



Fears and Hopes Protocol

Developed in the field by educators.

Purpose

One purpose is simply to help people learn some things about each other. The deeper purpose, however, is to establish a norm of ownership by the group of every individual's expectations and concerns: to get these into the open, and to begin addressing them together.

Details

Time for this protocol can vary from 5 to 25 minutes, depending on the size of the group and the range of their concerns. If the group is particularly large, the facilitator asks tables groups to work together and then report out. The only supplies needed are individual writing materials, newsprint and markers.

Steps

1. *Introduction.* The facilitator asks participants to write down briefly for themselves their greatest fear for this meeting/ workshop/ retreat/ class: *"If this were the worst meeting (class) you have ever attended, what will happen or not happen? (Adapt it to make it age appropriate)"* Then they write their greatest hope: *"If this is the best meeting (class) you have ever attended, what will be its outcomes (what would I learn)?"*
2. *Pair-Share.* If time permits, the facilitator asks participants to share their hopes and fears with a partner.
3. *Listing.* Participants call out fears and hopes as the facilitators lists them on separate pieces of newsprint.
4. *Debriefing.* The facilitator prompts, *"Did you notice anything surprising or otherwise interesting while doing this activity? What was the impact on you or others of expressing negative thoughts? Would you use this activity in your school (at home)? In your classroom? Why? Why not?"*

Facilitation Tips

The facilitator should list all fears and hopes exactly as expressed, without editing, comment, or judgment. One should not be afraid of the worst fears. A meeting always goes better once these are expressed. The facilitator can also participate by listing his or her own fears and hopes. After the list of fears and hopes are complete, the group should be encouraged to ponder them. If some things seem to need modification, the facilitator should say so in the interest of transparency, and make the modifications. If some of the hopes seem to require a common effort to realize, or if some of the fears require a special effort to avoid, the facilitator should say what he or she thinks these are, and solicit ideas for generating such efforts. It is easy to move from here into norm-setting: *"In order to reach our hoped-for-outcomes while making sure we deal with our fears, what norms will we need?"*

Variation

One variation that cuts down on time is to use picture or picture postcards that have fairly ambiguous meaning, and to ask participants to introduce themselves and tell how the images they have picked (randomly) express their hopes and fears for the meeting. In this variation, the facilitator listens carefully and makes notes while participants speak, so as to be able to capture expressed hopes and fears for the group's reflection.