Tips for Video Based Classes

Living Your Best Life (With Diabetes!)

Video based group classes can be just as effective and engaging as live group classes. In fact, many people prefer video-based classes to live in-person. They do not have to deal with transportation issues, day care issues, and they get to remain in the place they likely feel most comfortable - their own home. However, facilitating group classes via video does come with some unique challenges.

The biggest issue for facilitators of video-based group classes is keeping participants engaged. Most participants have experiences with screens. They watch TV. They may have watched YouTube or other videos. They may have attended a conference or other trainings on video. For most participants their experiences with screens are likely to have been one of observing. You don’t typically engage with TV or a video. As a facilitator you will need to work to set the tone right from the beginning of the very first class and every class thereafter: this is a class that is meant for participating. There are a couple of ways to do this. First, start every class with a poll or questions that require participants to chat with you and with each other. This will send a message at the beginning of class that you will want to know each participant’s opinions and feelings. Secondly, you will need to engage with participants regularly in a way that requires their active participation through speaking, thumbs up, thumbs down, chatting, or sharing with each other. The rule of thumb for online learning is to not go longer than 4 minutes without requiring your audience to participate in some way.

Another challenge of online group learning you will notice, is that without nonverbal cues, participants will not be able to tell when a classmate is about to talk. If people are using their microphones you will need to call on people one at a time to prevent people talking over each other. This can end up taking a lot of time. When people share one at a time for too long, it limits the engagement of other participants and people stop paying attention. To prevent that, it is helpful to use the chat box frequently. When you ask participants a question, and people respond by chatting, everyone is able to share, and at the same time. This increases engagement, and keeps any one activity from dragging on and on.

In order for participants to have the tools they need to actively participate in classes, they will be mailed a box of tools and materials before the first class. It will be very important for participants to keep this box complete, as missing items will keep people from being able to participate. Let each participant know before mailing their box the importance of keeping all tools in the box at all times. Also, let participants know there are items in the box that will be attractive to children, for example there will be markers and colored paper. It may be helpful for participants with young children to have a discussion with their family explaining that their class toolbox is only for the participant.

**Key Recommendations**:

* Practice Zoom with a friend or coworker before your first class. Make sure your microphone is loud enough. Some people can use the internal microphone included with their computer, but many people need a headset microphone so that others can hear them well. The same can be said for the camera. Some computer cameras are great. Other times they are grainy and it is better to purchase an inexpensive web cam to use instead.
* Make sure where you will be presenting has plenty of lighting. Lighting makes a big difference in how well others can see you. Lighting doesn’t have to be fancy. Start by using extra house and floor lamps. Place them behind and off to the side of your computer, so they illuminate your face. Lighting behind you will cast shadows on your face. You want to avoid this.
* Make sure your computer is eye level. You want to look as if you are having a conversation with the participants. If you need to prop your computer up on books or board games or whatever you can find that is sturdy but brings your computer to eye level, do that.
* Ask participants to “mute” themselves when they are not speaking throughout these lessons. It will cut down on background noise. You will need to remind participants of this every lesson.
* Throughout these lessons, depending on the size of your class, you may need to encourage participants to use the “chat” boxes to participate most of the time. While we don’t want to discourage people from using the microphone if they are uncomfortable chatting, if most participants only use the microphone, and you have a class that is large (15 people or more) you will find that lessons will take a very long time, and you will not be able to finish the lesson.
* In video group classes, participants are unable to see body language cues, and are unable to tell when their fellow classmates are about to talk. Therefore, in group education, when you are using microphones, the group’s facilitator will need to call on participants to keep them from talking at the same time. This lengthens the amount of time for a group discussion by more than you might guess. For this reason, using chat can be helpful, as many people can contribute their ideas simultaneously.
* Use “thumbs up”, “thumbs down”, “raising hands” and “clapping hands” throughout these classes to encourage engagement without speaking.