

GROUP DYNAMICS

The aim is to explore group dynamics, helping you create experiences where everyone feels truly welcomed, included, and supported.

When people come together in a group, they immediately start building relationships and forming a web of interactions. The group process refers to the emotions, needs, desires, thoughts, associations, and behaviors that emerge within individuals as a result of being part of the group. Observing, understanding, and shaping this process is a key skill for anyone working with groups.

There are several models describing how group processes develop. The model presented here focuses on the needs people experience at different stages of group development:

1. **Phase – the need for belonging, acceptance, and connection:** At this stage, the group identity begins to form. Key questions arise: What is this group about? What are its rules? What can I expect from others and from the leader? Typical behaviors include dependence and conformity.
2. **Phase – the need for independence:** This phase is often marked by tension around autonomy, power, and control. Group members may challenge norms, test boundaries, or question the authority of the leader. Rebellious or counter-dependent behaviors are common.
3. **Phase – the need for connection and meaningful relationships:** In this phase, the group begins to seek deeper emotional connection, trust, and shared purpose. Behaviours tend to reflect interdependence, cooperation, and a focus on common goals.

EXPLORE

Think of a time when you successfully led a group.

- What made it work so well?
- Which of your behaviors or attitudes from that experience could you bring into your forest walks?

REFLECT

- If the forest was your co-guide, what would it still want to teach you about guiding groups?

TIPS

As an accessible forest practitioner, you may work with different types of groups.

- When working with a **group which is meeting for a single walk**, it is essential to create a safe and welcoming space. Allow enough time for introductions, group bonding, and proper closure.
- For **groups which go for a walk with you more than once**, the need for belonging may be as important as the experience of nature itself. Make room for both. Encourage sharing of personal stories. Pay attention to the closing process and try to co-create a closing ritual that honors their shared journey, group identity, and individual contributions.
- When guiding a **group that already knows each other and you are new**, take on the role of a guest. Invite them to share the story of their group and its members. Show curiosity, listen actively, and emphasise that your role is to guide them.

