

Due to the fact that discussions around body image can be vulnerable conversations for youth, we recommend utilizing the parent and athlete communications that are located in the USA Volleyball BCS Pilot Toolkit. These communications briefly summarize the BCS program, provide a trigger warning on the material, and offer nationwide mental health resources in sport.

Be prepared with local resources and know your club's policy if an athlete discloses a mental health issue as a result of the conversation (e.g., eating disorder, body dysmorphia).

The USA Volleyball parent and athlete communications contain a trigger warning on the BCS material. This was created to allow athletes to opt out of the program if they believe it will be more harmful rather than helpful for their mental health.

While it's unlikely, it's possible that the BCS program discussion will lead an athlete to disclose a mental health issue (e.g., body dysmorphia, eating disorders). As such, in addition to the resources USA Volleyball provides, we recommend that you familiarize yourself with your club and regions' policies related to athlete disclosure of clinical mental health issues prior to implementing the program.

Start with some ground rules of engagement and engage athletes in conversation of refining/adding to this list.

The following ground rules have been used successfully in the past in vulnerable conversations. Feel free to use them as a starting point for this conversation and build in additional rules that feel appropriate for your unique team.

1. Speak in "I" statements. Speak from your own experience, but do not speak for another.
2. What is said in this session, stays in this session. The stories and perspectives shared are meant to be for the learning and growth of the group.
3. Be open-minded and respectful of others' experiences.
4. Be aware of how much time you are speaking- allow time and space for everyone in the group to share and all voices to be heard. Listen when others speak.
5. Embrace this as a judgement-free zone.

Be prepared with equipment and know the facility capabilities. Aim to make the athletes as comfortable as possible during the sessions.

The BCS curriculum is amenable to being presented in a variety of environments. During the NTDP implementation, it was conducted in both a classroom setting and on the beach (outdoors). As the facilitator, you should be familiar with the possible environments in which you are able to facilitate



the program. Regardless of the setting (e.g., classroom, gym), aim to make your athletes as comfortable as possible. As such, consider chairs/accessible seating and appropriate modifications for any audio/visual components you want to utilize.

Note: While BCS has designed resources you can use (PP slides), you are not required to facilitate this program with those resources. If you are in a space where audio/visual is NOT available to you, we recommend printing off multiple copies of the questions/activity instructions for each session so athletes always have discussion prompts in front of them.

Be aware of the time and how long you have to discuss each question/complete each activity in your session.

The BCS program is designed to be three one-hour long discussions. The BCS facilitator guides are an excellent way to guide you through the discussion questions and activities that should fit within this timeframe. However, it's important for the facilitator to have a way to keep time and honor the amount of time designated for each discussion/activity. Time passes much quicker than we think!

Adhere to recommended group sizes for facilitation and utilize small group pair and shares to engage everyone in the conversation.

This pilot program is assuming the BCS program will be facilitated with a singular club team per coach facilitator (~12-20 athletes). As such, if you are the facilitator for multiple teams in your club, ensure that each team is able to do it on their own OR do not exceed a group size of ~40 athletes. You want athletes to be able to adequately participate.

Adapt the conversation to the age of the participants.

While the BCS program is designed and proven effective with athletes aged 11-18, it should be recognized that the issues, examples and conversation that takes place with 11-12-year-olds may be very different from older athletes (17+). Factors that contribute to this difference might include:

1. The actual stage of puberty/growth the athletes are experiencing at the time of the program
2. The transitions they are experiencing in their social and academic environments (e.g., moving to HS, moving to college)
3. Their exposure to media and public conversations about female bodies in sport
4. Social media exposure and possibilities to be negotiating new levels of play or involvement in the sport (e.g., moving into college, NIL, coaching)

Due to the potential differences in age groups, we recommend facilitating this program with athletes of similar age groups (e.g., 15-16-year-olds, 11-12-year-olds). When implementing at the club level, this can be quite easy in practice, as you can implement by age-grouped team.

Additionally, it can be helpful to listen closely to the direction of the conversation in the first BCS session and iterate/adapt the second and third session based on topics that feel most pertinent to your age group. For instance, if your group of 18s bring up concerns about NIL or how to keep



healthy views of their bodies in college, you can prepare examples that allow you to continue this line of conversation in later BCS sessions.

Familiarize yourself with current examples of conversations around the female athlete in sport.

The female body is discussed in sport...a lot. Which means there is an abundance of examples you can use to help spur on conversation during BCS sessions. The BCS coach training provided some excellent resources and examples; however, looking on social media, in print and electronic news etc. will allow you to find examples that you think could help facilitate the conversation in a meaningful way.

Note: Younger age groups may be less likely to provide their own examples in discussions around body image. Coming prepared with examples they can relate to is an effective strategy for engaging them in the conversation.

Encourage athlete reflectivity between sessions and communicate about what you expect of your athletes between sessions.

The BCS program has participant workbooks that provide space for the athlete's reflection during a session (and can be used outside of a session). However, you are not limited to using this resource as the main means of soliciting reflection in your athletes. You are welcome to create a resource unique to your own team or to come up with additional questions which may not be part of the BCS program to guide continued reflection.

You are also welcome to assign "homework" to your athletes! Encourage them to find examples that relate to the conversation, to read short articles pertaining to the topics (the BCS coach training has several) etc.

Create alignment between BCS conversations and team culture/actions on the court during the season.

The final recommendation is to make sure there is alignment in the conversations you have, your coaching philosophy, and your actions on the court. A big emphasis of the Body Confident Curriculum is to reduce and change the way the female body is talked about in sport. We recommend backing this up by correcting athletes when you see negative body talk occur in the sport or catching them doing good when they build their teammates up in this space. It is also important to catch your own body talk and the example you set for your athletes.

There are many ways in which you can reinforce the positive message of the BCS program while being authentic to your individual club.