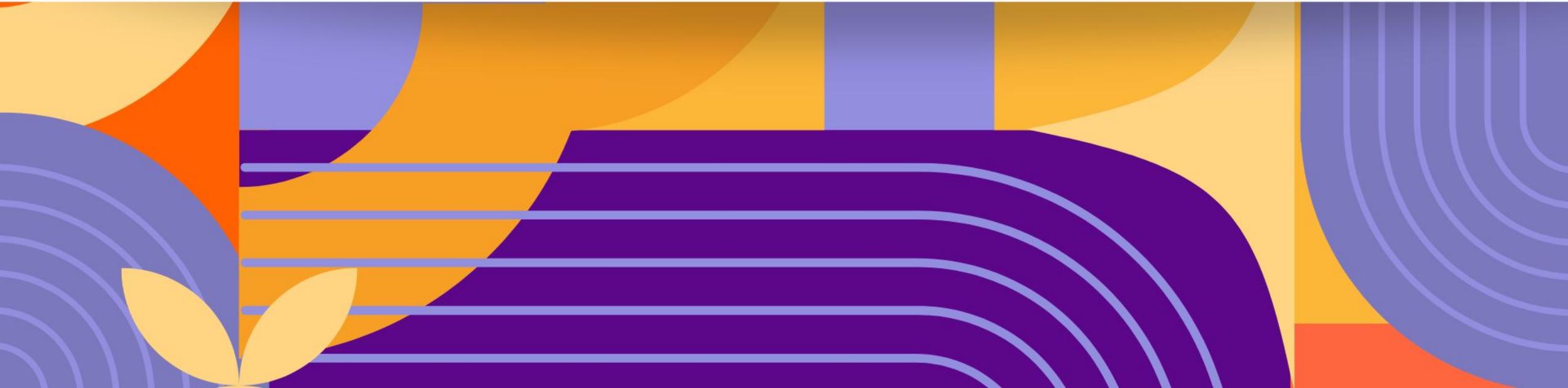




**INTERESTED SUPPORT  
GROUP LEADER TRAINING  
PART 2 – THE SUPPORT  
GROUP LEADER**

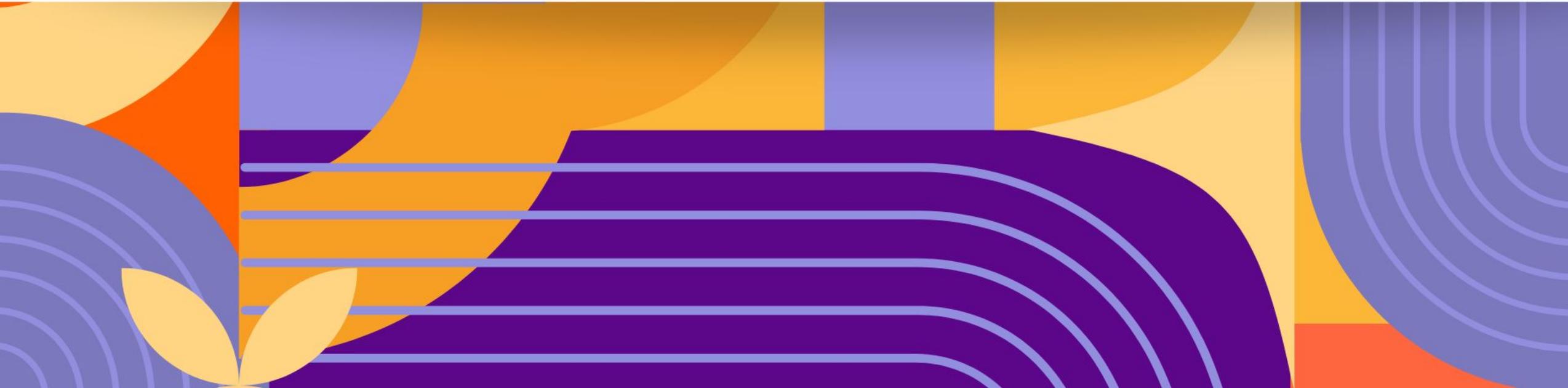
## WELCOME:

Hello and Welcome to **Part 2** of our Online SADAG Support Group Leader Training. In this session we will be looking at the role of the Support Group Leader



# AGENDA:

- Key responsibilities of a Support Group Leader
- Characteristics of a good Support Group Leader
- Group guidelines to ensure healthy Group functioning
- Helpful tips for Support Group Leaders
- Becoming a more effective communicator
- Compassionate Counselling Skills
- Active listening skills
- Looking after yourself

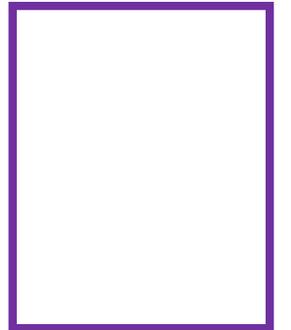




# **KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SUPPORT GROUP LEADER**

## SUPPORT GROUP LEADERS:

- Help to guide and support the Group
- Encourage Members to participate on an equal level – everyone is important/equal opportunity
- Help Members to feel like part of the Group so they feel comfortable to share their thoughts and feelings (you can do this by bringing them into group discussions, “*What do you think about what John said Thandi?*”)
- Remind Members about the Group **values** and **ground rules**
- Don’t be afraid to be firm when someone isn’t respecting the Group’s values
- Be observant. Consider each Member’s posture, expressions and body language. What are they saying about them and how they are feeling?





## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Be sure that you have enough time to dedicate your Group
- Support Group Leaders **do not** have to take on the role of a professional counsellor (**and should not try to**) – a Support Group is not therapy, and Leaders are not expected to be Mental Health practitioners
- The SADAG call center can assist your Members with counselling, containment and referral.
- **However, knowledge is power.** Educating yourself on Mental Illnesses and the topics that your Support Group may cover, will allow you to be prepared for some of the questions and conversations that may come up in your meetings



## Co-ordinating the meetings, this includes:

- Preparing a meeting agenda (this can be as structured or unstructured as you like)
- Identify a topic for the meeting: Initiating ideas, identifying needs and/or relevant topics for planning programs to meet the needs of the Group
- Organise a guest speaker with SADAG when necessary
- Ensuring the Group's Value Statement is adhered to
- Address issues with Group Members who may not be adhering to the Group's rules and value statements
- Manage disruptive or problematic Group Members

## Make sure to maintain a safe space that allows for:

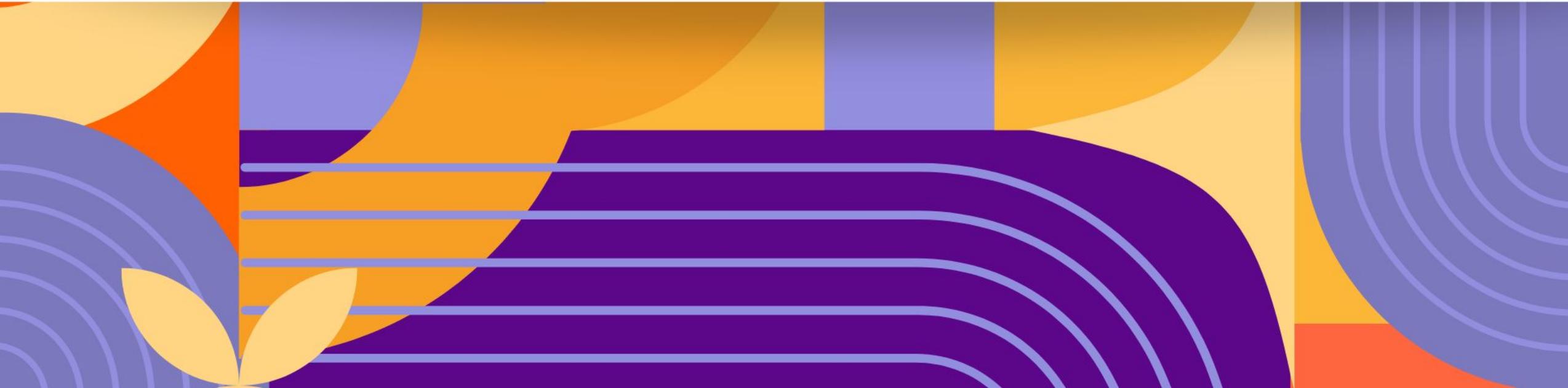
- Equal opportunity
- Non-judgmental environment
- Respect
- Understanding
- Sharing

# LOGISTICS

- Keep Members informed of meeting times, dates, topics
- Notify Members of any changes to these logistics (temporary or permanent) or cancelled/postponed meetings
- If you have a supplementary WhatsApp Group, you will also need to ensure this is monitored and that Members are adhering to the Groups' rules and value statement
- Advertise your Group in your community, again, you can ask Members of the Group to assist you with this, as well as SADAG
- For SADAG Support Groups – making sure that SADAG is aware of any changes to your Group – be it the focus of the Group, logistical changes, identifying a new Leader and so on



- Remember the goal is to get others involved and not to do everything yourself.
- This will empower your Group Members, and reduce the chances of you taking on too much yourself
- Reaching out to your Group and asking for suggestions and ideas is always recommended
- The more you include your Group in decision-making, the more the Group will feel like the “Groups” Group”.





## SECURING A VENUE / ORGANISING LOGISTICS OF AN ONLINE PLATFORM:

(This will be covered in more detail in part 3)

- If hosting a **face-to-face Group**, you would need to arrange and finalise your venue, meeting time and frequency prior to us being able to assist with your advertising (SADAG Group).
- For SADAG Support Groups, only once you have been accepted as a Group Leader and successfully been able to complete your entire information form can we start looking at launching your Group – launching a Group takes roughly a month
- For **online Groups**, you will need to identify the best online platform for you and your Members – Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Discord and so on. Familiarise yourself with the platform and set up recurring meetings so that your Members always have the link
- In some cases, you may find that you need to find a new venue or meeting room for a variety of different reasons – don't be shy to ask your Members for ideas. However, the onus of logistical changes will be on you and/or your co-facilitator together with SADAG's help



## PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETINGS IN ADVANCE:

### Online:

- Reserving the meeting room / finalising meeting link

### Face to face :

- Arranging the room as needed for the meeting: tidying, removing, and arranging
- For special programs or guest speakers, arrive timeously before the meeting to set-up (literature, refreshments, chairs/ audio-visual equipment)

## WELCOMING AND INTEGRATING NEW MEMBERS:

Connect newcomers with longer-term Members

- Designate a person to greet and welcome new people
- Arrange the seats in a circle with longer-term Members interspersed with the newcomers (venue)
- Creating a buddy system

## Remember

- **You are not solely responsible for your Support Group**
- A Support Group Leader is not a teacher-student relationship
- Each Member and the Leader are both the teacher and the student
- **The Group as a whole is responsible for the supportive and informative functions of the Group**
- **By empowering your Members, you empower the Group**

However, one or preferably two people are needed to provide:

- Organisation
- Continuity
- Stability for the Group
- And to assist with enforcing Group rules, value statements and boundaries



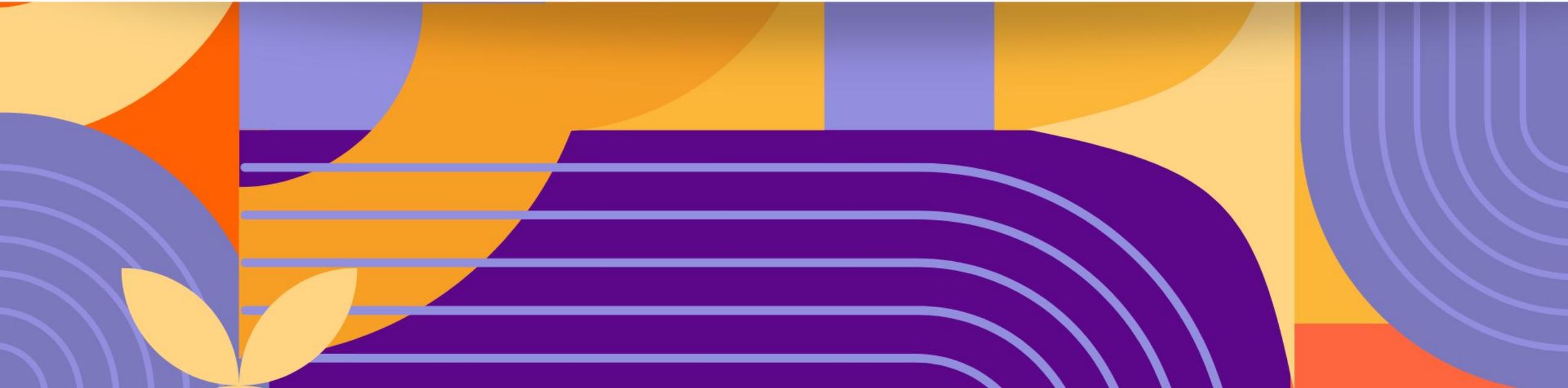
An abstract graphic on the left side of the slide. It features a vertical purple bar on the far left with several thin, light purple curved lines that sweep from the top to the bottom. To the right of this bar is a large, stylized shape composed of several overlapping curved sections in shades of orange, yellow, and purple. The overall design is modern and geometric.

# **CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SUPPORT GROUP LEADER**

A Support Group Leader's job is to help **guide and support** the Group. Encouraging Members to participate on an equal level within the Group, will assist Members to feel part of the Group, and become more comfortable in sharing their thoughts and experiences confidentially

**To be an effective Support Group Leader you don't need to be:**

- A super organiser
- As strong as a rock
- You don't need to have overcome all aspects of your own Mental Illness
- You don't need to be perfect





No-one is perfect, you won't get it right all the time. You may not have all of these characteristics at the same time, in fact you may never have all of these characteristics, but by being open to feedback, and reflecting on Group interactions, both you and your Support Group Members will grow and learn exponentially.

Remember: In as much as you are the Support Group Leader, you are also a Member of the Support Group, you are there because you want to create a safe environment where people can share, you are not there in the role of a professional, so be kind to yourself.



Don't forget: Your interest in becoming a Support Group Leader, and your journey thus far, is already a strong indicator that you have many of these characteristics

- **Seek knowledge** about Mental Health. The more willing and open-minded you are to learning, the more empowered your Group will become. Visit the SADAG website, [www.sadag.org](http://www.sadag.org), for information, videos and handouts on a variety of different Mental Health topics.
- **Be honest** with yourself and your Group
- Be **real**. Express your feelings in an open and honest way
- **Be present in the moment**. Listen to others and don't let your thoughts go elsewhere.

- Be **non-judgmental**. Make sure Members know that the Group is there to listen and share, not to be judged, so steer clear of negative comments – **YOUR STUFF AND MY**

- 
- Showing and having **empathy**
  - Have **compassion** for others
  - At times you may need to be **assertive**: remind the Group of boundaries, values and expectations, to ensure a healthy Group
  - **Observant**: Being able to closely watch the way a Member sits, talks and communicates
  - Being **dependable, reliable and congruent**



- Be supportive
- Be approachable
- Be respectful
- Give Members the platform to talk about what is troubling them
- Focus on listening
- You don't have to offer solutions
- Share your own experiences with your Group
- Use verbal and non-verbal gestures like "go on" or nodding your head to show that you are actively listening
- The more open you are, the more open your Group will be.





**GROUP GUIDELINES  
TO ENSURE HEALTHY GROUP  
FUNCTIONING**

- 
- Group guidelines are a set of values or rules that the Group adheres to, we will cover these in more depth in later on
  - These values are a defined list of acceptable behaviours central to a healthy Support Group
  - When people are aware of well-defined expectations, they are aware of boundaries, and able to communicate and act accordingly
  - These pre-defined guidelines can help a Support Group Leader to maintain balance in the Group, without causing conflict or unintentional hurt
  - The Groups guidelines and values **should be determined by the Group as a whole.** If the Group as a whole agrees to these guidelines, it is more likely that they will adhere to them
  - Spend a minute or two at the beginning of each meeting to remind the Group of the values and guidelines, and when necessary re-open the discussion about them to include additional points where relevant



# **HELPFUL TIPS FOR THE SUPPORT GROUP LEADER**

**Share information, without dictating or dominating:** As a rule of thumb, you shouldn't talk more than any other Member of the Group during a meeting

If you **model leadership, enthusiasm and motivation** regarding the Group, other Members will follow

**Empowering, and gently encouraging people to take ownership of their lives,** and managing their own Mental Illness, can be the greatest gift of a Support Group



- 
- **Create a place of safety by fostering a friendly, supportive and trustworthy environment:** This is accomplished by reminding members of the purpose of the Group and the Group guidelines
  - **Encourage equal opportunity in the Group, this means creating an environment where each Member feels that they have the time, and support to participate**
  - **Try to keep the meeting on track:** Direct conversation back to the purpose of the Group when necessary, or re-direct questions to other Members, when someone is ‘taking-over” the Group and their time
  - **Be an active listener:** There is a lot that can be picked up and understood by observing what is not being said. Being aware of non-verbal behaviour can be helpful if you verbalise what you have noticed when giving feedback. If you think the Group has ignored an important point, go back to it and a bring it up to the Group
  - **Be flexible:** The needs of each individual Group Member from the Group, may be different to your own.

- 
- **Encourage self-esteem**
  - **Avoid making judgments about others**
  - **Create a safe atmosphere**
  - **Be clear with the Group Members that a Support Group is not a substitute for professional treatment**
  - **Empower each other:** As Members of the Group serve as helpers to others, they will feel empowered to take control of their own situation.
- 
- **Follow your instincts:** Don't be afraid to question a statement, communicate your discomfort, or comment on a problem you observe in the Group
  - **Foster personal responsibility in the Group:** It is the Group's Group!

- **Don't force your thoughts onto others:** If someone doesn't agree with you, it doesn't mean they are wrong, it also doesn't mean that you are wrong. People are more inclined to listen to feedback when they ask for it.
- **Accept people for who they are, and where they are in the process of grief and self-growth:** Respect how others feel instead of trying to make them change. Their change will come when they are ready.
- **Leave medical advice to the professionals**

- 
- **Avoid giving unsolicited advice in the Group:** The purpose of Support Groups is to share personal experiences with each other
  - It is important to avoid telling others what they should do/have done as this can be experienced as attacking

Some Group Members may find themselves at a Support Group before they are ready. If a person is upsetting the dynamic of the Group, they may need more one-on-one help. If this is the case, please reach out to SADAG, and we can formulate a plan together of how to deal with the situation in everyone's best interest.

## How to contact SADAG

### **PHONE** 24 / 7

Suicide Crisis Helpline  
**0800 567 567**

CIPLA Mental Health Helpline  
**0800 456 789**

Substance Abuse Helpline  
**0800 12 13 14**

### **WHATSAPP** 8AM - 5PM

Cipla Chat Line  
**076 882 2775**

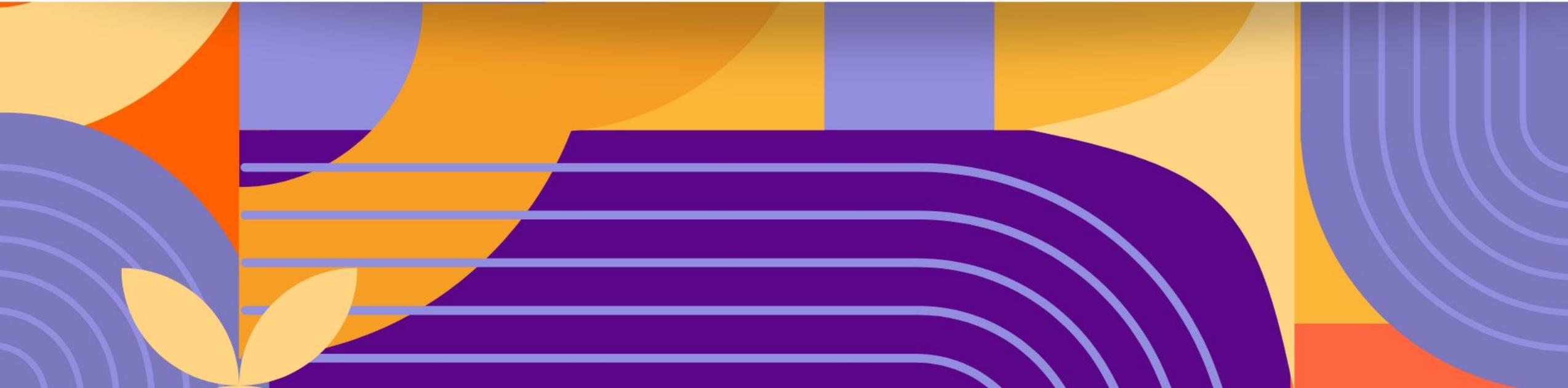
Maybelline BraveTogether  
**087 163 2030**

### **SMS** 24 / 7

**31393**



# BECOMING A MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR



**Keep it simple:** Avoid using jargon that some may not understand, which may make them feel isolated or unsupported

**Convey sincere concern:** Really listen, try to understand things from their perspective. Make regular eye contact, and refer to people by name

**Consider the timing of your feedback:** Timing can be crucial for effective communication. Let Members offload, refrain from automatically offering solutions and advice. People are more open to feedback when they are ready

**Put the talker at ease:** Be patient, look and act interested. Avoid interruption. Communicate using non-verbal indicators

**Avoid argument and criticism:** The Group's aim is to be supportive of one another, which means making space for everyone's feelings and opinions



**Summarise what has been said:** A summary of the important points discussed helps to provide direction for the Group, and makes sure nothing has been missed

**Be aware of how much you are talking:** You cannot listen if you are talking. A helpful gauge is to not talk more than the other Group Members.

**Be assertive:** Members may violate Group guidelines or be disruptive to the group process. Try to deal with these kinds of situations immediately, directly, and tactfully.

**When it is appropriate to say, “I’m sorry,” do not hesitate to do so:** When a misunderstanding occurs, a genuine apology is helpful and appreciated by the whole Group. It shows the Group that you care, and that it is okay to be imperfect and to recognise that in yourself. Forgiveness is an important component of forming trust in the Group.

- Positive interaction creates an effective, safe and welcoming Group environment
- **Use questions to prompt a discussion, return to a topic, or to expand on one that's already begun**
- **Encourage and invite participation**
- **Validate emotions:** Reinforce that this is 'normal' for people to experience in this situation
- **Refocusing:** *"I'm sorry I've allowed the Group to stray from the topic. Let's refocus on the loss we've experienced."*
- **Restating:** To rephrase a statement in order to clarify or to simplify what a member has said. *"So, Toni, am I correct in saying that you are....."*



# COMPASSIONATE COUNSELLING SKILLS



**As a Support Group Leader, you are not expected to be a counsellor – but by using some of the below compassionate counselling skills, you can encourage positive dialogue and interaction within your Group, and between Support Group Members.**

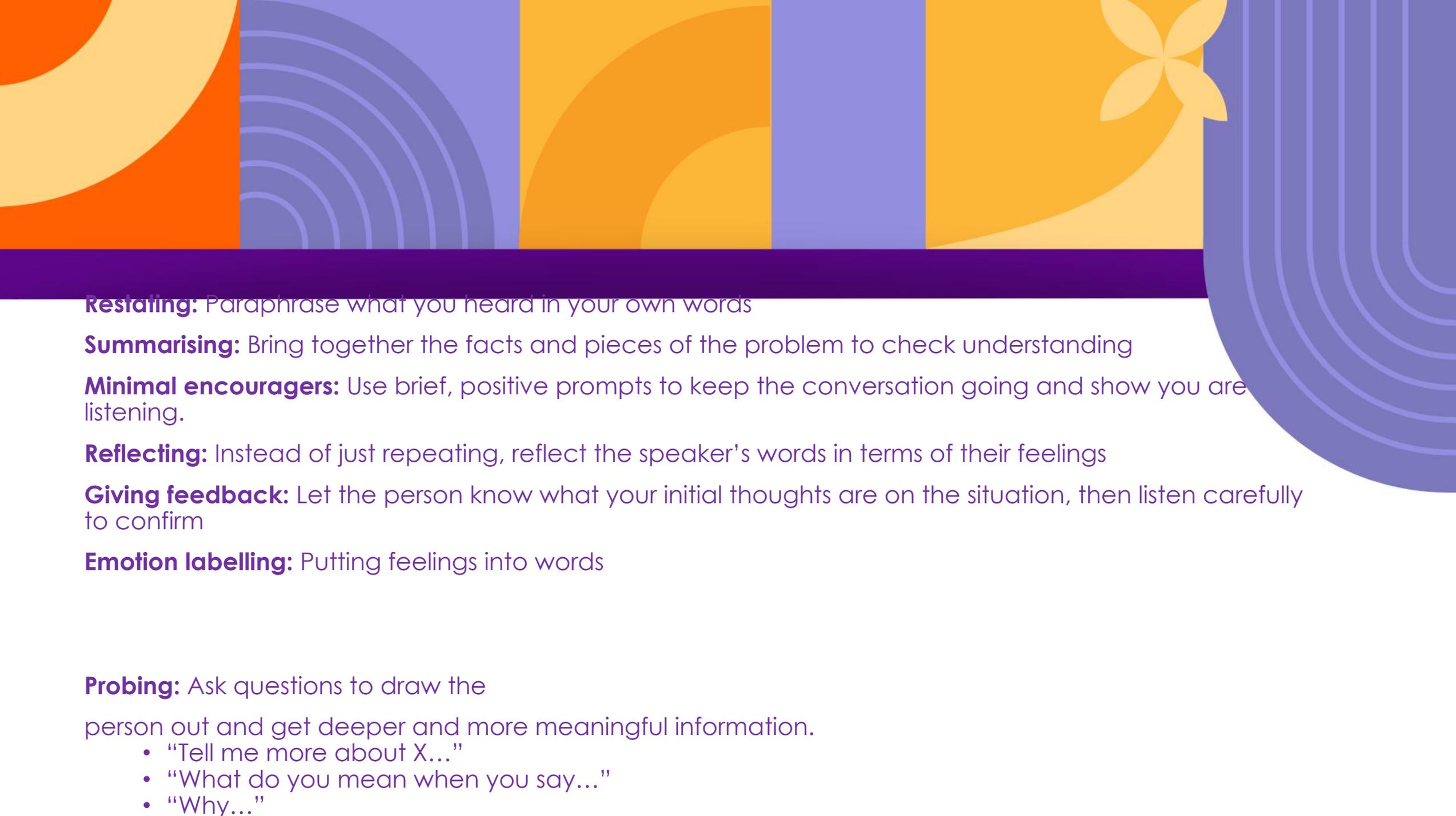
**Compassionate counselling is a form of interpersonal communication in which feelings, thoughts and attitudes are expressed, explored and clarified.**

**It can help a person learn how to deal with certain interpersonal, emotional and decisional problems. Most importantly it helps the person to learn how to help themselves.**

**Compassionate support isn't:**

- Telling or directing
- Giving advice
- An interrogation
- A Confession
- Praying

**Remember:**



**Restating:** Paraphrase what you heard in your own words

**Summarising:** Bring together the facts and pieces of the problem to check understanding

**Minimal encouragers:** Use brief, positive prompts to keep the conversation going and show you are listening.

**Reflecting:** Instead of just repeating, reflect the speaker's words in terms of their feelings

**Giving feedback:** Let the person know what your initial thoughts are on the situation, then listen carefully to confirm

**Emotion labelling:** Putting feelings into words

**Probing:** Ask questions to draw the person out and get deeper and more meaningful information.

- “Tell me more about X...”
- “What do you mean when you say...”
- “Why...”



## **Normalise their experiences and feelings**

- This doesn't mean saying - *"I know exactly how you feel"*.
- Acknowledge their feelings - *"I can imagine you must have felt X..."* or *"It sounds like it must have been very X..."*
- Helps to remember that having an emotional response is normal.

## **Validate their experiences and feelings**

- I can hear you are angry right now
- You are feeling so frustrated
- This must be really overwhelming
- You don't have to agree with someone's feelings or choices to acknowledge their emotions are valid

## **Redirecting**

- If someone is showing signs of being overly aggressive, agitated, or angry, this is the time to shift the discussion to another topic.

## **Summarise**

- Gives the person a chance to clarify, if misunderstood
- Reinforces that you are listening



# **ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS**



## Active listening can be very insightful, and tell you more about how a person is feeling

It can also be helpful to assess a situation

- Does the person need a break from the conversation?
- Is the person getting angry, should the Group move on, and come back when the person is feeling calmer?

You can also use active listening techniques to monitor how the rest of the Group are feeling

- Do they want to move on
- Is someone offended/ hurt/ angry/ sad/triggered



## Body Language

- What does the person's body language say about how they are feeling? Are their arms folded?
- How are they sitting? Do they look relaxed, tired, agitated?

## Being physically and psychologically present

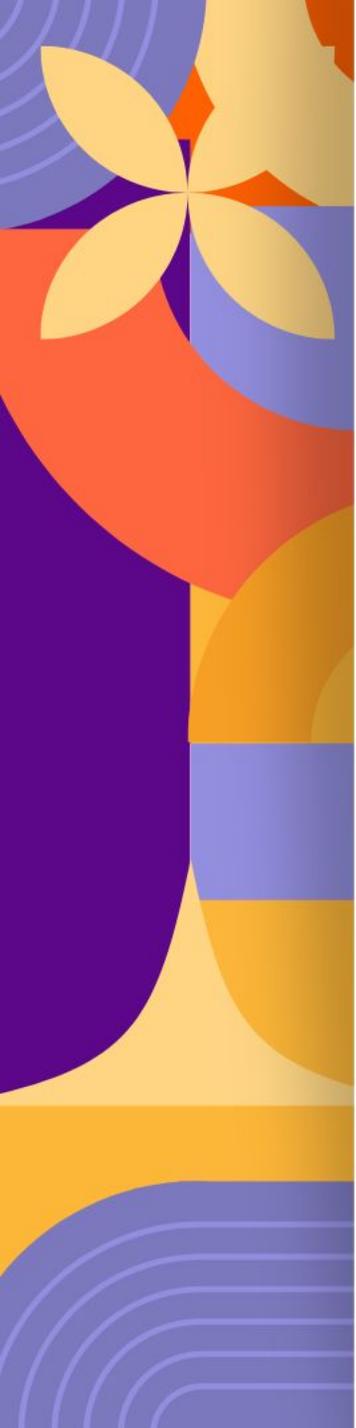
- Avoid zoning out in the middle of a conversation
- Focus on the conversation that you are having
- Don't let external stimuli distract you
- Put your phone on silent

## Your non-verbal communication also matters

- Eye-contact
  - Facing the person
  - Body Gestures
  - Facial expressions
- 
- Being physically and mentally present
  - Engaging with your full attention.



# LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF



## Running a Group is not a reflection of your skill or your worthiness

- Just because you have volunteered to be the starting point for a Support Group, doesn't mean you are solely responsible for the Group
- Be kind to yourself
- You're doing a great job!
- Remember that the Group is the Group's responsibility – not only yours
- **Allow yourself to be vulnerable**, you would want your Members to feel the same
- It's OK to hand over the responsibility of the Support Group to another co-ordinator if you feel like you are not coping or aren't in the right head-space at the moment

It is SO important for you as a Support Group Leader to **take care of yourself**, and respect your own limitations. By installing healthy boundaries for yourself you can prevent 'burn out' and compassion fatigue

- 
- Thank you, and **congratulations** on attending part 2 of SADAG's Support Group Leader online training
  - To continue with Part 3 of the training and/or to let us know how the training was for you please complete the following evaluation and assessment survey **by 5pm on Monday, 30 June.**
  - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2025SGLTPart2>

# Questions and Answers

