



Module 8: Dealing with Disruptions

In this module, you will learn how to deal with participants constantly running in and out of your meeting, cell phones ringing and off-topic discussions. The goal is to reduce the effect. It can be very difficult to avoid these distractions.



Dealing with Disruptions



Running In and Out



Cell Phone Ringing



Off on a Tangent



Personality Conflict



Group Facilitation Techniques




Building Consensus in Meetings

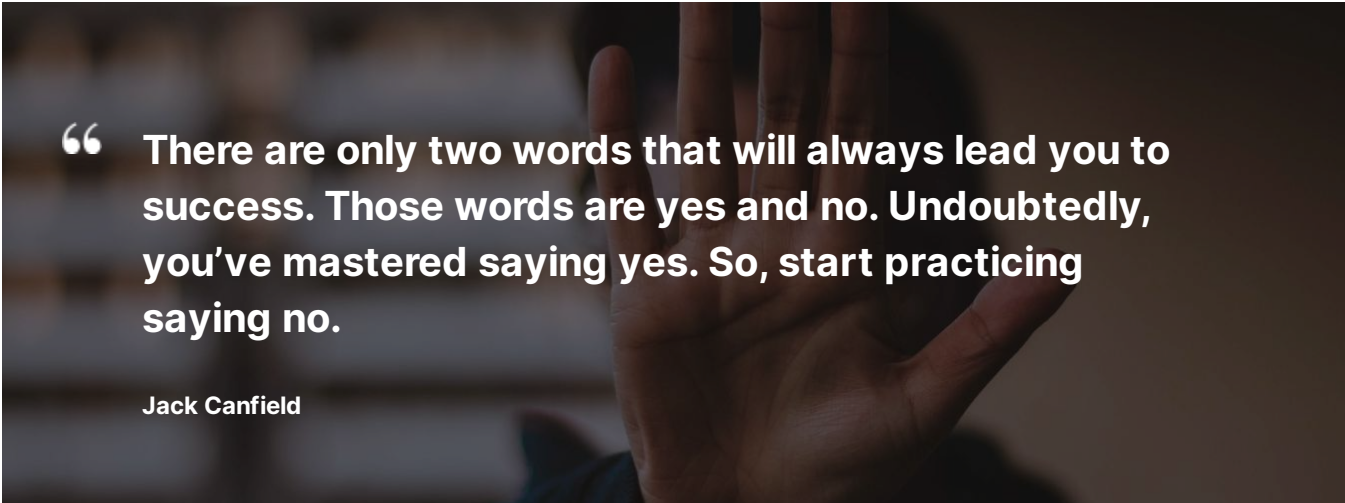


Knowledge Check



 **Module 8: Completed**

Dealing with Disruptions

A graphic featuring a quote by Jack Canfield. The background is a dark, blurred image of a hand with fingers spread, palm facing forward. The quote is written in white, bold, sans-serif text.

“ There are only two words that will always lead you to success. Those words are yes and no. Undoubtedly, you’ve mastered saying yes. So, start practicing saying no.

Jack Canfield

Disruptions in the meeting are bound to happen. Personal technology keeps participants constantly connected to the outside world. Frequent disruptions could impede the effectiveness of your meeting and become distracting to those who are focused on the meeting. Furthermore, poorly managing disruptions will reflect on the chairperson or meeting organizer. The key to mitigating disruptions is to plan for them and set expectations.

Watch the video clip below...



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

How many minutes was business suspended for?

Type your answer here

SUBMIT



Complete the content above before moving on.

Running In and Out



We often take it for granted that attendees will stay in the meeting and not leave.

Constant disruptions caused by attendees running in and out of your meeting will affect the experience of the other attendees. We often take it for granted that attendees will stay in the meeting and not leave; therefore, we do not discuss this issue very often at the beginning of the meetings. Addressing this form of distraction is best done proactively.

Using the **SIT** technique helps you set the expectation regarding running in and out of the meeting. Next, incorporating frequent breaks lessens the chances of participants leaving the room, and finally giving timely feedback to those who break the rule is necessary in order to stop frequent violators.

Let us review each step in more detail...

Set Expectations —

Tell participants at the beginning of the meeting what you expect of them when it comes to staying in the meeting room. Explain to them the effects that constantly running in and out of the meeting will have on the presenter and other participants. Let all the participants know that if they need to leave the room, do so only if it is an emergency. If there is an emergency, they should leave the meeting because they will be more of a distraction if they stay.



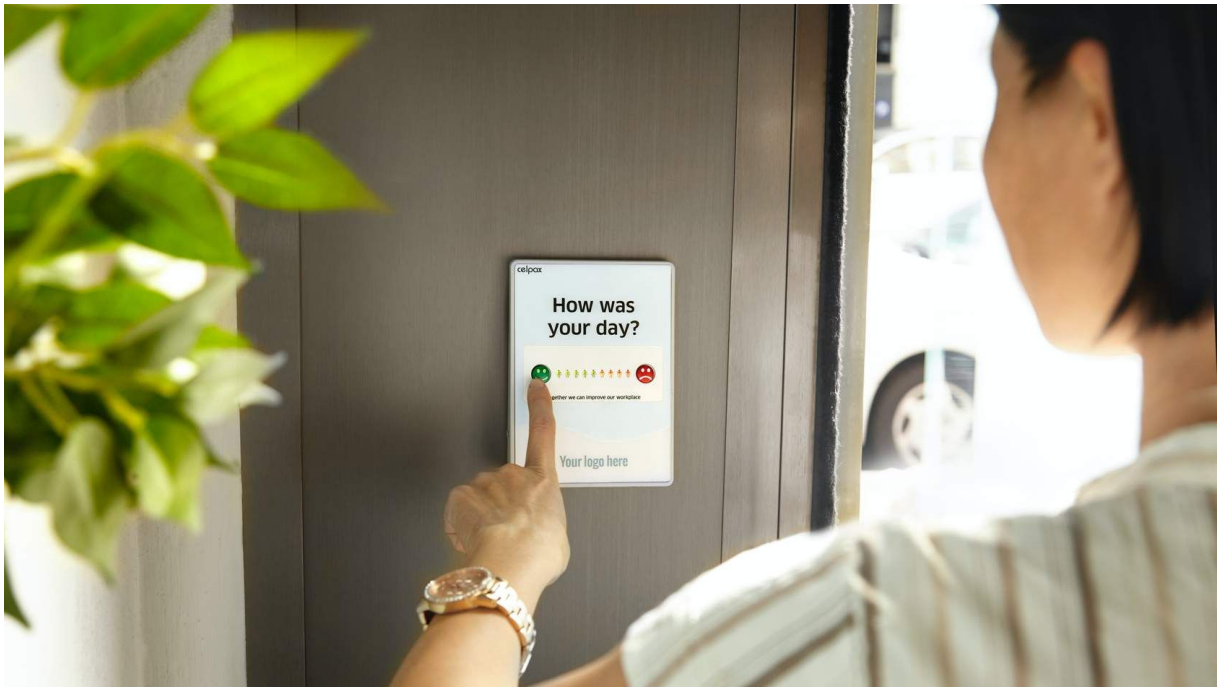
Incorporate Frequent Breaks —

At the beginning of your meeting, tell the participants they will get a five-minute break every hour the meeting lasts. Establishing this up front lets the participants know when to expect a break.



Timely Feedback —

This feedback is given to those who break the rules. When a participant continues to run in and out of your meeting, it is best to address that with them as soon as possible. If you have a problem participant, quietly leave the room and wait for them outside. Speak with the participant in a respectful manner and tell them that their behavior is disrupting the meeting. Ask if they are experiencing an emergency and ask if they need to leave. If there is no emergency, ask the participant to please wait until the scheduled breaks to do what they have to do.



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

_____ feedback is given to those who break the rules.

Type your answer here

SUBMIT



Complete the content above before moving on.

Cell Phone Ringing



Most people know to silence their cell phones when entering a meeting; however, they may forget every so often. Your job as the meeting manager is to remind them.

Here are a couple of steps you can take to remind your participants to turn off those phones.

- 1** Place signs in the room instructing participants to silence their cell phone. They can be humorous and light-hearted. In any case, you will get your message across.
- 2** Make an announcement at the beginning of the meeting instructing the participants to turn off their cell phone now. The signs are a back-up in case you forget to do this.
- 3** Since the participants will most likely be looking at the agenda, place a reminder there too. This way you have several areas where the participants can get the message.

One cell phone ringing in the middle of the meeting could lead to a disruption that could take a couple of minutes to recover from. You can reduce this type of disruption by almost 100 percent by just mentioning it at the beginning of the meeting and providing reminder signs.



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

Your job as the meeting manager is to _____ participants to switch off their cell phones.

Type your answer here

SUBMIT



Complete the content above before moving on.

Off on a Tangent



This is by far the most difficult to manage in a meeting. The biggest challenge is to redirect without offending the participants. Using the **EAR** technique helps to do this in three simple steps.





Engage in the conversation by becoming a contributor for a moment.

The goal is not to carry the conversation but to gain some control by getting the meeting floor. Once engaged you are able to go to the next step.



Redirect the participants back to the conversation.

This brief statement ends the last discussion and starts up the previous one that was on topic.



Acknowledge that the topic is valid and worthy of discussion.

This should be a short and affirming statement. This avoids the embarrassment of those who carried the conversation when it is time to redirect.

Here is a sample EAR script:

Participant on a tangent: I think pizza for breakfast is the best! There is no doubt about it.

Meeting manager: (E) I am willing to try pizza for breakfast. It can't be that bad.

Meeting manager: (A) Perhaps you represent a large number of pizza lovers that enjoy the same thing you do. I won't knock it until I try it.

Meeting manager: (R) Now, let's get back to the problem of employee morale in the call centre. Who has some ideas they can share?

Granted, the topic was embellished, but this last script demonstrated the steps clearly. Using **EAR** will help you master the meeting room every time the conversation goes astray.

Here are some additional techniques:

Summarising —

Periodically summarising what has been discussed so far around a specific agenda item will help clarify and focus the meeting participants, enabling them to make a clear decision and move on.

If the action points have been captured during the meeting, time can be allocated at the end of the meeting to summarise the agreed decisions/actions back to the meeting participants.

Paraphrasing —

Paraphrasing is repeating what you have heard or read in another way, (in your own words).

People express their thoughts in different ways, and sometimes in ways that are not as meaningful to others. When this happens, you can help others to understand better by paraphrasing what was said in a different way. Keeping the discussions moving forward is key for meetings, and paraphrasing is one of the best ways to accomplish this.

You can paraphrase negative comments of some participants in a much more constructive and productive way. In fact, paraphrasing negative comments can be one of the most important skills to help keep the discussions moving forward and not letting a particularly negative comment destroy what was a good discussion.

Gate keeping —

The gatekeeper is the meeting "Chairperson". They are supposed to ensure that the meeting will be conducted orderly, and a conclusion is met on the agenda when possible. The gatekeeper may need to remind the participants to adhere to the time limit set for the meeting or the topic on the agenda.

Repeating —

There is no shame in not understanding. In fact, if you don't understand a certain issue, chances are, other members of the meeting are also facing the same anxiety.

Asking the meeting leader to repeat a certain concept not only clarifies the information in everyone else's minds but also in the speaker's mind. Repetition creates an opportunity to highlight any apparent inconsistencies in information or logic.

It allows the meeting to be more productive, as it is only when everyone understands completely, can tasks actually move forward.

Therefore, repeating information not only allows everyone to gain a uniform understanding of the pertinent matters but also creates ample opportunity to internalise the information as well.

Rephrasing —

Rephrasing is another great technique that facilitates a clearer understanding of meeting discussions. If what the speaker says does not make sense to you, ask him or her to rephrase their thoughts.

As opposed to repetition, where the speaker may use the same or similar language to express the thought, rephrasing becomes a different ball game.

Rephrasing an idea requires the speaker to be more critical of what they are saying. The speaker must find a completely different rhetoric to express the same idea and express it in a way that is more consistent, clear and detailed.



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

Paraphrasing is _____ what you have heard or read in another way, (in your own words).

Type your answer here

SUBMIT



Complete the content above before moving on.

Personality Conflict



“ Wherever you have people, you have factions and disagreements and personality conflicts.

Jerry B. Jenkins

Diffusing Conflict

Sometimes a meeting could result in conflict. This may be true of meetings where new teams are storming together and forming the team. Conflict could arise when two participants with opposing views clash. In any case, conflict in a meeting has to be managed. There is an acceptable degree of tension, which is normal in debates; however, when the tension turns into outright conflict, the focus turns from the meeting to the spectacle that is the conflict. Your job as a meeting manager is to diffuse the conflict and restore order to the meeting. Allowing conflict to go unchecked could fester into a bigger problem for everyone in the meeting. The news of the conflict will spread quickly and how you managed it will be scrutinized.

Here are three steps to take when conflict arises:

Step 1

Stop



Stop the conflict by intervening and making a statement that acknowledges the conflict. Do not become frustrated. Avoid taking sides. Never yell. Be professional and calm. Simply state that the discussion has turned personal and that it needs to stop.

Step 2

Drop



Instruct the parties in conflict to drop the discussion for now and regain their composure. There is no need to carry on if the discussion is counterproductive.

Step 3

Roll



Roll into a break. Even if you just got back from one, take a break and send the participants away for a moment. Call on the parties in conflict and hold a brief expectations meeting. You are not there to resolve personal conflict. However, you must manage the conflict because it is your meeting. Tell the persons in conflict that they must immediately stop the behaviour. Restate the need for the meeting and that healthy debate is always welcomed. Have them agree to behave for the remainder of the meeting.

Summary

The meeting room is no place to try to resolve the deeper issues of the conflict. On the other hand, if the participants are all a part of a team that will meet regularly, then this issue has to be addressed in a coaching session and not in front of spectators.

Group Facilitation Techniques



Goals of Facilitation

Meeting facilitators are not expected to have all of the answers to questions on the meeting's agenda, nor the solutions to the issues a meeting will address. Rather, a facilitator is expected to help the group reach those answers or solutions collectively using their leadership and interpersonal skills. For example, facilitators:

- 1 Engage participants.** Encourage equal and active participation in meetings. Provide discussion prompts and make sure that everyone's voice is heard.
- 2 Create a productive environment.** Establish an environment of trust and respect in which participants feel safe, inspired, and open to share. Help the group navigate disagreements constructively.
- 3 Achieve meeting objectives.** Keep the discussion relevant to the meeting's objectives and summarize key action items or takeaways.

"The facilitator's job is to support everyone to do their best thinking. To do this, the facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding, and cultivates shared responsibility."

Sam Kaner, et al.



Common Meeting Challenges—and Facilitation Techniques to Overcome Them

Improve your ability to engage participants, create a productive environment, and achieve meeting objectives with the help of these facilitation techniques. Expand the rows below to learn specific strategies for overcoming the most common challenges in meetings.

How Do I Encourage or Balance Participation? —

Whether you're dealing with an overzealous meeting attendee—or a wallflower—here are some techniques for balancing participation in meetings:

- **Go around the table.** This technique is ideal for encouraging participation from quiet attendees—or preventing a single attendee from dominating the conversation. After asking the group a question, collect responses by going around the table and having every participant share something.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Use open-ended questions to either increase or balance participation. For example, you could ask: *“What else?”* or *“What do you think?”* or *“Who else has something to add?”* or *“What are your thoughts from X perspective?”*
- **Break into groups.** Consider assigning pairs or small “breakout” groups to give participants time to work through more involved prompts or activities. Smaller groups are easier for participation and can give participants space, time, and support for developing their ideas.

What Should I Do If Attendees Talk Over One Another? —

When multiple participants want to speak at once, establish who will speak first, second, third, and so on. If possible, write down the speaker order somewhere that the group can see, and add a checkmark next to each name after a speaker has had their turn. This process is known as **speaker stacking**.

What Should I Do If an Attendee Takes the Discussion Off Track? —

If a participant makes a point that isn't relevant to the issue at hand, acknowledge and record it, then set it aside for now. You might say, ***"That's a good point, but I'm not sure it's relevant to the objectives of this meeting. Let's table it for another time."*** You aren't ignoring the participants' ideas, but you're also staying on track and moving forward.

What Should I Do If the Meeting Grows Stagnant? —

When participants get stuck talking in circles without committing to specific decisions, solutions, or plans, you need to intervene. If that happens, you might:

- **Encourage decision-making with visual aids.** Use visual aids such as whiteboards or flip charts for capturing ideas, summarizing outcomes, or bringing closure to decisions or action items. Visual aids can help you keep the group aligned and signal when to move to the next agenda item.
- **Reframe and refocus.** Another technique is to reframe and refocus the conversation with a specific prompt, such as, *"What are the next steps?" "Where did we land?" "How can we keep moving forward?"* Or, *"What's our final decision here?"*

What's the Best Way to Solicit Ideas From Attendees? —

Quickly generate ideas with a group brainstorm. Give the group a prompt and have them shout out ideas as fast as possible. Set the expectation that no idea is a bad idea in a brainstorm. Record ideas where everyone in the group can see them.

How Can I Create a Safe Space for Discussing Sensitive Topics? —

Agree on **ground rules** to guide group interactions. Having ground rules can foster a respectful environment that encourages participation or invites participants to voice disagreements constructively.

Tip: Some examples of ground rules include: *“Consider and respect others’ opinions,”* and, *“Give everyone an opportunity to speak.”* You might even agree on signals participants can use when they have something they’d like to add without disrupting the person speaking.

What If a Meeting Agenda Item Is Taking Too Long? —

A drawn-out meeting isn’t just frustrating, it also negatively impacts productivity. Manage the clock with the help of these tips:

- **Create a “no-rehash rule.”** A “no-rehash rule” prevents the group from repeating previous points. If an item has already been addressed, say, “No rehashing,” and encourage others to do the same. That will help call out counterproductive behaviour.
- **Give a time limit.** If the group is struggling to reach an agreement, give them a certain amount of time to decide. If a decision can’t be reached after that time limit, assign independent work and defer the topic until the next meeting.



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

If attendees are speaking over each other, use the process known as

_____.

Type your answer here

SUBMIT



Complete the content above before moving on.

One challenge that we haven't addressed is how to navigate competing ideas and interests to build consensus in meetings. Explore this topic in the next lesson.

Building Consensus in Meetings



What Does Building Consensus Mean?

A common objective of meetings is to reach agreement on an idea, issue, or decision. For example, you might need to converge multiple ideas into a single strategy, decide on the best course of action, or develop a common vision.

Building consensus describes this process of reaching agreement in a group setting.

5 Steps for Building Consensus

Building consensus requires collaboration and evaluating multiple perspectives; that can lead to smarter and more informed decision-making. Consensus also requires space for questions and concerns, which can help to foster solutions everyone supports. Click through the cards below to learn the different steps involved in reaching consensus in meetings:

Step 1

Define the Issue

Introduce the issue and relevant background information at the beginning of the meeting. Clearly outline decisions that need to be made, or problems that need to be solved, so that everyone is aligned with the meeting's purpose. You might also take this a step further by describing how the issue fits within the greater objectives of the team or organization.

Step 2

Gather Initial Reactions

Avoid the temptation to start brainstorming ideas or solutions right away. Instead, ask meeting participants to share initial feelings, reactions, and criteria that are important to their decision-making. Consider asking specific factions of the group to share thoughts from their unique perspective. For example, you might ask the marketing specialist to share his thoughts from a marketing perspective, or a developer to share her thoughts from a development perspective.

Step 3

Brainstorm and Debate Ideas

Move on to brainstorming ideas and weighing potential solutions once everyone has shared their initial thoughts and reactions. Collect a range of ideas and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of each. Open the floor for healthy debate.

Step 4

Form a Proposal

Look for common ground and patterns that emerge in the group discussion. Synthesize ideas to form a proposal. Your first proposal doesn't have to be final. An early proposal can help you gauge how close you are to reaching consensus and serve as a launching pad for feedback and iteration in the next step.

Step 5

Test for Agreement and Iterate

The final step is to check for group agreement. Present the proposal and ask for participants' thoughts and feedback directly. Do they support the idea? Do they have any reservations? Is the proposal close? If participants have reservations, address them together. Keep iterating until the group reaches an agreement.

Summary

Reaching consensus doesn't mean that a decision has to be everyone's first choice. However, it does mean that the group has addressed concerns and participants can agree that a decision is the next best alternative.

Strategies for Facilitating Consensus

Reaching consensus is not always a linear process. It can be messy, and you might need to repeat steps several times before you find the right solution. To help speed up this process, consider the following four strategies. Click on each strategy below to expand it:

Focus on the Criteria —

Criteria are the standards for making a decision. For example, your criteria for choosing an event location might include a space that has a stage, a space that accommodates 300 people, and a space that falls within a certain budget.

Ask each meeting participant to share their top criteria for making a decision or finding a solution. List the criteria for everyone to see. Encourage compromise by having the group explore the best alternatives that still satisfy shared criteria.

Gather Feedback in Advance —

Take a proactive approach to building consensus by interviewing meeting participants or sending out a survey in advance. Gather and share the initial insights, reactions, and feedback you receive anonymously with the other participants several days before your meeting.

Advance feedback encourages participants to consider alternative options and reflect on others' reasoning right away. You can also use advance feedback to inform your meeting agenda. For example, if you notice that several people express the same concern, then you can add that topic to be addressed in-depth at the meeting.

Identify the Source and Extent of Disagreement —

Align meeting participants by separating areas of agreement from areas of disagreement and clearly identifying the source and extent of the disagreement.

For example, you might say, *"We seem to agree that the content team should be in charge of making these edits. So, it sounds like the area of disagreement is whether these edits should take place before or after script writing. Is that correct?"*

By identifying the source and extent of the disagreement, you help all parties to focus on the unresolved issue.

Check the Group's Temperature —

One strategy to test for consensus is to check the group's temperature. Present a proposal and then ask meeting participants to share how they feel about it on a scale of 1-5:

- A "1" means that the participant fundamentally objects to the proposal and prefers to create a new one.
- A "2" means that the participant has some reservations.

- A “3” means that the participant neither approves or disapproves of the proposal.
- A “4” means that the participant likes the proposal but would like to make a few amendments.
- A “5” means that the participant fully approves of the proposal as is.

Use this temperature check to quickly assess your group’s level of consensus and guide the discussion that follows. Depending on the responses you receive, you might need to address reservations, brainstorm amendments, or throw out the proposal and draft something new.



To check your understanding of the lesson content, answer the question below...

You’re three-quarters of the way through your meeting, and the group hasn’t committed to any decisions. You have, however, brainstormed and discussed several options at length. What do you do?



Define the issue. Redirect the group's attention by reiterating the issue they are trying to solve.



Form a proposal and test it. Take what you've heard from the group to form an early proposal so that you can test it and iterate from there.



Use your authority. Ask proponents of each idea to present its strengths and weaknesses, then use your position of authority to dictate the final decision.

SUBMIT



Complete the content above before moving on.

Consensus is always the goal. But what if disagreements become contentious? In the next lesson, learn how to manage conflict in meetings.

Lesson 8 of 9

Knowledge Check



Module 8: Review Questions

Question

01/10

What is the SIT technique useful for?

- Keeping attendees in the meeting
- Keeping attendees' attention
- Dealing with participants who are running in and out of the meeting
- Making meetings go faster

Question

02/10

What is 'I' in SIT technique?

- Incorporate frequent questions
- Incorporate brainstorming
- Incorporate frequent breaks
- Incorporate frequent presentations

Question

03/10

Which of the following is the best way to ensure that attendees will silence their cell phones?

- Place signs with instructions to silence their electronics
- Remind them about it in the agenda
- Ask them to do it at the beginning of the meeting
- All of the above

Question

04/10

If you ask attendees to turn off their phones at the beginning of the meeting, you'll reduce the chance of disruption by:

- 50%
- 75%
- 95%
- 100%

Question

05/10

What is 'A' in the EAR technique?

- Acknowledge the importance of the meeting
- Acknowledge that the topic is valid and worthy of discussion
- Acknowledge that any idea is worthy of discussion
- Acknowledge that each member has equally contributed when the meeting approaches the end

Question

06/10

The EAR technique helps you redirect without:

- Losing time
- Offending participants
- Entering a new digression
- Making a new problem

Question

07/10

What is the best thing to do if a conflict occurs?

- Ignore it and proceed with the meeting
- Intervene
- Call someone to handle it
- Let the conflicted attendees solve it by themselves

Question

08/10

Which of the following is not one of the steps for handling possible conflicts?

Stop

Go

Drop

Roll

Question

09/10

With enough planning, you can avoid disruptions at your meetings.

True

False

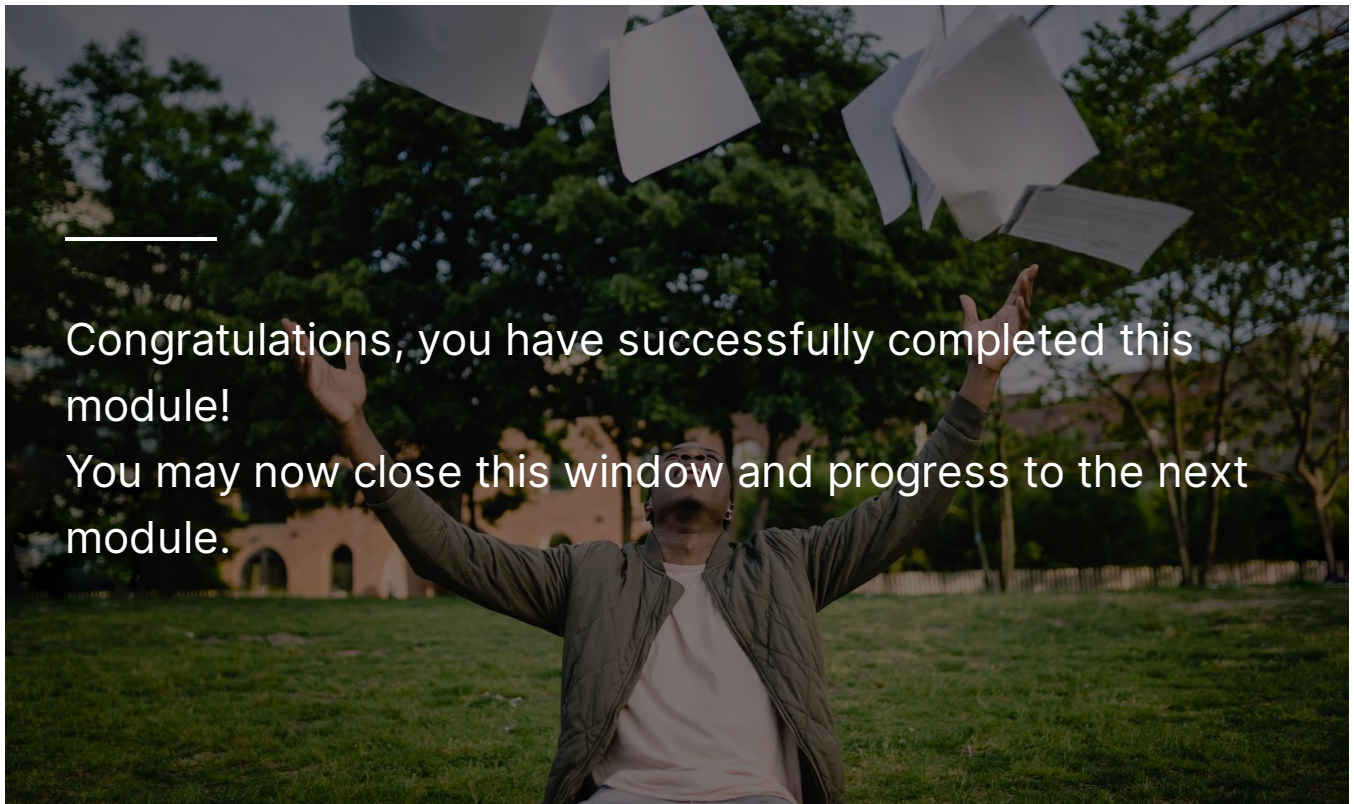
Question

10/10

What can a participant do when they need to step away?

- Smoke
- Cry
- Eat
- Go outside

Module 8: Completed



Congratulations, you have successfully completed this module!
You may now close this window and progress to the next module.