

# How to run a workshop

Workshops are a great way to help people engage with big issues and work together. If you have a well thought out plan and feel confident then nothing should stop your workshop being a great success!

## Get support

If you've never done something like this before, or you're just a bit busy, don't feel you have to do it all alone. You can run workshops as a team, each introducing a different activity, or with one 'leader' and others facilitating small groups. Other SCM members or staff will be happy to give you any pointers you need, or come and visit when you're doing your workshop.

## Plan, prepare, pray!

It is important to have a well-structured workshop plan that you feel confident using. The SCM Group Resource Pack provides a variety of workshop plans, but you and your group may want to explore other issues.

Make sure you know your plan well and have all the resources you need prepared before the workshop begins so that you don't feel rushed or flustered. You may also like to take a moment to prepare prayerfully, asking to be guided and supported.

Plan well but be aware that workshops rarely develop exactly how you've planned; some activities may take more or less time, and interesting discussions may arise. Don't feel restricted by your plan, allow yourself to respond to the group.

## Consider accessibility

If a lot of your workshop material is text based then consider the needs of dyslexic or partially sighted people. If there is a lot of movement involved then the same goes for people with physical disabilities. In the publicity for your

workshop you may want to ask people with any accessibility needs to contact you in advance.

## Clarity is key

In order for people to feel engaged with the workshop, they need to understand what's going on! This may seem obvious, but often if you know the material well yourself, you may skip over things that you take for granted but which may be new to others. Write up a brief workshop structure somewhere, so that participants have a rough idea of where they are going. Try to find more than one way to give instructions. If you can do things orally, visually and kinetically (using actions and movement) then you will connect with more people.

Also remember not to use jargon, acronyms or short forms. For example, if you refer to SCM in a group where all but one person knows that this means "Student Christian Movement", then that one person may feel excluded or lost.


## Time is on your side

Don't feel rushed! Sometimes activities will take longer than you'd planned. As long as the group is engaged then this doesn't necessarily matter. Abruptly moving everyone on may disrupt things. However, if you feel an activity is dragging on, or that one dominant group member is dictating the schedule then it is okay to be a bit strict about time! Above all, do try to end when you've said you would, otherwise you risk a lot of clock-watching from the group.

It's also a good idea to have a few stock games or some



This How to guide was written by Aileen Few when she was SCM's Resource Worker 2009-2010. She works as a chaplaincy assistant in Manchester.



discussion questions up your sleeve in case the workshop activities take less time than expected. Or you could just have longer social time at the end!

## Encourage contribution

It is important to remember that everyone has gifts and thoughts to contribute, so make sure they get a chance to offer them. Ask open questions; if you already know the answer then your question is closed. This may appear to be manipulative, and it certainly won't stimulate discussion.

You may be inclined to dismiss overly dominant group members, but these people are often self-conscious and may need acknowledgement before they quieten. Equally you may want to 'pick on' quieter members of the group, asking them directly to contribute to a discussion. However, this may be intimidating for some. Small group work and 'go rounds' may be more effective, as the focus isn't solely on them. A 'go round' simply means going around the group in a circle asking everyone to contribute, this could be a one-word reaction or a more detailed opinion, whatever is appropriate at the time.

## Size matters

So you planned a workshop for five people and 50 showed up? Or you planned a workshop for 50 people and five showed up? Don't panic, most activities can be adapted to accommodate different group sizes.

If big numbers mean you're worried about time you may want to break whole group activities down into smaller groups e.g. a discussion in four groups of five will take less time than in a group of 20 and ensures everyone gets a chance to speak.

If you have a smaller group than expected this could be a

great opportunity; fewer people means that there's more chance for everyone to contribute and you can take your time over ice-breakers, meaning the group can gel more. Instead of splitting off, keep the group together for the full workshop, you'll be surprised how well it works!

## Issues, issues, issues

Many workshop themes may touch on personal issues for participants. A theme that doesn't seem emotional to you may touch a nerve for others. Remember to be sensitive and open. The workshop should be a safe space where people feel they won't be judged or dismissed. You could say something of this nature at the start to set the tone.

Disagreements may also arise in the group. As long as they are being expressed peacefully then don't feel you have to intervene; this is all part of exploring an issue. However, if there is aggression or you sense others are uncomfortable you may want to divert the conversation to diffuse the situation. You can calmly suggest that people speak respectfully to each other.

## Enjoy yourself!

You've put in a lot of work, now relax and have fun. Don't be so caught up in your plan that you forget to be interested and challenged by the workshop yourself!

