



FACILITATORS GUIDE



Introduction to the Problem

Every day, we're surrounded by people who are hurting – from a neighbor who's battling cancer, to a coworker who just lost their mom, or even that classmate who is always sitting alone in the lunchroom. We're always in a rush, and wherever we go, we look down at our phones, not up at the people around us. And, if we do notice, too often we don't do enough to help.

Maybe we don't know what to say or are afraid to make things worse. Maybe we just feel too uncomfortable to try and form a real connection with someone. Comforting doesn't come naturally, and today the barriers that prevent it – what we call the Awkward Zone™ – are stronger than ever. We turn inward, give in to second guessing and, within minutes, our impulse to act is gone and we're stuck in the Awkward Zone. But people all around us are still hurting. So how can we break through these barriers to connect with those in need?

Your Role

By facilitating Project Comfort, you are teaching and equipping your participants to identify those who are hurting or isolated. They will create a heartfelt personalized plaque to intentionally give, connect with and comfort the person in need.

It's important to lay a solid foundation for this activity so we have set Program Rules that should be reviewed with the participants to set the stage. They will be collaborating with each other and possibly connecting and sharing their own needs. So, it's important to create a safe place of belonging for all participants. They will all bring their own hurts with them, we want to encourage and support them. This step may not seem important, but it really is. Please review the rules with them.

Project Comfort will allow you to see and experience the full circle of comfort with all of those involved. It will open your eyes to what is happening all around us. In the end you will feel proud of what you helped facilitate. Please embrace the process and do what you can to get to know each of those creating plaques a little better. One message at a time.



Program Rules

1. **Everyone Belongs Here** – No one is unworthy. No one is different in what we are trying to accomplish. We all belong here.
2. **We have all made mistakes, here the slate is clean** - We've all messed up. No one is perfect. We've done things we regret. We are starting fresh here. Forget the past and instead look ahead to all of the good you can do.
3. **We assume the best in each other** - Every day with every person we interact with, we have a choice. We can assume the best in that person, or we can assume the worst. It's not ok to assume the worst in someone, so here we will always assume the best.
4. **We support and care for each other** – When we assume the best in each other, the next natural step is to support and care for each other. When we work together, we will help and support each other when we are having a hard time.
5. **We will choose to make a difference in the lives of others** – Here we have another choice. We can spend our lives focused on ourselves and our needs, or we can choose to help others. The truth is, when we help others we help ourselves. So that's what we do.
6. **We will take ownership and be proud of what we are doing** – If others try to make fun of what we are doing or ridicule us, we will not agree, and we will not engage. Instead we will stand up for what is right.

What Does a Session Look Like?

Set Up Time

Allow for time to set out your supplies. The more organized the supplies are set up, the better the session will run.

- Average Length of Time: 5-10 Minutes prior to participants arriving
- Materials needed: Core Comfort Kit / Worksheets printed, table surfaces covered where needed.
- Materials set out and organized: plaques sorted by color, plastic cups for markers, small bowls for bling and glue, pencils, etc. Hand Sanitizer on hand if possible for ink clean up.

Lessons & Circle Time

Our sessions typically start with group conversation, sharing and learning. This is also the time that you teach the core lessons if this is part of your program objectives. They can be taught briefly or in depth. It's up to you. If you are able to have a comfort / therapy dog present, this is a great time to sit around, pet the dog and chat.

- Average Length of time: 5 Minutes to 50 Minutes.
- We review the program rules and then have an ice breaker to get the group talking
- This time can be used as a share out time for previous plaque deliveries and Paws to Reflect Worksheets if this group is meeting following a previous session.
- Lessons can be taught – All or none or one or two.

Our 3 Core Lessons:

Lessons We Learn From Dogs



#1 - Lessons We Learn from Dogs: How man's best friend can often be our best example for learning how to comfort others.



#2 - Learning Comfort as A Skill: We introduce the Awkward Zone™ and the differences between kindness & comfort. We walk participants through the barriers that make it uncomfortable to connect with and comfort others.

The diagram illustrates the 5 steps of the Skill-based Learning process, centered around the concept of Skill-based Learning and Empathy. The steps are arranged in a circular flow:


- Participant:** I reflect on how helping this person helped me too.
- Self-Reflection:** I take time to think of others.
- Empathy:** I choose to help someone hurting and find the right message.
- Overcoming:** I intentionally reach out even if it's awkward.
- Participant:** When we connect, I focus on them, not me.

The central text is **Skill-based Learning**, and the word **Empathy** is written vertically on the right side of the diagram.

Think Time

- Average Length of Time: 5-15 minutes
- NOTE: If you only have 5 minutes – Use only the *Paws for Thought* Worksheets
- NOTE: The best way to implement this program is to use the worksheets as a pre-assignment prior to this session. It gives more time for thought as well as allowing parents and other family members to collaborate with the participant, so more are included in the connection.

[illegible]



**PROJECT
COMFORT**

**Paws
FOR THOUGHT**

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Who is this plaque for? _____
2. Why do they need comfort? _____
3. Identify things that would make the plaque special for them:
(i.e., quotes/feelings/feelings/ themes) _____
4. How will the plaque be delivered? _____

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Creative Time

The creation of our Comfort Plaques is the central part of the session. They will use their completed *Paws for Thought* worksheets along with the supplies in the Comfort Kit to make their plaques.

- Average Length of Time: 30-45 Minutes
- The more time you allow, the more you can walk participants through the steps for better plaques.



Paws to Create - This hands-on activity utilizes skills in creativity and communication. A personal comfort plaque is created specific to the needs of the receiver. Many times, in this step, the participant may change direction after thinking things through more deeply. The results are special and amazing. It's not about the artwork, it's all about the messaging. Take time to encourage each participant and offer compliments on their designs and chosen messages.

Wrap Time

It's important to allow enough time at the end of the session for participants to wrap their plaques in a cello bag tied with ribbons and including an insert card.

- Average Length of Time: 5-10 Minutes
- Wrap with one purple and one blue ribbon (easiest way to tie: have someone hold the corners of the bag while the other wraps around the ribbon and ties it).
- This is a great time to reflect on all of the comfort that is about to be spread
- Please also review and hand out the Giving & Reflecting Worksheets
- Encourage picture taking to capture the moment.

Optional Follow Up Session: Share Time

One of the most magical parts of the program happens when you bring participants back to talk about delivering the plaques and sharing the stories. This re-emphasizes the learning and allows for everyone to see the impact that they have had. Ideas for this share out session:

- Ask participants or their parents to capture the plaque delivery with a photo and forward to you so you can create a slideshow
- Review their *Paws to Reflect* worksheets prior to the session
- Assemble participants in a comfortable setting
- Ask for a few brave volunteers to share their experiences of delivering the plaques – most other students will typically want to follow. Most will want to share
- Watch for teaching points as they share their stories. What they saw, what they learned, what more they plan to do. Who – where – when – why – what more can they do?
- Recap how many people were comforted and where they all were. Celebrate the impact you made!

Steps Done After the Session by the Participant



BEFORE YOU GO

This is all about the person you are giving the plaque to – not you.

- Think back to the times you have spent with this person so you have some memories in your head
- You have 2 ears and one mouth – **prepare to listen** twice as much as you talk
- Be prepared to share a little about what's going on in your life – **just a little**

GREETING

Be genuinely happy to see them and smile.

- Greet them with "It's so good to see you" or "I'm so happy to see you"
- Give a hug if you can – people need lots of hugs.
- **Watch** to see their mood. If they are happy, keep the mood happy. If they are sad, do not try to cheer them up.

WHILE YOU ARE WITH THEM

You can start by saying: "I am so sorry. This must be very hard for you."

- Before you give them the plaque, tell them why you picked the message on the front of the plaque.
- Read the back of the plaque to them and then give it to them.
- When they talk about things, **ask questions** about what they talked about.
- Share a memory with them.
- Look around or ask to see if there are specific things that they need help with. (e.g. cooking, cleaning, yard work, laundry, errands run).
- For people of faith, ask them what they need prayers for.

AFTER YOU LEAVE

- Send them a text or email or note saying how good it was to see them and that you promise to **always be there** for them.
- Plan the next thing you can do for them. Be Specific. Refer to our Paws to Reflect worksheet and checklist for ideas.

Giving Time

Paws to Give - The single most important step in our program is **intentional action**. This is the step that pushes participants through the Awkward Zone. If this step is omitted, then no connection has been made. This step overcomes the "empathy-action gap" where people want to do something but fail to follow through. At Inspiring Comfort, we believe that if you want to teach connection, you should require it. That is why this step is required as part of the activity.



Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Were you excited or nervous to deliver your plaque?

2. Did you cheer up the person you gave the plaque to?

3. What did you learn from this experience?

4. What other things can you do to comfort this person?

Reflecting Time

Paws to Reflect Worksheet: It is our goal that this is just the first step of many to care for the person receiving their plaque. Paws to Reflect has two purposes. #1 is for the participant to capture the feelings of delivering the plaque and its ensuing reaction. How they went from the awkward zone to the comfort zone. How helping others, helps them. #2 is to identify what more the participant can do for this person and make plans to do that.



We are all called to pray for one another. Use this guide to make prayer an easy conversation with God

Heavenly Father,

I thank you for this day and am grateful for so many things in my life, including:

Today, I am praying for _____

Because:

I ask you to please be close and let _____ feel your love and comfort for today and the days and weeks ahead.

Thank you Lord, for loving me and loving _____.

In the name of your son Jesus, I pray,

Amen.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer... with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)

Optional: Prayer Time

Paws to Pray Worksheet: In our faith-based clubs and for people of faith, this step completes the process. Many times, in very dark situations, prayer is the only thing that can be done. This step teaches participants to be an "anonymous donor", asking God to continue to provide this person with peace and comfort.



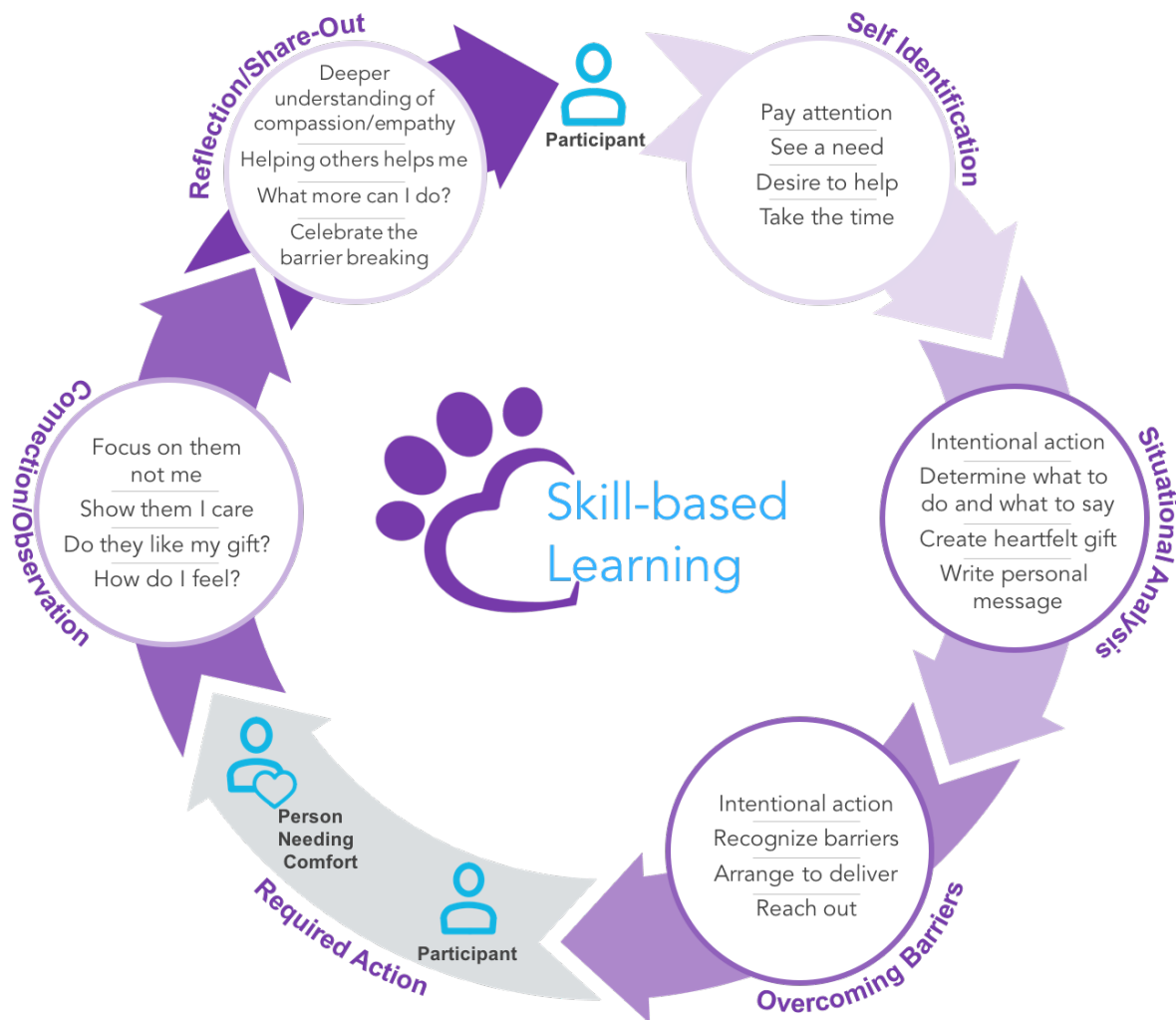
Suggested Program Timing Options

"The more you do, the more the skill is developed"

	45 Minute Craft Activity	One Session 1 Hour	Two Sessions 45 minutes at each session	Three Sessions 45 minutes at each session	90 minute Session Get one/ Give One
Benefit	An activity with a purpose. Perfect for service day activities or when time is short, or for a craft. A great activity to add to an existing character development program or youth group activity.	Perfect option for when deeper learning is desired, but only have time or budget for one session.	There is deeper understanding of this skill when there is time to reflect on the first session and share before starting second session. Plus two people are comforted by each participant.	In breaking this into three lessons, the participant is required to identify 3 people needing comfort. For some, this takes them out of their comfort zone, which is the whole point of this skill development program.	This get/give activity gives the participant the feeling of receiving comfort in addition to giving comfort. And understanding why it is sometimes hard to do.
Lessons Taught	Session can operate without a lesson or you can choose to do one quick lesson	All three lessons in one session	Two lessons in two sessions	Three lessons in three sessions	All three lessons in one session
Circle Time	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
Lessons	5 minutes or none	10 minutes	5 min each session	5 min each session	15 minutes
Think Time	5 minutes	10 Minutes	5 Minutes	5 Minutes	15 Minutes
Creative Time	25 minutes	30 minutes	25 minutes	25 minutes	45 minutes
Wrap Time	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	10 minutes
Giving Time	Done after session	Done after session	Done after session	Done after session	Done after session
Reflecting	Done after session	Done after session	Done after session	Done after session	Done after session
Share Out - Optional Follow Up Session		15-30 Minutes	30-60 Minutes	30 – 60 Minutes	15-30 Minutes

"What Does Project Comfort Teach?"

1. **Self-Identification:** Helping participants see a need and taking the time to help others who are struggling or hurting.
2. **Situational Analysis:** Taking the time to think about the situation and finding the right words and messages that might help the receiver.
3. **Overcoming Barriers:** Taking intentional action to reach out to someone.
4. **Connection / Observation:** In connecting with others, we learn to focus on them and not us and observe how that feels.
5. **Reflection / Share Out:** It is in the reflecting of how this process makes us feel that we learn that helping others truly does help us.



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