

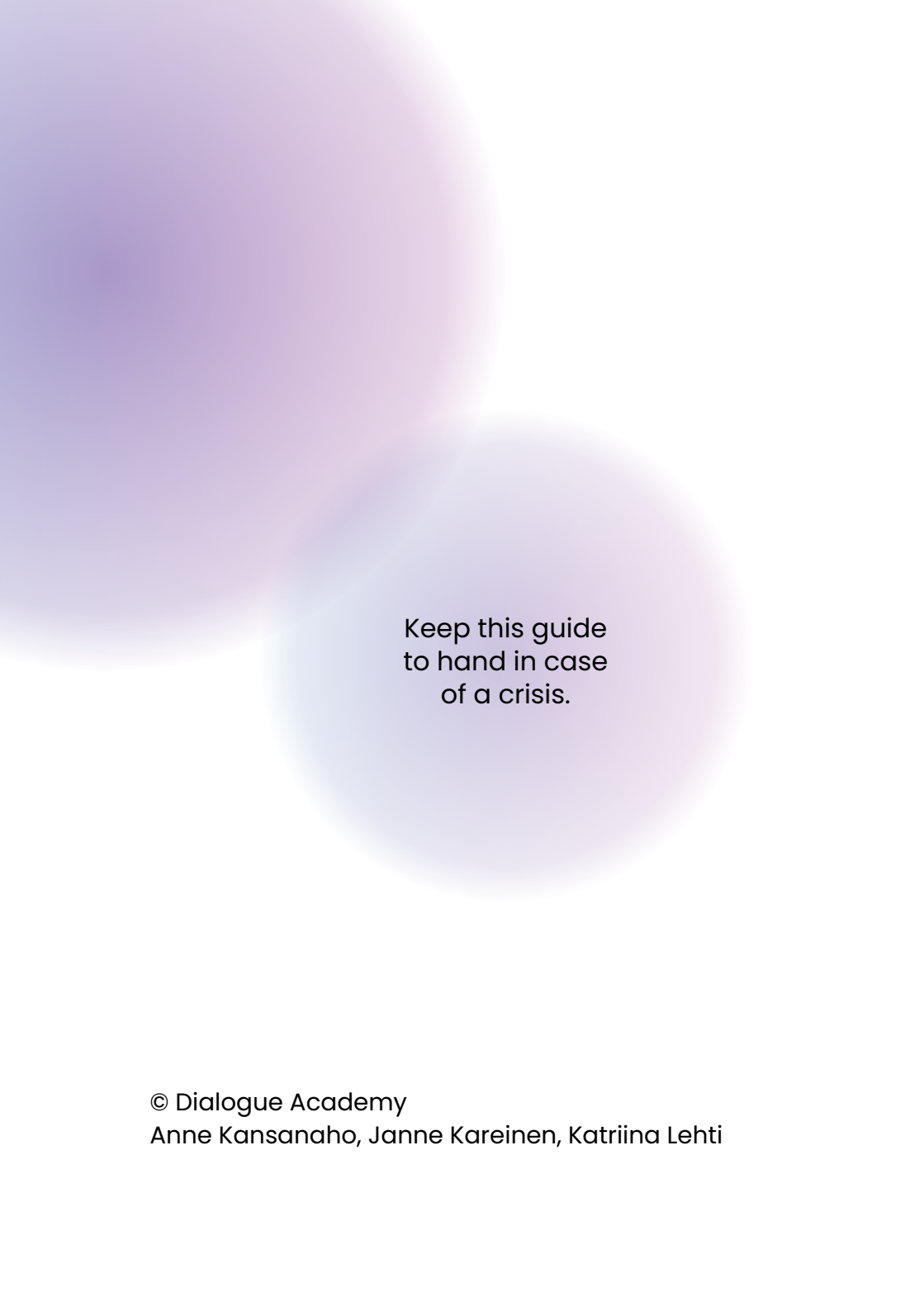
Open this guide at the latest
when possible crisis arises.

O A S I S

Psychological Resilience Support Group

A guide to organising and facilitating

National Dialogues – Ministry of Finance Finland



Keep this guide
to hand in case
of a crisis.

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1. Introduction

This guide is designed to help you organise and facilitate Oasis groups. The aim of the group is to support participants' psychological resilience in challenging situations.

The adaptability of our brains and nervous systems enables us to go about our daily lives, but its primary function is to keep us safe and alive. The psychological resilience of individuals and communities is put to the test in crisis situations and requires support. When resilience is compromised, functional capacity declines, and the consequences may include, for example, overreactions and chaotic behaviour, or paralysis and an inability to function.

Research into the nervous system has shown that being in the company of others in a situation perceived as sufficiently safe enhances the ability to understand and make sense of events as they are experienced, and their significance for oneself and others.

In the Oasis group, participants can share their immediate experiences, strengthen their individual and collective resilience, and receive support from one another in regulating their state of mind and energy levels. This supports the capacity for integration at both the individual and community levels. In other words, it relates to how we experience our emotions and moods, how we manage our thoughts and behaviour, how we interact with others, and our ability to direct our attention.

The groups are small-group dialogue sessions run by the organisations or communities themselves, for example in workplaces, neighbourhoods, hobby groups, civil society organisations and social networks of relatives. You can decide for yourselves who takes part in the group, how often you meet and where. Adapt the material to suit your needs and the situation, using the draft script as a guide.

The group leader/instructor/facilitator creates a confidential atmosphere, and everyone is given the opportunity to talk about the issues that are worrying them at that particular moment.

The group also focuses on the coping strategies and ways of making things more tolerable that people have discovered, and these are shared amongst the group.

Oasis groups form part of a comprehensive safety framework designed to maintain citizens' capacity to function. These groups operate throughout Finland, maintaining and strengthening citizens' psychological resilience and capacity to function, both amongst professionals in critical functions of society and amongst individual citizens.

2. Draft Oasis script

Duration: 120 minutes

Guidelines for using the script

- The draft script is based on a running time of 120 minutes, but you can also stage Oasis for a shorter or longer time.
- An ideal group size is 3–12 people.
- We recommend that the same group meets more frequently, for example once a month, depending on the situation.
- If possible, plan the conversation in advance based on the draft script.
- The draft script is intended to support your facilitation. Use whatever works for you and disregard the rest. There is no need to share the script with the participants.
- You can draw on your own group facilitation skills and, where necessary, use tried-and-tested methods to support the discussion and the participants.

- The sentences in the script is provided as examples. Adapt them to suit the situation, the group and your own way of talking.
- The structure of the script helps to build trust and a feeling of security within the group, making it easier for participants to share their own experiences.
- You can also use the Dialogue Facilitator's Toolkit to support the script and the facilitation process.

Tips on wording and guidance for the leader/instructor/facilitator

Standard font – say it like this, for example

Italic font – guidance on facilitating the conversation

Bold – adapt as necessary

Sample timetable

The duration of each section and the given times are approximate. They are intended to give an idea of roughly how much time should be spent on each stage. There is no need to stick strictly to the times, except for the start and end times.

<i>Minutes</i>	<i>Stage</i>
15	Start, principles, introductions, attuning
85	Group discussion (including a break)
5	Reflection: writing
10	Reflection: sharing
5	Thank you, agreeing on next steps, conclusion

Total 120 minutes

Start: objectives, roles and a few words about Oasis

It's a good idea to start by explaining why you've gathered and that the aim is to engage in dialogue. If the participants of your Oasis group remain the same and you meet regularly, you can keep the introduction brief.

Welcome to Oasis (Henkireikä) – a support group for psychological resilience. The aim is for everyone here to be able to talk about the things that are worrying them right now. We'll also focus on the coping strategies and ways of making things more bearable that you already have, or that we can discover together.

My name is **XX** and I'm **the leader/instructor/facilitator**; I'll ensure that we have as equal a dialogue as possible, so that everyone has the chance to join in the conversation. In practice, this means, for example, that if you talk over one another or you speak very long, I will interrupt. Is this OK with everyone? *Please confirm this.*

Dialogue is a specific way of conversing that focuses on deepening our understanding of the topic, others and ourselves. The aim is not, therefore, to decide who is right, but to focus on understanding.

During the conversation, there may be different views on the topic. This is perfectly fine, as we are not aiming for consensus. There is no need to make decisions or seek solutions during the dialogue, though these may emerge.

Research into the nervous system has shown that being in the company of other people in a situation perceived as sufficiently safe enhances the ability to understand and make sense of experienced events and their significance for oneself and others. This increases one's ability to cope in challenging circumstances. This is also what we aim for in Oasis.

We have **two** hours. Let's start with a discussion in pairs. Most of the time will be spent in a group discussion, and we'll finish with a brief reflection. We'll finish at **xx.xx**.

Introduction: principles and establishing trust

Oasis is based on the principles of dialogue. Let's go through them now.

1. Listen to others and do not interrupt.

We'll aim to listen in a way that helps us understand what the other person is trying to say, rather than trying to find a gap in the conversation to squeeze in our own comment.

2. Connect to what others have said.

Try to connect what you say to the points raised by others in the conversation. However, you do not have to agree with them.

3. Share your own experiences.

As you listen to one another, various experiences (thoughts, emotions, perceptions, memories, imagination) will arise in your minds in that moment. Speak these out loud, and we'll likely end up having a conversation that hasn't been had before.

4. Ask questions to understand better.

You can ask to speak or address others directly and ask questions. I'll start by giving you the floor.

5. Explore also new and unknown things.

It's important to look for things and perspectives that have gone unnoticed. Together, we can try to bring to light issues that would otherwise remain hidden, or that simply haven't come up in the dialogue.

Let's agree now on the confidentiality of this dialogue. It is my wish that you can continue the conversation we are about to begin even after Oasis. Let's agree that you'll do that in such a way that no individual participant in this dialogue can be identified from the comments. Is this acceptable to everyone? *Please confirm this.*

Introductions

Let's start with a brief round of introductions. You can introduce yourself using just your first name and explain why you want to take part in this meeting.

You can say: Please keep it brief so that we can spend most of our time discussing.

Let's start here, please.

Attuning: introduction

If necessary, you can attune the group by using a topical experience, article, news item, research study, song or other material relevant to the current situation that is suitable for your group of participants and use it to kick-start the conversation.

Let's get started by setting the mood with the following **experience/video/music/text**.

Attuning: in pairs

You can also start attuning directly with a pair conversation without any introduction. Divide the group into pairs or trios. Make it clear who is paired with whom. If there are only three people in the group, you can start straight away as a group of three.

Let's start the conversation in pairs or in trios.

Opening question after the introduction: Tell your partner about a personal experience (a thought, emotion or perception) that the introduction brought to mind, relating to the concerns raised by the current situation.

Opening question without an introduction: Tell your partner about a recent personal experience or situation that is causing you concern. Also explain what it is about it that worries you.

Make sure that both of you get a chance to speak.

You have three minutes for this.

You may begin... It's time to finish now.

Group conversation

Now I'd like to hear what you discussed with your partner and what thoughts it aroused. What you talked about and what thoughts or other experiences came up. The pair who are ready can start.

At this stage, it's a good idea to ask each participant a question to show that everyone's contribution to the conversation is important.

After the pair conversations, continue the conversation as a group: Now that you've listened to one another, what sort of thoughts, feelings or questions have come to mind?

You can also summarise some of the themes that have emerged: 'You've highlighted at least the following points: xx, xx and xx'

Try to address the issues that come up in the conversation. Formulate further questions based on them. It is best to let the dialogue flow naturally and avoid it turning into an interview.

At an appropriate stage, move on to discussing what builds trust for each of you:

What builds trust for you?
Now and in the future?
Why?

After asking these questions, use individual reflection or pair work if necessary.

Reflection: writing

The conversation is drawing to a close. I'd like to hear what issues, feelings or thoughts our conversation together has brought to light.

Ask everyone to write down their thoughts on a piece of paper that you have set aside before the conversation – for example, under a chair along with a pen.

Working individually, write down 1–3 thoughts or points from the conversation that are significant or relevant to you, in complete sentences. It can be anything – for example, something you've noticed happening within yourself, in your emotions, your body or your thoughts. You have three minutes, and the time starts now.

Three minutes have now passed.

Reflection: sharing

Ask everyone, in turn, to share or read out a sentence they have written.

Let's pick out a few highlights and try to bring out the variety of experiences. Let's start with you. What has been significant or central to you in this conversation?

If you have time, ask the participants for a few comments on what they thought of the dialogue.

Finally, let's briefly go over what this Oasis has been like for each of you. Your experiences may differ from each other. Anyone who's ready can start.

Thank you, next steps and closing remarks

This conversation was confidential, so please do not pass on what others have said without their permission. You are welcome to share your own thoughts and feelings, as well as your general views on the issues that have come up.

If your group plans to meet again, agree on the date for the next meeting.

Thank you for sharing your experiences!

Oasis

Further reading

If you'd like to learn more about how the brain and nervous system work and how to run groups, you might want to take a look at the following books.

Daniel Siegel: Mindsight

Random House Publishing Group, 2010

Practical, research-based information on the brain, the mind, the body, and their connections and functioning. Chapters 1–7 cover these topics in particular, providing many examples.

Babette Rothschild: Help for the Helper

WW Norton & Co, 2022

A book aimed particularly at professionals in the helping professions, but also suitable for others. From the third chapter onwards, the book contains practical tips and perspectives on working with difficult issues. For example, how to take care of your own well-being and energy levels during interactions, and how to maintain one's own resilience in the long term.

Daniel Siegel: The Developing Mind

The Guilford Press, 2020, third edition

A seminal work on interpersonal neurobiology.

The first part of the book introduces the basic elements of the human mind – such as bodily awareness, emotions, memory and regulation – particularly from an interpersonal perspective. Chapter 7 deals with the regulation of arousal and introduces the ‘window of tolerance’. Chapters 8–10 focus on integrative capacity and the significance of interpersonal relationships for the nervous system and the mind. You may start by reading only Chapter 7 and Chapter 9, which deals with the various dimensions of integration.

Kai Alhanen: The Dialogue Book

Into, 2024

This fundamental work on dialogue provides a clear and accessible overview of everything essential regarding the theory, practice and facilitation of dialogue. The book is easy to read and intended for anyone interested in dialogue. It is well worth reading in its entirety.

