



# **SUPPORT GROUP LEADER TRAINING:**

## **PART 5 – Q&A**



# Q&A PART 5: ASSESSMENT

# Question 7?

What is your biggest concern or worry in regards to hosting your first Support Group Meeting?

**That there will be technical difficulties preventing it from running smoothly / navigating that online space**

With tech, a lot is out of our control. Practice sessions and familiarising yourself with the platform is always helpful, but if problems arise, take a deep breath and know that it is something that happens, and it's not the end of the world.

Don't be afraid to let the Members know if you have an issue or ask for help.

**How to start the conversation**

Starting off with an ice-breaker can help set your Group at ease.

Having a topic for the meeting will also guide you and make you feel more comfortable as the facilitator.

**Getting everyone comfortable to share their stories**

Lead by example! Sharing some of your own stories will make the Group feel comfortable to share theirs.

**The turn-out might not be as I expect**

Keep in mind that making a difference in the life of one person is still incredibly valuable. Two Members plus you is three, which is considered a Group.

Regardless of the participation of you your first meeting, we will work together. If the turnout is low, we will advertise more. If you feel the Group is the perfect size, we can halt advertising for a while, and if you have a massive turn out, we will look to find other leaders as clearly there is a massive need in the community.

In our experience, only about 50% of people who RSVP actually attend.

**My biggest concern is that I might be too young for this**

Remember that we can set an age range target for your Group – for example 18 -30 (young adults) - that way it is likely that you may be facing similar challenges.



**That I am going to mess it up! I am very scared that I will say the wrong thing, speak for too long or not know how to react to certain things such as long silences.**

This is a concern many of you shared. Being nervous is totally normal! it makes you human, and it shows how much you care. Try not to judge your emotions, but rather simply observe them.

Let's say you do **talk to much**... that's why we debrief. So that we can reflect and analyse. You are never going to be perfect, what matters is you are trying to make a difference.

At times, there may be a significant reason why you are talking more than you think you should be.

I know I talk too much if no one else talks. I am aware of it, but it is still something I naturally 'default' to when no one else is talking. Now that I am aware of it, I try to remind myself to perhaps wait a few more seconds before 'saving' the Group from silence. I often find that in those few seconds, someone will step in and talk.

I have also come to appreciate the silence and acknowledge my need to 'save' the Group, is in fact a need to 'save' myself from my own feelings of discomfort.

**I'm very passionate about creating a safe space and I think my biggest concern would be to fail to do that in any way.**

My question here would be, what does failure look like, and what would success look like to you?

If you are doing your best to make a difference and do good in your community, and are creating a space that is welcoming, safe and non-judgemental - do you think you can still fail?



## **I am concerned I won't remember all the important protocols for the first meeting**

Making a list, or having your meeting plan prepared may help you to feel better.

Main points to touch on:

- Welcome and introduction, (both of you and your Members)
- Purpose of a Support Group (what Members can expect, and what their expectations are)
- Boundaries and limitations of the Group
- Opening a discussion about Group Values

## **Handling conflict in the Group**

Refresh your memory by reading over Part 4 – “Handling potentially challenging situations” as well as well as Part 2 – “Characteristics of a good Support Group Leader”.

## **That people will leave feeling more overwhelmed than when they started**

In Groups we often discuss difficult topics, and that may leave some Members feeling overwhelmed. At the end of a meeting you can debrief with the Group. If someone is really struggling you may want to check up on them afterwards, or ask if they would like a SADAG counsellor to call them.

## **I will run out of time**

And? If you do? It's not a train smash! Bring it up with the Group if you are feeling worried about it. Debrief and look at ways of how to keep on time in the future. (This may sometimes look like making the meeting a little longer).

## **I am concerned that one of the Members has been using, and this may cause distress for other attendees**

Make sure that this is something that you list in the Group value statement if it is something you are concerned about. That way if it does happen, you can refer back to the statement and ask the Member to leave, and only return when they are sober.

## **That the meeting does not meet the standards of the Members joining – as in, they do not feel the value or connection the Group would have intended**

Unpacking each Members expectations for the Group, as well as discussing the limitations of the Group, can really help with this. Checking in with the Group regularly and asking about their experience of the Group is can also helpful to guide you and give you clarity.



# Question 8?

## Question 3 List three things you can do to help your meetings run smoothly

- Test equipment / do a dry run prior to the meeting
- Use the same link for each meeting if it is online
- Start off with an ice-breaker
- Let your greeting set the tone
- Welcoming Members warmly
- Make venue comfortable
- Arrange furniture in a quiet environment before the meeting such as chairs in a circle and set up tea facilities
- Prepare before the meeting
- Arrive early
- Prior to the online meeting ensure that I am familiar with the online logistics and functionality.
- Agenda
- Let people take turns to go over the guidelines
- Have a beginning, middle and end in each meeting
- Advertise the Group beforehand and send a reminder to existing Members
- For online meetings - Make sure all the technical things are sorted out - my internet connection, sound, the background, any audio or video files I may want to use are ready
- Set rules and boundaries from the beginning
- Check in with the venue before hand
- Have a Group meeting plan or agenda to guide you
- Start online meetings with a intro slide up so that people know they're in the right place
- Make all people feel welcome and comfortable
- Have a register for Members or a paper trail encase there is need for follow up
- Keep a notebook handy to jot down ideas or topics to follow up
- Encourage introductions
- Introduction questions to get to know each other, if necessary explain what Support is and what to expect, explore the Members expectations and discuss with the Group the rules and Group values



- Do a practice session
- Use a timer
- Have a topic and prepare for it
- Allow people to have different views; however, respect for others needs to be maintained
- Prepare for the meeting; topic of discussion, handouts etc.
- Making sure you are in a private space without interruptions and/or distracting backgrounds
- Have a co-facilitator
- Have a plan for the meeting, even if you don't end up sticking to it because things take a different turn
- Encourage Members to take part in discussions
- Treat everyone equally to make them feel comfortable
- Do a test run before meetings with friends or family Members
- First meeting focus will include 'What's the purpose of these meetings? ', 'What Members can do', and 'how they may assist'
- Keep an eye on the clock
- Set up registration table
- Be present in the meeting
- Have refreshments prepared
- Have a cup of tea and read through the topic that will be discussed
- Do a debrief
- Remind Members of the Group Rules
- Give everyone a chance to share
- Ask Members for input, suggestions etc.
- To create the Group values with the Members and interact, and include all Members
- Be mindful and sensitive of team Members' emotions
- Keep structure and make sure meetings don't run over



# Question 9?

A Member of your online Support Group meeting has a boyfriend you can often hear commenting and muttering about what is being discussed in the meeting. What would you do in this situation

There are several different options and ways to handle the situation, and several will depend on context. None are necessarily right or wrong, and you may find that you have to try more than one.

## Being less directive

If this has only started happening recently or it has only happened once, you may want to generally go over the Groups rules and value statement, or even the online Group etiquette statement. We don't want her to feel targeted so you may want to ask the Group, or remind them of why each of the values are in place.

## Contacting the Member directly

You could message the Member in a private chat during the meeting and ask if she can mute herself, or you may ask if she could go somewhere more private for Group confidentiality reasons.

You could contact her after the meeting and ask how she is doing. Comment on the fact that you can often hear someone talking in the background and explain how this can be disruptive to the Group, but also make Members feel exposed.

Remind her that a Group is a safe sharing space, and she may not feel comfortable talking about some things in front of him, which may jeopardise her experience in the Group.

You can ask her if it would be possible for her to go somewhere more private during the meeting. Remember, we don't know everyone's circumstances. Maybe she lives in a one-bedroom flat, and can't go somewhere private.

By asking her if there is somewhere more private, you open the topic to discussion. If she can't go anywhere where she is alone, maybe suggest that she put earphones on – so that he can't hear the conversation. What about suggesting that she sit with her back to a wall so no one can see him?

If it is the first time you are bringing it up with her, try to be gentle, and approach the conversation as a discussion rather than a reprimand. I would suggest calling her instead of sending her a WhatsApp as that leaves room for intentions to be misread.

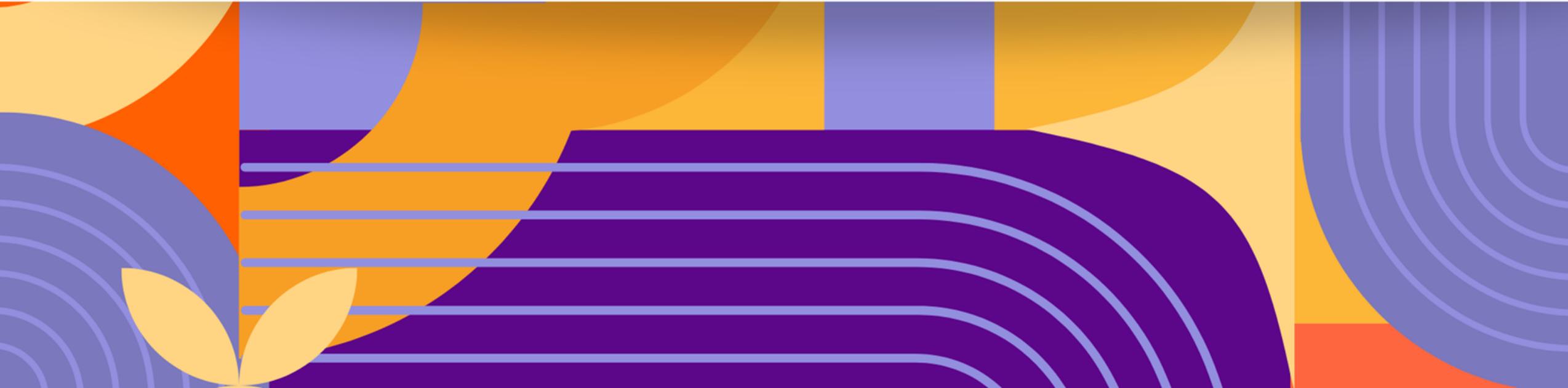
If it continues to happen you may need to speak to her again, and explain that his presence is jeopardising the Group's sense of safety, and if she can't go somewhere private, regrettably, she may need to leave the Group.



# Question 10?

**During the 'beginning' of each meeting you have a Member that always takes up more than their 'fair share' of time. List two different ways that you could address this issue.**

- Summarise key points & ask for other Members to comment.
- Start each meeting with the agenda and remind Members to be respectful and cognizant of each other's time to share.
- Ask Members at the beginning of a meeting to discuss how it feels when they don't have an opportunity to share (make sure that this conversation isn't specifically directed at anyone).
- Acknowledge the person and request that someone else is given a turn to speak
- Discuss value statements of the Support Group.
- Politely mention that others are keen to share their ideas and call upon someone in the Group to continue.
- Remind the Member that there is a limited amount of time each Member to share with the Group.
- Try to encourage as much discussion and participation as possible from other Members in the Group.
- Introduce a meeting topic.
- Reflect their content and feelings and ask if anyone else relates.
- Give a slight nod that they need to finish up.



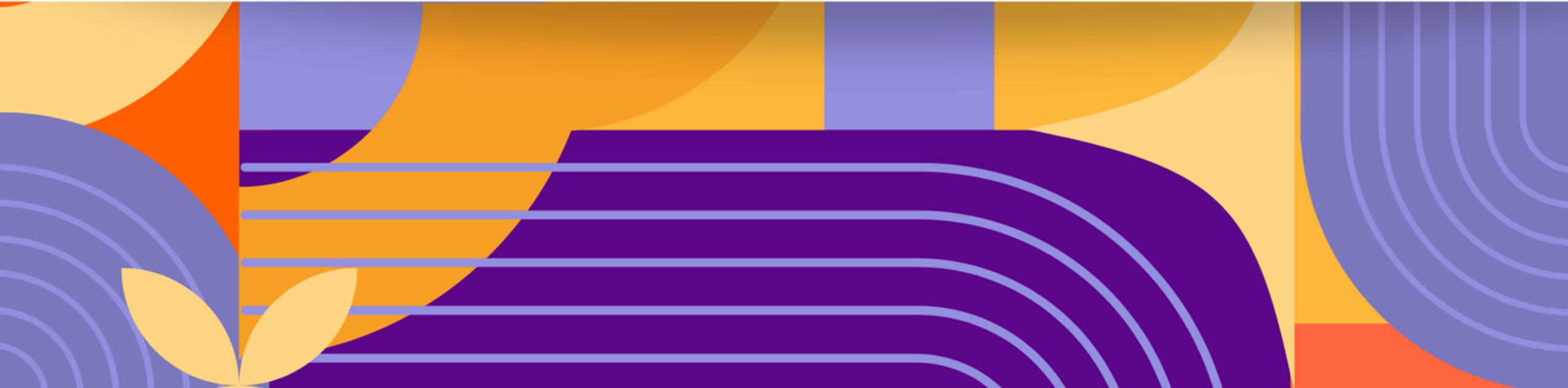
- Ask everyone to keep their introductions as short as possible.
- Help the Member to understand that their view is very important; however the Group has limited time and we would like to give everyone a fair opportunity to share the concerns and views.
- Avoid eye contact, move eye contact the to next Member.
- Interject: "You bring up some interesting points" Does anyone have any comments, or would others like to share their story like this?
- Interject and redirect.
- Sorry to interrupt, "Mary, It sounds like you have a lot to discuss this week. I heard you raise an important theme of 'frustration' with the system. Who would like to go next, and we can come back to this concept later if we have time.
- I would suggest allowing this person to speak last.
- Try to wrap up the Member's sharing as gently as you can.
- Check in with her before the next session to see how she is and gently remind her of the Group's agreement on time
- Speak to this person in private before session start. Ask him/her to please be aware of the time restriction
- Make them the time keeper.
- You could speak to the person before the meeting and ask them how they are coping. Get them talking with you so that at the beginning of the meeting, they have had a chance to talk and now can think through and process and then talk again later during the meeting.
- Speak to Member privately and explain that if they feel they need more time or one on one space to contact SADAG or their Mental Health practitioner.
- Respectfully ask them to hold their comments until the end to allow enough time for others.
- Unpack further with the Member as there might be something really bothering him/her .
- " It's wonderful to see how comfortable you are at sharing. Thank you. Let's just hear from everyone else too."
- If the Group rules are reinforced at the beginning of each meeting, making a special point of mentioning that each person in the Group needs a chance to share, this would be less likely to happen, and if it did, I could gently remind the Members of the rules.



# Question 11?

## What is the value of 'debriefing' after each session?

- It gives the Leader the opportunity to learn from the session & identify points to improve on for the following sessions.
- Allows the Leader to process what has been discussed & can help inform the agenda for the next meeting.
- It can give you the opportunity to grow and it allows you to process what worked and didn't work in the Group today. Remember, reflecting on what worked is just as important.
- Debriefing is also an opportunity to reflect on your Members as individuals.
- The Leader can reflect and process what happened in the Group, and become more aware of the feelings they may have experienced during the meeting.
- Debriefing offers closure, an opportunity for reflection.
- The value of debriefing is important to the Group and the Support Group Leader. It gives the Group the space and opportunity to grow, improve the functioning of the Group
- Gives room for improvement in learning and growth opportunities, allows one to process how the meeting progressed and allows the Leader to seek assistance in case of an overwhelming situation.



- It is an activity where the Group Leader and co-facilitators (if applicable) sit down and review what has taken place during a Support Group meeting. Reflecting on what happened, what worked and what didn't. Was there a conflict, and how was it handled?
- If a conflict arose, did you handle the conflict well, what can you do differently? Making notes of questions, fears or Anxiety that you can discuss with the Group.
- Allows one to see where you could have said or done things differently. Also aids in identifying issues you feel need to be raised and addressing issues at the next meeting.
- It allows for closure and a time for retrospection. Members can share what they are taking away from the session and what they might be feeling.
- Some people's lives are hectic, and when you give-give-give all the time, you need to recharge and trust someone else with your vulnerability.
- It gives you a space to reflect on how the Group made you feel, how you are feeling after the meeting, and also if you feel you may want to speak to SADAG about something you are experiencing or worried about.



# Question 12?

True or false, the Groups' value statement is decided on by the Support Group Leader

This answer is **false**.

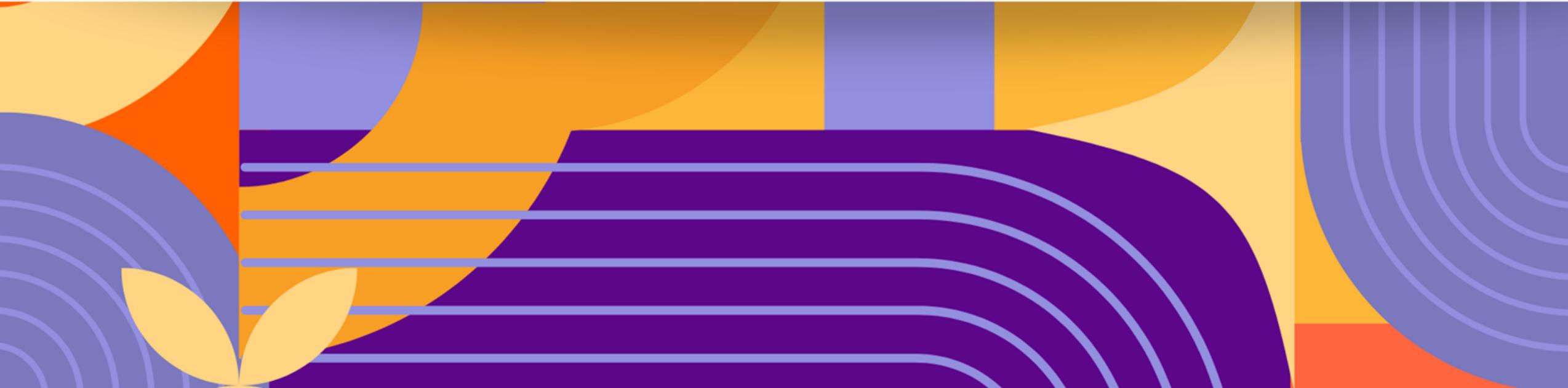
**Deciding on a Group value statement** should be a discussion between your Group.

Opening it to the Group shows that it is the "Group's Group" not your Group.

If Group Members help make the rules, it is likely they believe in and agree with the rules.

It also means that it will be easier to implement the rules.

You can vote on rules as Group by putting up your hand.



## Question 13?

As a SADAG Support Group Leader for a Depression and Anxiety Group, you recently received a call from a woman who found your contact details on the SADAG website. She expressed interest in joining the Support Group, sharing that she suspects she might be Depressed.

## How would you go about screening her as a potential Member?

Try to be mindful that someone reaching out for help can be a really big step for them. So, starting with a statement emphasising you are glad they reached out and why you need to ask them some questions can help establish a welcoming tone.

### You would ask questions like:

- What type of Support Group does the person want to join
- Where the person lives
- Has the person been professionally diagnosed?
- Have they gone for treatment? By whom?
- Are they on medication?
- Have they been for Therapy, Counselling etc.

### We screen potential Support Group Members to:

- Remind them that a Support Group is not Therapy
- Explain it is for extra support, networking and guidance
- Make sure that the person gets the correct help and information they need
- Find out if the person feels ready to join a Support Group
- Make sure that the Support Group will be beneficial to them and not triggering
- Make sure that they would be a good fit/addition to a Support Group

As this person only thinks she may be Depressed, we would need to explore this more, why she thinks this may be the case, and also if she has spoken to a professional about it. If she hasn't, we would encourage her to do that first before joining the Support Group



If you are concerned about someone who has reached out to you, and you feel they may need more help from a counsellor, please either refer them to:

- the SADAG website <https://www.sadag.org>
- One of our toll free numbers 0800 456 789, 0800 212 223
- They can SMS 31393
- Let me or Tracy ([info@anxiety.org.za](mailto:info@anxiety.org.za)) know – and we will arrange for a counsellor to call them
- You can also contact me for further support and guidance





**Q&A**

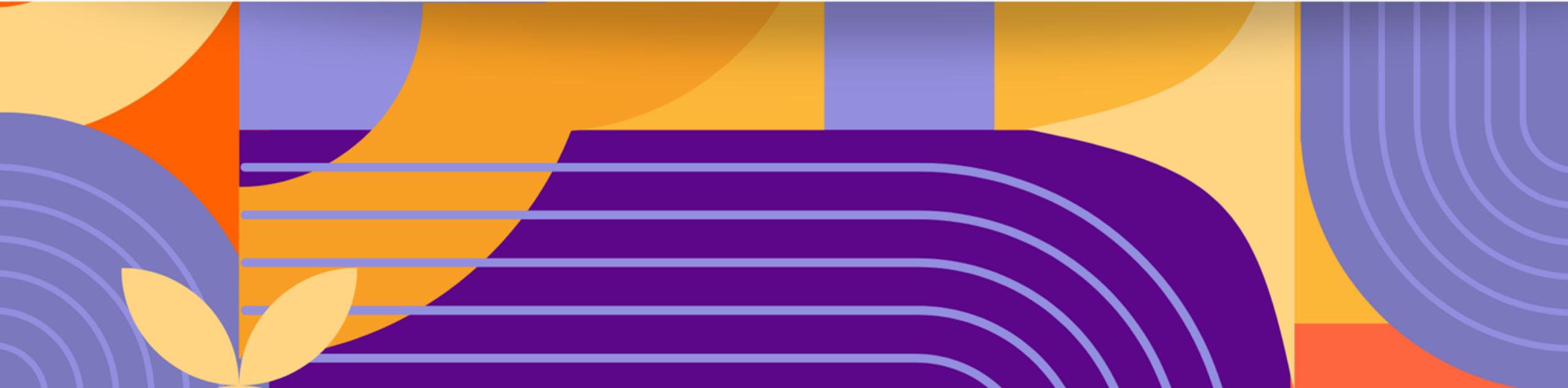
**PART 5: EVALUATION  
QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK**

**What if the Group fails to be participatory after several meetings and are not willing to share their experiences even after making the environment safe and confidential. How can that be handled? Is softly nominating people to share a good idea?**

I think it is unlikely that this will happen, if it does use ice breakers can be a good prompt.

If it continues give us a call and we can try unpack what is going on.

Another idea would be to focus the topic of a meeting specifically about Group purpose. Ask Members to share how they are finding the Group. Reflect on the fact that you are concerned that no-one is participating, ask the Group what they feel the Group can do to to make it more interactive.

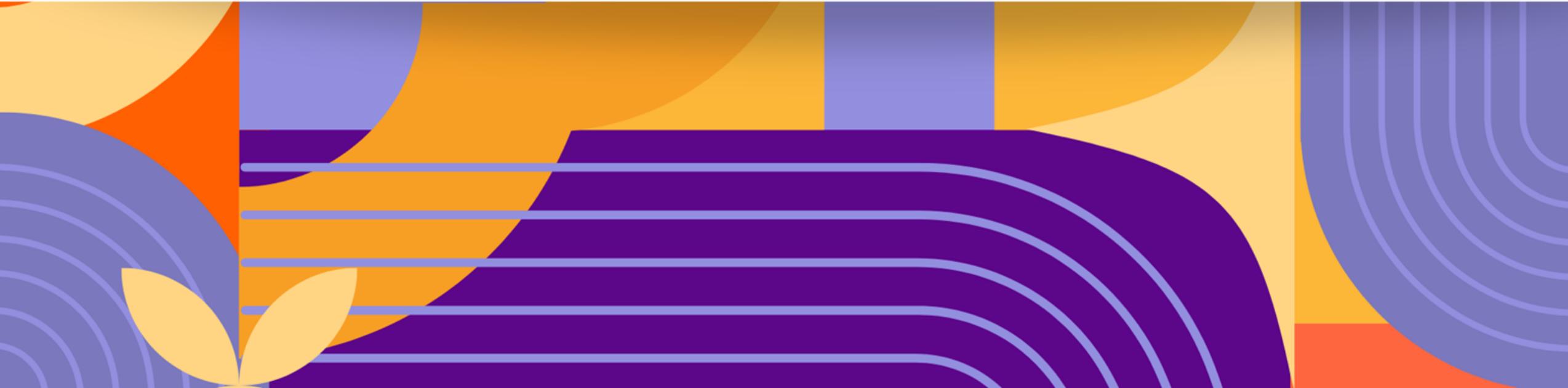


**Can we have a 2nd or 3rd co-facilitator?**

**Also can these co-facilitators join at a later date?**

We have had Groups with 6 co-facilitators in the past. One facilitator was constant while the other facilitators took turns co-hosting. While this is possible, it can be disruptive to the Groups sense of cohesion and purpose. I think that two facilitators is a nice fit, but you could explore three. I think it would also depend on the size of your Group, if there are 7 Members are three facilitators necessary? If you have a reason or need for 3-facilitators there is no reason why you shouldn't.

A co-facilitator can join whenever you want; however, if the Group is already established, I would suggest discussing the addition of a facilitator with the Group to get their buy-in and make sure they are comfortable. Anyone who is considering being a co-facilitator needs to first complete the SADAG training.



**I have started reading the journals on the website, would these be appropriate for topical discussions?**

Definitely!

**What happens if a Member forms an unhealthy emotional dependence or attachment to another Member?**

This can be prevented by discouraging Members from contacting other Members outside of the Group.

Reminding them that they are all there for additional help and Support, and may not be able to 'give' outside of the boundaries of the meeting.

**How would we handle the scenario of the girl telling the Group about her abortion? After our initial reflection, what's next?**

After your reflection, she may likely continue sharing. Try to stay present with her and what she is saying / how she is feeling. Even when there are several emotions coming up. Identifying the main underlying emotion may give her some more clarity.

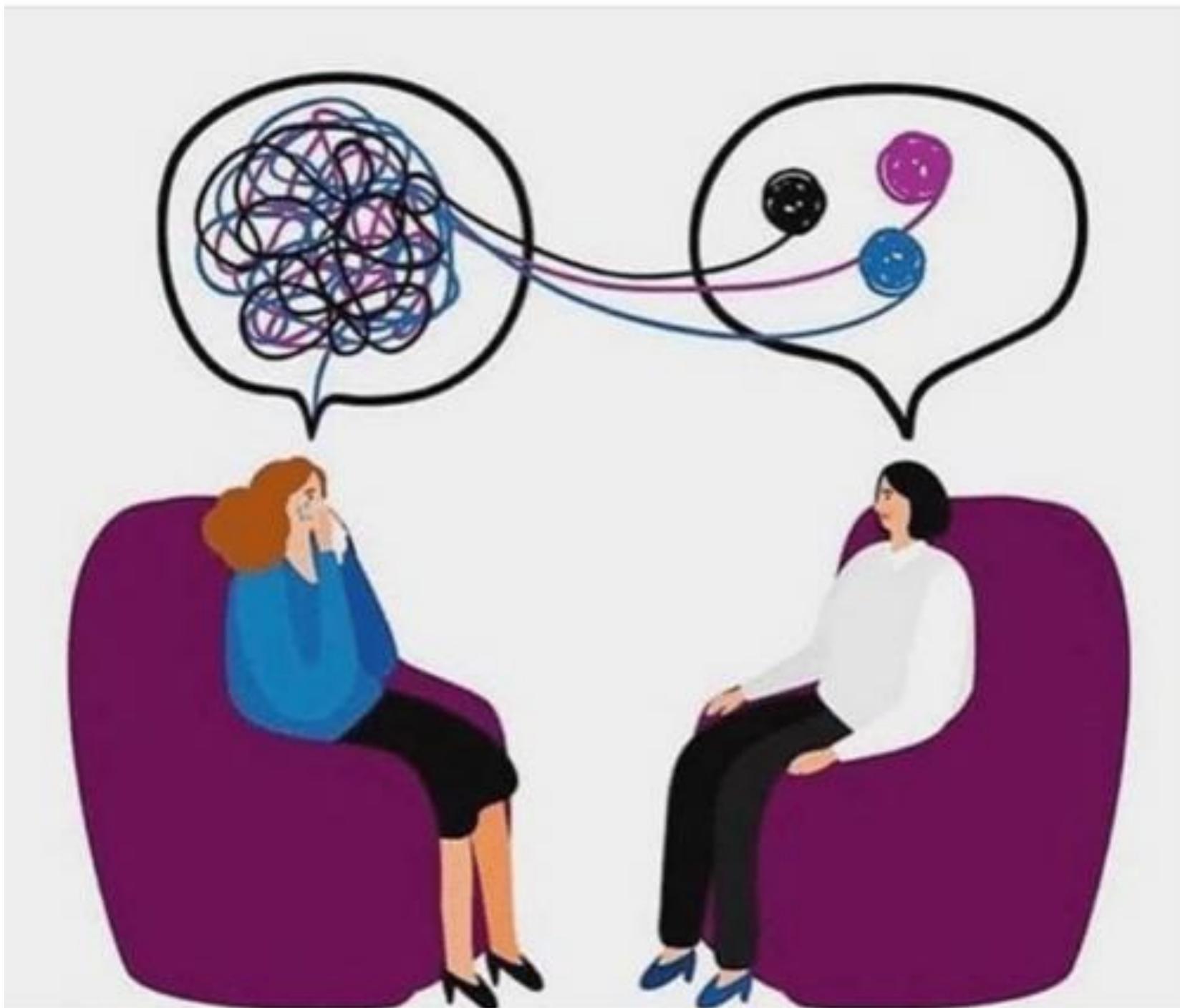
You may help her further by summarising the different problems she is experiencing, 'so on the one hand you are feeling like this, or this is happening, but on the other hand xyz'.

Summarising can help when someone is feeling overwhelmed or overcome by emotion or a situation.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed as a Leader if we can't go into problem-solving mode or rescuing/ reassurance. So try to be kind to yourself, as this often makes us feel helpless.

Don't underestimate the power of simply being able to talk to someone. Reflecting on her feelings can help her to make sense of what she is experiencing. Sharing more (if she is open to it) can also help her compartmentalise how she feels into more comprehensible parts; and often allows an opportunity to realise what she needs to do next.





For more information, please email  
[SupportGroups@anxiety.org.za](mailto:SupportGroups@anxiety.org.za)

