

Tips for Running a Safe Sisterhood Meeting

Purpose and scope of the Sisterhood Group

Sisterhood groups are a way to extend the support and welcome of the WI out to wider communities. They are open to all and are spaces for people to come together to socialise, learn from each other, and share their experiences of living as women. Below are some tips which you may find useful.

Opening a Sisterhood Group session

Open the meeting with a reminder of the group's ethos, and the purpose of the Sisterhood space and remind attendees that the meeting follows the organisation's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and the NFWI Code of Conduct. Below is some text that you can use at the start of each session:

....(add name of group....) is a transinclusive space. By attending (...add name of group.....) events, you are agreeing to respect the organisational belief of NFWI that Transgender women are women.

Whilst we acknowledge and respect all views, this group has been created specifically for those who share the NFWI's organisational belief and wish to work together to reflect this and create a transinclusive space in their community. NFWI have designed this as an optional activity for those who are interested in creating that space.

We welcome anyone to attend and this group, which is open to all. However, anyone behaving disrespectfully or undermining our work to create a safe and supportive space for transgender women will be removed from the meeting, at the discretion of the group Facilitator.

You can also use the text above on any online booking page.

Facilitating a Sisterhood Group session

A WI Sisterhood Group Facilitator will be present at all Sisterhood Group sessions and will lead the session's activities and create a respectful and inclusive environment. Over time, with the reaffirmation of the group ethos, it is anticipated that groups will become self-moderating, with the role of the Facilitator being a more passive one. However, in the early stage of the group or when new members join,

the role of the Facilitator is to maintain a supportive ethos and ensure everyone can participate.

To avoid challenge around discrimination or exclusion, use inclusive language at all times and remind all participants that anything shared in the meeting is to remain in the meeting. Anyone attending the group should feel confident that anything they say or share will not be repeated or reproduced outside of the group. Any breach of this confidentiality will be addressed formally by the Facilitator and in conjunction with the host WI or federation.

It is also useful to remind everyone that we have a zero-tolerance policy for:

- bullying
- harassment
- discriminatory remarks
- undermining behaviour.

If tensions do rise:

- Pause discussion, reaffirm ground rules, or take a short break.
- Remember that the Facilitator has the authority to keep the meeting safe and productive and remove anyone who is disruptive from the meeting.

Manage Conflict Openly and Fairly

The safety and wellbeing of everyone in a Sisterhood Group is paramount. Facilitators are empowered to act if someone's behaviour becomes abusive, threatening, or undermines the safe and inclusive nature of the group. We advise that you ensure that another facilitator or responsible person is present at all meetings, and particularly to support with navigating any difficult issues.

1. Act Early and Name the Behaviour

If behaviour becomes abusive (for example shouting, repeated disruption, discriminatory remarks, intimidation, or refusal to follow ground rules):

- Calmly and clearly interrupt the behaviour.
- Name the issue, not the person for example:

“That language is not acceptable in this space.”

- Reaffirm the group's purpose, ethos, and ground rules.

2. Give a Clear Warning

If behaviour continues:

- Issue a firm but calm warning.
- Be explicit about the consequence if the behaviour continues, for example:

“If this behaviour continues, I will ask you to leave the meeting.”

3. Ask the Person to Leave

If the abusive behaviour does not stop:

- Ask the person to leave the meeting immediately.
- Keep language neutral and factual, for example:

“Your behaviour is not acceptable, and for everyone’s safety I am asking you to leave now.”

- Do not engage in debate or justification.
- Do not attempt to physically intervene.

4. Put Safety First

If the situation escalates or you feel unsafe:

- End the meeting if necessary.
- Ensure facilitators are not alone when dealing with the situation.
- If someone becomes threatening or violent, **contact emergency services**.
- Trust your instincts – safety always overrides keeping a meeting going.

5. After the Incident

As soon as possible:

- Make a factual record of what happened (who, what, when).
- Share the information with the NFWI as appropriate.
- Seek support from the NFWI if needed – facilitators are not expected to manage serious incidents alone.

Key Principles for Facilitators

- You have the authority to remove someone to protect the group.
- You are not required to tolerate abuse, harassment, or intimidation.
- It is acceptable to take a strong boundary-based approach.
- Support is available – you are not expected to “handle it” without help.

Don’t forget the NFWI is here to support you, therefore, if you have any concerns, or need support, please contact the inclusion@nfwl.org.uk

Useful documents:

NFWI Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy
NFWI Code of Conduct
NFWI Complaints Policy