

Reflections on Common Agreements – Amber Clark

Prior to our first meeting, I sent out an email asking people to brainstorm and come prepared to discuss one rule or guideline that they felt was essential to an effective group. I used a round robin format to dialogue and discuss the common agreements; this was given 10 minutes. Thus, we developed the common agreements as a group. At that time, there were 6 members in the group. We must have had two that were similar, as we ended up with, and agreed upon, 5 common agreements. Every meeting after, we would revisit them briefly (usually using a thumbs up/thumbs down), but more as an energizer than a discussion. To be honest, I felt that we were using them effectively and there wasn't a need to spend a lot of time on them. We re-discussed them in September 2013 as some group members changed, and everyone accepted them – new comers and veterans alike.

I think common agreements are essential because they establish the norms of the group and allow you to have some standards of accountability for the members. We never really had any problems but we were a small, close-knit group of professionals and we bought into the common agreements right away. I have now since used the common agreements with another group and I feel that not only are they necessary, but they are also a way to educate the members on the effective functioning of a group. They also allow members to hold each other accountable: “We said this was important, are we actually doing it?” I have to say that I have become a huge fan of common agreements; they might not need to be used often, but I feel they are very helpful when they do need to be used.