

DEVELOPING A SUPPORT GROUP

By Marcia Matthies

First thing to remember when starting a support group ... it is always a work in progress. As you are dealing with people who have issues changing daily ... keep an open mind as well as a listening ear.



#1 Gather a planning committee. Include professionals and lay people ... people who have a passion for your group. In your initial meeting, decide what your group is about and where it is going. Don't re-invent the wheel. If a national organization exists that represents your topic ... contact them for ___starting kits or ___topics for your group.

If another group exists somewhere in the United States...keep in mind they may be great support to you and your group but you also will bring new ideas and a fresh perspective that may benefit their group.

#2 Think of your group as a “Mutual Help” Group. Others in your community may wish to join in on the organization and regular running of your group. By starting out as the leader, it does not mean you have made a life commitment ... begin from the beginning grooming others to keep the group going. This is important to keeping you mentally and physically strong for the long run.

#3 Seek out professionals who have an interest in your group's needs.

___Social Workers ___Physicians ___Mental Health Professionals ___Teachers

#4 Identify a comfortable meeting location.

___Community center ___Legion/VFW Hall
___Church ___Hospital
___School ___Your Facility



Allow your community businesses to step up and donate their meeting rooms to the group.

___Always give thanks via letter and PR for the use of any room given free of charge.

___How many will the room seat? ___Are there tables and chairs

___Are their kitchen/coffee pot facilities.

Note: Avoid setting chairs in a lecture format ... circles or relaxed settings work best.



#5 Develop a meeting date and time

Identify other support groups and organizational meetings throughout your community. Your chamber of commerce may have a list of meetings. Wednesday nights are often considered “church nights”. You want open nights that allow people to attend and not have to make a “choice” on what they should attend.

#6 Identify the groups purpose among the originators but most importantly bring it to the group and allow them input. Allowing them involvement in developing a purpose or mission gives them ownership.

#7 Publicize your Meeting

Church Bulletins Chamber of Commerce Monthly
Calendar Local Bulletin Boards
 Discharge Planners/Social Workers Local Newspapers
 Other _____
 Always notify State Stroke Office of your times, location etc.
for inclusion on the Stroke Association Website



Be prepared if your local newspaper would like to run an article on your group...

Why did you start the group?
 Who can attend your group?
 Keep the group non-judgmental
 Educating the attendees as well as others in the community
 Reduce caregiver stress
 Support the person in need
 Eliminate isolation
 Assist in building new relationship
 Building a stronger sense of community

When publicizing your group ... is there a high school computer class that could help develop your flyer or a local marketing company that would like to donate their services "in kind".

Contact Local Media to submit a public service announcement (PSA). Most often these are free.
 Get flyers, brochures out to all local groups, health fairs, county fairs, etc.
 Provide flyers to Veterans Service Officers

#8 Running your first meeting

Identify the person or persons who will greet everyone at the door
 Identify person who will lead the meeting
 Identify who will provide refreshments (Note: this person should come a little early to have coffee), etc. ready when first attendees arrive.
 At each meeting ask the group for topics of interest and possible speakers.
 At the end of each meeting, meet and determine positives and barriers for your next meeting

REMEMBER, YOUR GROUP IS A WORK IN PROGRESS ... ALWAYS!



#9 Delegating responsibilities ... be prepared to delegate from the beginning. *You can't do it all!* Involving others will only make your group stronger and relieve the stress of organizers.

#10 Build a Speakers Bureau ... I guarantee you will be given names constantly that can assist you in providing valuable information on how to live life to the fullest via your support group.

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