



Getting Conversations Going

Tips to help people in communities who want to get activities or groups started or develop what you are doing already.

About these tips

Happiness Habits is supporting people in communities in Scottish Borders to do things that bring people together.

- Shared activities build connections between people and reduce social isolation.
- When people come together they support each other and learn from each other.

This is one of a set of Tips for people in communities who want to do something – get activities or groups started or develop what you are doing already.

We've drawn on lots of experience and examples from established community activities across Borders and other places, as well as the ideas that we heard as part of the Happiness Habits project.

These Tips are about getting the initial conversations going, to give you ideas about what you want to do and work out how you are going to do it.

- Conversations with other members, neighbours and other people who may be part of whatever happens
- It is getting from the stage of an idea or an awareness that something is needed to the point where people are able to get something going
- How this stage/process can be done – ways of getting more ideas and planning out sharing tasks, getting it started
- Our tips are about the conversations and involving people.
- There are the examples of the activities they go on to do are an added bonus

We hope that these ideas are useful in what you do.

The Initial Conversation

The idea of setting up a new group can be both exciting and daunting. Here are some of the things people have told us worked for them:

- Invite the community along to have an informal chat about your idea.
- Make any conversations about what we want to do next a good time in itself. That way, people get benefits from it right from the start.

“Use the 3 Fs – Food, Fun and Friends”

- Tea and cakes were part of most of the initial conversations people told us about, but you can also use other types of food:

Examples:

Food Buddies used international food tasters to generate conversation and ideas around tasty, nutritious snacks and trying new foods.

“I wouldn’t buy these as I don’t know if I would like it”

“One of my favourite childhood memories is granny’s clootie dumpling, which always had a thrupenny bit in it”

Both our Food Buddies & Families projects have made Smoothies to generate chat around being healthy, adding calories or protein, getting your 5 a day...

In Yarrow we invited the community to a Halloween party where we asked them to write on post it notes what they would like to see happening in the village. Everyone enjoyed dookin for apples and the kids loved wrapping the adults in toilet paper to make them into mummies!

Find a place that works for initial conversation

You want to be at a place that is convenient for everyone who has something to contribute

Go to a place that frees up people’s ideas.

- if the place is associated with a particular type of activity it can make people think of that and not explore other possibilities
- open space and outdoors, and a physical activity such as going for a walk, have been shown to help people think more creatively

“Going out into the fresh air always clears my head”

Examples:

In Caddonfoot we initially met with a group who meet in the local hotel on a Wednesday, we asked what they wanted to try then organised a taster day with indoor carpet bowls, art & craft and indoor Kurling and served afternoon tea

With a group of home educated families we had an informal gathering round a campfire which naturally generated conversation. The campfire was a good way to welcome parents and their children, and was a place where people felt that everyone’s ideas are valuable

Cafes are good when it is people from several groups involved, or people who didn’t know each other well.

“Tea and cake always gets me chatting”

Find ways for everyone to contribute

Think about how people will take part

- Reaching the hard to reach – offer lift-sharing/community transport for those who struggle to travel
- Other ways for people to feed in – talking over with a friend who feeds in their ideas, social media

Some people need longer to come up with ideas or say them

- Some people need a bit longer to work things out
- Some people are not so confident, especially in bigger groups or with people they don't know
- Some people need a bit of help with reading notes and papers, or with hearing a conversation

Examples:

With some groups we have asked folk to write their ideas on a coloured 'leaf' and tie it to a tree. You could also use post-its. Not everyone likes to shout out and some prefer their ideas or opinions to be anonymous.

Setting up tables with paper table cloths and pens that way people can write their ideas on the table cloth as they have them.

"It was great getting to write on the table cloth, I could write my idea down and wait for a space in the conversation – otherwise I would have forgotten it"

"I am not confident in groups so being able to write on a post it made me feel part of it"

"The group accommodates everyone's needs"

Remember the focus of the initial conversations

This stage is working out what you are going to do. You don't have to get too far into actually doing it at the start.

- Don't try to solve every issue people raise
- Concentrate on what needs to be done first
- Take a note of tasks for the future as they are raised so you don't forget them
- As different issues or problems arise, be alert to them and if appropriate, turn the conversation to ways of dealing with or resolving them – or note them for agenda points of future meetings

Don't just go with the first ideas

It can be difficult knowing what activity to go with especially if people have lots of different ideas.

- Spend a few weeks trying out different ideas to see what works best for people
- If you know of another group go and visit them or ask them to come and do a demonstration
- See if anyone locally has the knowledge, skills and time to give you a little taster session

Examples:

People asked first for some indoor carpet bowls & crafts activities. We brought along those and New Age Kurling equipment so we had another option. People decided they liked the kurling and that has been the main activity they have enjoyed since then.

In Eyemouth they had lots of ideas but didn't want to focus on just one so we tried lots of activities including seated yoga, card making, a sing song and a visit to a local business.

“Excellent introduction – everyone so friendly”

“Enjoyable was apprehensive beforehand”

Getting word out

Word of mouth is always a great way to spread the word especially in small rural areas. Other things you can try are

- Use social media
- Local press – local newspapers like to hear about new groups starting and if you can get a story it is usually free!
- Put posters up in library, dr surgeries, lamppost – anywhere people will see them
- Ask other local groups to share with their members/mailling lists

...and remember a photo speaks a thousand words!.

“I had a leaflet through my letterbox and I thought I would give it a try”

“My neighbour fancied going along and asked me to chum her – I'm glad I did it's the highlight of my week”

Developing the ideas

You may not have much money or resources at the beginning.

- Have a rota for who brings the biscuits
- For bigger events – hire a function room or community space, there will be lists on local council websites and social media

- Think creatively about spaces which are not used all the time – school halls, scout huts, yoga studios...they will probably be pleased to be able to hire their space to groups
- Make time to chat, for some people it maybe the only time they get out the house
- Have fun!

“Lost my partner last year, previously I was a carer 24/7 for five years – I went nowhere – now I’m attending the Kurling & Keepfit. It gets me out the house and I know most of the people. They are really helpful”

“Important at any age to be part of a group – even more important when people are older and on their own”

“These two hours are the best of the week”

“It is often the only time I go out the house – it gives me the incentive to make the effort”

Thanks

Thank you to everyone involved in Happiness Habits, Families and the other Outside the Box projects who contributed your tips.

Contact us

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