

*Navigating Group
Dynamics*

05

05. NAVIGATING GROUP DYNAMICS

EASY GROUP ICEBREAKERS & MEDITATIONS

Icebreakers

I know, this has the air of a corporate retreat at a hotel near the airport. But icebreakers are great ways to set the tone of a room! A well-executed icebreaker will help create a sense of openness and push just a little bit of sharing—kind of like the ante at a poker table. Even if a lot of participants know one another, don't assume the ice is broken; worse, it could create cliques that exclude people who aren't socially connected. An icebreaker puts everyone on an equal footing.

First, as the leader, you should set your intention with a brief explanation of your “WHY.”

“I hope to set the record straight on how to effectively advocate for yourself with your providers.”

“I hope to help you understand the basic definitions.”

Then break the ice by inviting people to answer a few questions. Everyone should start by stating their name, and answer two or three of the following:

- Why did you attend this session, and what do you hope to get out of it?
- The most ridiculous thing you ever heard someone say about menopause—a rumor, something that was said to you or you experienced, etc. Remember to ask participants to keep it short!
- One fact you know about menopause and one you hope to learn.

Meditations

I start and often end **Menopause Bootcamps** with a meditation. If you're new to meditation, if you're new to the practice, I would suggest you search online for free resources, like guided meditations on YouTube OR apps that offer a library of guided meditations. Here are some of my meditation go-to's:

For opening Menopause Bootcamp:

- Box breathing in video #5.
- So-Hum breathing** (Here's an example: <https://soundcloud.com/ealthenter/so-hum-breathing>). Remember to sound or count out for participants, be slower than feels natural, and time 1 to 2 minutes maximum.
- Any other short guided breathing.

For closing Menopause Bootcamp:

- I always end with Metta loving kindness. I describe what it is and guide them through it: **"May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may you live with ease."**
- Ask them to direct it to all of the aforementioned people and then take a beat.
- Now ask them to direct this mantra inward, themselves:
"I love you, keep going"
- Ask them to repeat it aloud at least three times, and then ask them to slowly flutter their eyes open. **Thank them, and then formally end the course.**

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TIPS FOR GROUPS BIG & SMALL, **ONLINE & IN-PERSON**

The dynamics of a group change based on whether there are four people or 40. (Please, for the love of god, don't invite 40 people to your first bootcamp.) And it changes, too, if it's online or in-person. Having run these meetings every which way, I thought I'd share some of my top learnings for each situation. At the top, everyone should have with them their "Menopause Bootcamp" book, something to write with (which you should provide), and an open mind.

Regardless of group size or format, I always prefer to have someone there helping me. It's an extra set of hands to arrange the room, collect email addresses, aid with technology and social media, make sure people are comfortable during the fitness segment, and be present for the things that worked—and didn't work—for next time. It really does take a village!

Big Groups

- ★ Not to scare you, but these can get unruly from time to time. You have to establish your authority early. Yes, you have to be the biggest voice in the room. Find success by having a gentle but firm hand. Get people's attention and launch in.
- ★ Be meticulous about your timings. If you give people a break, give them an exact time. And don't just say five or 10 minutes. Tell them the time on the clock.
- ★ You might end up with a dominant voice in the room. You'll sense whether you're losing other people while one individual unloads. It is OK to interrupt them mid-thought. You might say, "It sounds like you have a really particular question. Why don't you stay after and we can talk about it more together." Another honest response: "I'm not sure I could answer that. It's a good question to ask your doctor the next time you see them."

Small Groups

- ★ These are easier in some ways. It doesn't take as much work on your part to get and keep everyone's attention. But be prepared to fill in the dead air if the participants are particularly taciturn.
- ★ Check in with the group more often. Ask them if there's anything they wanted to spend more time on. Small groups give you the opportunity to make the content more personalized.
- ★ There's less anonymity in a small group, so people might be a little shy. As I've said, you are not hoping for people to open up or unburden themselves, unless you are a doctor or a trained therapist. But you probably do want some back-and-forth. If your open-ended questions aren't landing, ask yes-no questions. That at least forces some participation!

Online

Luckily—and perhaps sadly—everyone is now well-versed in how to participate in online meetings. But set the parameters early. Do you want people to be unmuted or mute themselves? Should they jump in or raise their hands?

Who is managing the chat feature? There's no right answer, but putting everything out there at the outset will empower people to participate.

- ★ It's hard to talk to a room where no one has their cameras on. However, I wouldn't suggest you force people to have their cameras on. If it seems like people are going incognito, you might say something like, "If you are more comfortable having your camera off, I understand. But if you'd be OK with having it on, it helps me gauge what we need to go over more—and when I'm droning on!"
- ★ You might find people are less talkative in virtual sessions. Here's one way to encourage people to chime in. Every five minutes or so, ask the room if there are any questions or comments. Wait 10 full seconds before moving on. This accomplishes two things. One, people learn at different speeds and the pause gives people time to process both the information you've told them and may help reveal a question. Two, people naturally don't like dead air. Someone may feel the urge to fill it with a comment. And all it takes is one or two people to voice their thoughts and everyone will feel better about adding their voices, too. If you have a larger group, consider creating break out sessions at intervals but also keep close tabs on timing and content.

In Person

- ★ You'll get a lot of visual feedback from participants. Use it—but don't drown in it. You've curated an outline especially for them that challenges their perceptions and gives them information about things that they might not have considered, and may make them uncomfortable. It's OK to lean into a little discomfort, as long as you've established that this is a safe space for learning!
- ★ Ideally, arrange chairs in a circle. It is a tacit signal that everyone is equal in the group.
- ★ Figure out your technology beforehand. The last thing you want to be doing is asking if anyone assembled is good at IT.