

General Event Ground Rules

Meg Barker

Running events, for various audiences, over the years, it is evident that it is worth all of us – whoever we are – thinking about how we interact on such occasions, especially when topics are personally relevant and/or politically charged.

This set of suggested groundrules may be helpful:

Treat speakers and participants with respect

It can be daunting to talk in front of a group, especially about your own work and ideas. It's fine to disagree but try to keep criticism constructive and to own your perspective: 'I think...' rather than 'you're wrong'.

Be kind to yourself self and others

When you have a comment to make in discussion, think first about whether it might feel too personally exposing for you afterwards, or triggering for others, and also whether it leaves space for other people to express different points of view.

Keep it brief and cultivate a culture where all are able to contribute

Keep contributions brief enough that everybody present has the possibility of taking part. As a rough rule of thumb think about dividing the total available time between the number of people present. If you end up talking for a lot longer than this amount of time then it is time to stop.

Remember that some people need a period of silence to consider what to say before contributing or putting their hand up, so don't rush to fill the space.

If you have already contributed, or tend to do so a lot, consider stepping back to give others space. If you don't often contribute, think about stepping forward (if you speak quietly or find it too daunting you could right a comment on a post-its and give it to the chair rather than speaking).

Keep questions and comments clear and relevant

Try to keep questions and comments on the topic and expressed in a way that everyone can understand (including those with no academic background). Particularly consider the relevance of personal disclosures: these can be valuable but can also derail the discussion or make it difficult for others to contribute under some circumstances.

Keep what people share confidential after the event

If people discuss personal experiences, or if practitioners mention people they work with, remember not to discuss these outside of the event (with others, or with them if it is a confidential space). Also be very careful only to talk about other people who have given you explicit permission to do so.

Dealing with problems

If you have any problems with the event, talk to the organisers individually, or email them afterwards, rather than bringing it up during the discussion, unless explicitly invited to. Put yourself in the shoes of the organisers!