



# **SUPPORT GROUP LEADER TRAINING:**

## **PART 2 – Q&A**



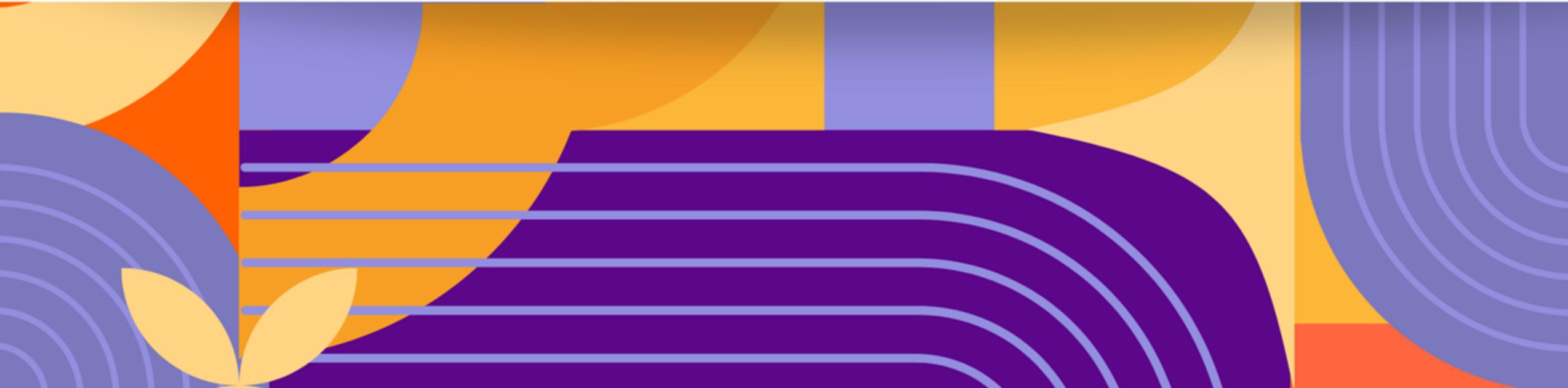
# **Q&A PART 2: ASSESSMENT**

## Question 8?

What is not a key responsibility of a Support Group Leader

- Help to guide and support the Group
- Encourage Members to participate
- Offer advice and your opinion
- Remind Members about the Group's values and ground rules
- Educating yourself on Mental Illnesses

Offering advice and your opinion is not a key responsibility of a Support Group Leader or a Member for that matter. Our role is to actively listen, make the person feel heard, acknowledge their feelings and show we understand.



We trust that each Member knows what the right thing for them to do is, and chances are that others in their circles, be it friendships, family or workplace, have already given them suggestions and their opinions on the matter.

Talking about their problem allows them to work through their thoughts and feelings and helps them to gain clarity about what their problem is and what they want to do about it. Assisting a Member by commenting on the emotions, feelings and core problem that you are observing or hearing them say can assist them to clear the clutter in their minds that may be obstructing or distorting the problem for them.

Leader “I can hear that this has really hurt you, you feel so let down”

Member “ I thought I was angry, but now that you have mentioned that, yes, I feel so disappointed and hurt”

The person sharing their problem will often correct you if they don't agree with your reflection. That is perfectly okay, even if you are wrong, it will allow them to explore what it is they are feeling.

Member: “No, I don't think I am feeling hurt, I am really angry! I feel resentful that after everything I have done for them...”

Later on in the conversation, you may want to reflect on their corrected feeling, to see how that sits with them

Leader: “You just can't believe how they have acted, you really expected more from them, given how much you have done”

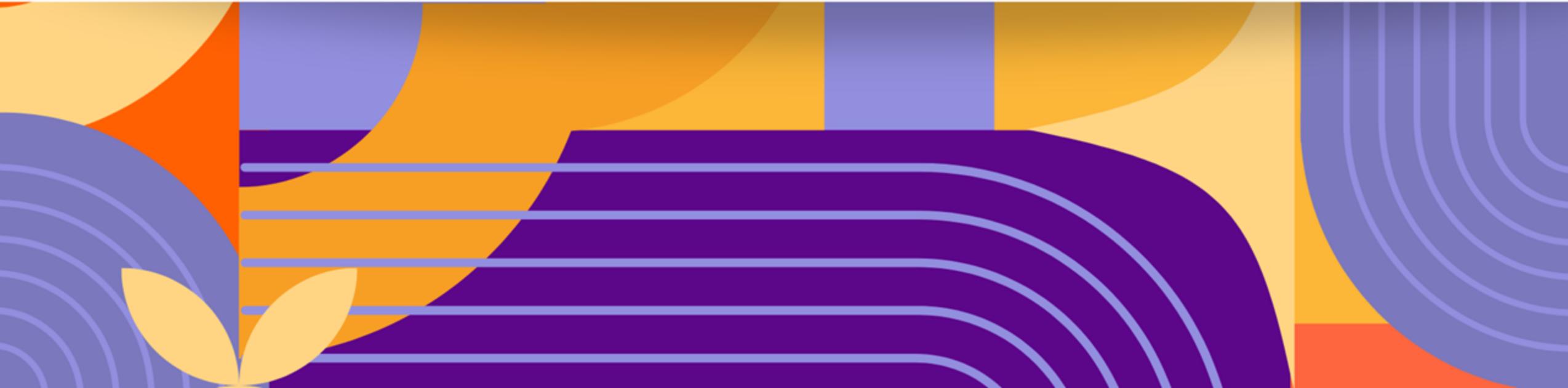


# Question 9?

Scenario - You and a fellow interested Support Group Leader named Bridget get together for a chat after Part 2 of the training. During the chat she shares the following information with you, "I just spent 3 weeks in a psychiatric hospital (I was discharged a week ago). I admitted myself to the clinic because I was feeling incredibly Depressed and Anxious - I had been feeling terrible for months, but I am doing so much better now. At the time, I was struggling to get out of bed in the morning - even getting dressed for work felt like a challenge. I received such great treatment when I was in the hospital, and now I really want to help others like me who can't afford to get the help that they need!

I missed part one of the training. Do you think I will be able to start my own Support Group after the training?

Considering the above information, how would you answer Bridget?



## Start by unpacking the key facts

- Bridget has recently been in a psychiatric clinic
- She has very severe Depression and Anxiety, and her Mental Health was not good for a significant amount of time
- She took the step to identify that something was wrong, admitted to needing help, and then went to get help
- She is feeling much better now
- She wants to start a Group to help others
- She is looking to you for guidance and your opinion

## Keep in mind the following points from Part 1: Who should Start a Support Group

- Support Group Members become very dependent on their Support Groups
- Future plans and goals
- Current responsibilities and available free time
- Reason for starting a Support Group
- Do you want to start a Support Group, or join a Support Group
- Pay careful attention to your own Mental Health, you can't give if your cup is empty
- Support Groups at times can be a triggering and draining environment. Is this the best fit for you right now
- If you have been struggling with your own Mental Health recently, rather give yourself a decent amount of time to heal. You may want to first get some one-on-one help or perhaps join a Support Group instead

Based on the scenario and information presented to you – it may very well be too soon for Bridget to start her own Group. We would want to make sure that she is managing her own Mental Health first (and it may take a few weeks or months to gauge this)



It may even be too soon for Bridget to join a Group right now, as she has only just been discharged from the clinic, she may need some more one-on-one professional help. Members sharing their problems with her may make her feel overwhelmed, and to become more Depressed or triggered. Remember a Support Group is supplementary support and we want to ensure she has first received the help she needs.

SADAG would also suggest that she discuss joining or starting a Group with her Mental Health practitioner (although this is not something you would need to discuss with her. Remember you are equals, and even if it isn't the right time for her right now,) by telling her she can't you:

A: put yourself in a position of authority and –

B: May leave her feeling rejected or hurt, or even like the progress she has made with her Mental Health is not enough.

There isn't one right or wrong answer to this question. We are all unique, and our responses will never be the same. The below indicates a few ways you could navigate the conversation.

### **Acknowledge:**

Show Bridget you really hear her, and can empathise with how difficult it must have been for her

- “Wow Bridget – thank you for sharing that with me”
- “It must have been really difficult feeling so Depressed and Anxious”
- “It is really great that you reached out for help when you needed it”
- “I can only imagine how scary it must have been for you going to the clinic”



## **Validate:**

“It is so great that you want to give back and help others”

“I am so glad to hear that you are doing so much better now”

## **Reflect:**

What Bridget really wants to know from you is if you think she will be able to continue with the training. She may also be looking for your approval on proceeding

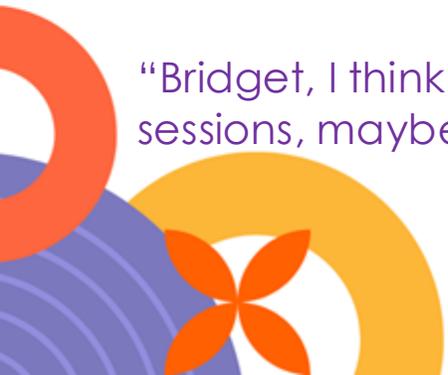
## **What are some of the feelings she may be experiencing here?**

- Excitement
- Pride
- Nervousness
- Apprehension
- Fear of rejection or being seen as not good enough

Remember, even in this case, we don't need to give her an answer. As a Leader it is not our job to decide who can and can't be a Leader. However, having done the Interested Support Group Leader training, chances are that you already have some ideas and thoughts and learnings on the situation

“This is something you are really passionate about doing! Perhaps you should contact SADAG to find out more.”

“Bridget, I think it's great that you want to help and support others. I am not really sure what happens when you miss sessions, maybe you can ask the SADAG Support Group Co-ordinator?”



## Question 10?

Briefly explain the difference between sympathy and empathy

As Support Group Leaders, we want to be **empathetic, not Sympathetic** – to find out more about the difference between them, go here - <https://www.6seconds.org/2021/01/20/empathy-vs-sympathy-what-the-difference/#:~:text=Empathy%20means%20experiencing%20someone%20else's%20feelings.&text=%20It%20requires%20an%20emotional%20component,means%20understanding%20someone%20else's%20suffering.>

Or watch Brené Brown on Empathy vs Sympathy  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZBTYViDPIQ>





**Sympathy** means understanding someone else's suffering. It's more cognitive in nature and keeps a certain distance.

Drives disconnection. Avoid the The 'At Least' Trap; "At least he was old and had a good life" or "At least you have a job" it undermines what the person is feeling.

Sympathy often looks like you trying to show the person you understand what they are saying or feeling by telling them about a similar experience you had. When we do this, we make the conversation about us, rather than them.

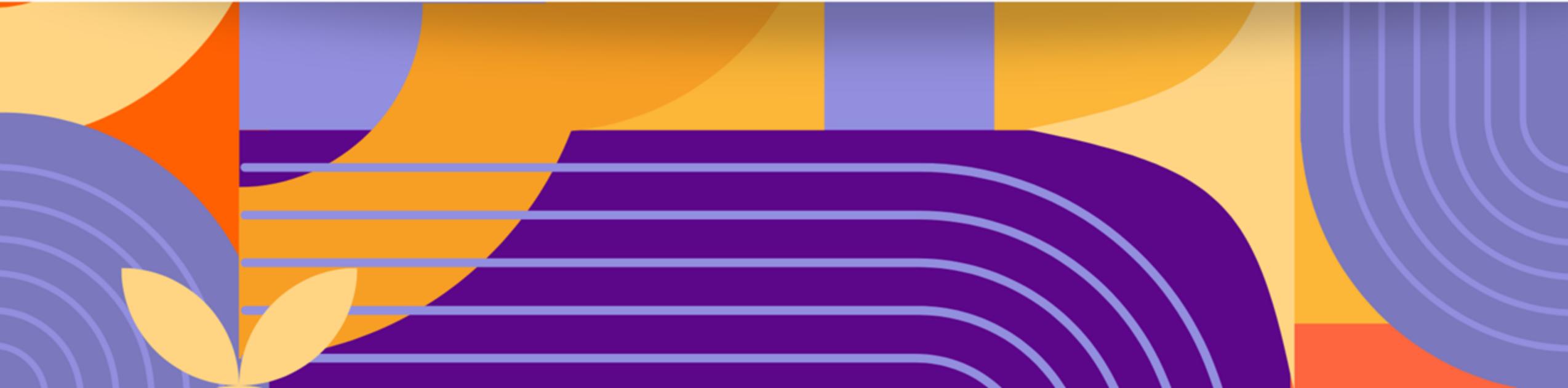
Try to avoid the 'Promises You Can't Keep' Trap. "I promise everything will be okay, you won't lose your job," "as long as you sanitise and wear a mask you won't get covid." You may think these promises are reassuring, but chances are the person you are talking to is thinking "you can't know that" making them feel more worried, concerned or anxious, as well as less trusting of you.

**Empathy** means experiencing someone else's feelings. It comes from the German *Einfühlung*, or 'feeling into.' It requires an emotional component of really feeling what the other person is feeling.

- Feeling with other people
- Fuels connection.
- Perspective taking
- Staying out of judgment
- Recognising emotion in others, and then communicating that
- A choice where we make ourselves vulnerable to connect with the emotion the other is feeling
- Stays away from problem-solving or solution

## Question 11?

As a Support Group Leader our role is not to offer advice or provide a solution, but rather to listen and support. One of your Support Group Members asks you the following question: "My husband is cheating on me again, I just found out. I am heartbroken and I feel so betrayed! What should I do?" Please comment on how you would respond to her.



The key to this question is not falling into the trap of telling the Member what you think they should do. Trying to solve her dilemma and find an answer to the problem.

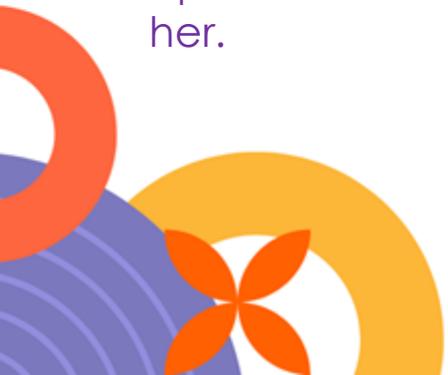
What if you were to say, “Oh my gosh, I am so sorry to hear this. I can imagine how devastating this must be. My husband cheated on me for years, and let me tell you, once a cheater, always a cheater! You should definitely leave him!”

While the member may at first feel supported by you, what if she decides to stay in the marriage, she may feel judged by you and as a result, no longer come to the Group.

What if she decides to do what you said? She may later harbour feelings of resentment and hold you accountable for a potential missed opportunity to save her marriage.

The Member will know what to do when they have unpacked their feelings and the situation. **Remember, knowing what to do doesn't mean you have to be happy with your choice.**

Rather, reflect on what she must be feeling and how difficult this must be for her. You can even explore what her options are. Keep in mind that she must present the options; otherwise, you will be trying to solve the problem for her.





## **If someone is sharing something personal with you, it is important not to be dismissive**

- “Sorry, but today we are talking about coping mechanisms, not relationship problems” – Even if this is the case, if someone is going through something really hard, we may need to put the meeting topic on hold while we acknowledge what the Member is going through
- You should go see a marriage counsellor (solution)

## **Remember not to ask too many questions, especially if you are asking the questions because you are curious about what happened. Ask yourself if the question you are asking is helpful to her?**

- How did you find out?
- How did you feel when you first found out?
- Did you speak to your husband about it?

This is not an investigation; the above questions don't help her to unpack what she is feeling. Questions like this can also make people feel judged.

## **Try to avoid asking clarifying questions that are repetitive or redundant.**

- Member: “I am heartbroken, and I feel so betrayed!”
- Leader: “ Am I correct that you are feeling heartbroken and betrayed?”
- This will make the Member feel like you are not listening: “That's what I just said!”
- Try instead to paraphrase or summarise what you are noticing “This must be so devastating...”

What is important here is that she feels heard and understood. So exploring and reflecting on what she is thinking and feeling will be the best way that you can offer support and show understanding.



Before jumping into a discussion of options, stay with her in the 'now' what are you feeling, what is going on inside."

**Some nice responses from the evaluation:**

- That must be heartbreaking. I understand why you feel betrayed. Do you want to tell me more about how you feel and about the whole situation?
- Empathise with the other person's situation. Listen to what they say and what they are going through. Be there for them and present in the moment.
- That must be a difficult situation to be in. I imagine you feel in crisis at the moment?
- Feelings of betrayal can have a massive impact on us and our day-to-day lives.
- It must be really difficult for you. I am so sorry that you are going through this.
- I am so sorry that you are experiencing this \*Mary\*, that is terrible news. Being betrayed by someone close whom we love and trust is devastating, it can make you feel like the whole world is crashing down...



**Q&A**

**PART 2: EVALUATION**

**QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK**

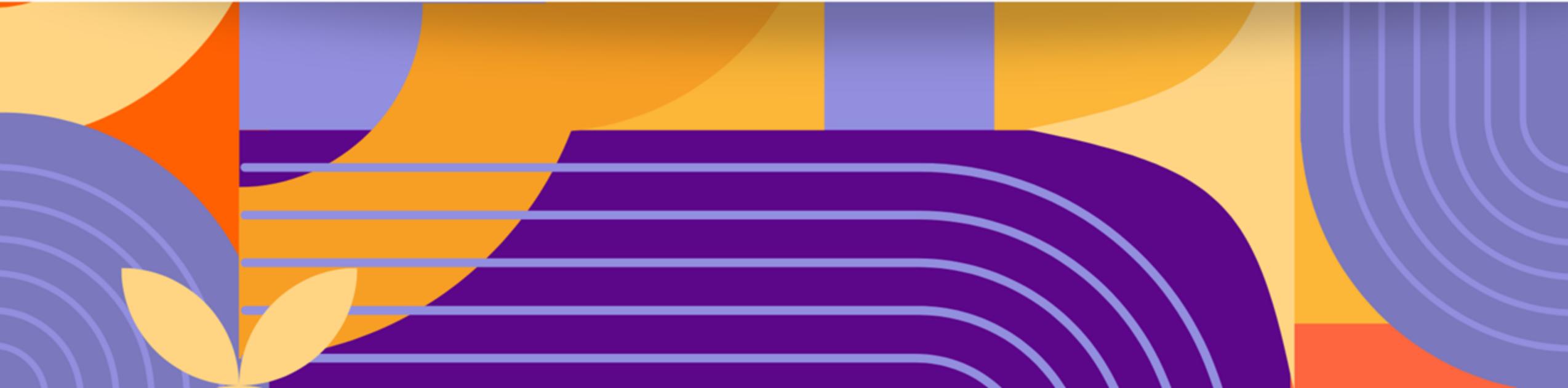
**Is there a Support Group for Support Group Leaders? For troubleshooting, or referring problems, learning from others.**

Yes, we have a WhatsApp Group as well as weekly connect sessions – A Support Group for Support Group Leaders

**Is there a conflict of interest if a member in your Support Group is a friend or family member?**

My concern here would be that either you, or your family member/friend may not feel comfortable to be entirely open or honest, in order to protect the other, or because they don't feel comfortable with the family member/friend knowing something private about them. This is often the case with Leader/Member relationships and Member/Member relationships

With that being said, we often have friends and family members co-running a Group



## **Difference between closed and open Support Groups.**

Closed Groups are Groups that not open to everyone to attend. They may be Groups for teachers at a specific school. Or Support Groups for Members of the same church. Closed Groups would not be included in our referral guide, or advertised as only a specific community of people can attend.

Open Groups on the other hand can be attended by anyone who fits the criteria of the Group, for example a Group for Postnatal Depression could be attended by anyone who is struggling with PND but wouldn't be appropriate for someone struggling with workplace Anxiety.



What are some of the different platforms available which would appeal to the majority of individuals with the least amount of inconvenience? Not many are people are tech savvy, so I am looking for a user-friendly platform.

Some of the platforms you can look into are

- Google Meet: <https://meet.google.com/>
- Zoom: <https://zoom.us/>
- Microsoft Teams: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-za/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>

All three of the above have some really great tutorials on how to use their platforms.

Here is a short video about starting and setting up your first zoom meeting [https://youtu.be/F\\_3PzLL2FdM](https://youtu.be/F_3PzLL2FdM).



**Just give me, for example, 3 things to make sure that no matter what happens in the session, these are the three fundamental things to achieve/maintain/keep in the forefront of my mind through the session**

This is a really tough question, as I think there are always so many things that a Support Group Leader needs to keep in mind some of which include:

- Help to guide and support the Group
- Encourage members to participate on an equal level – everyone is important / equal opportunity
- Help Members to feel like part of the Group so they feel comfortable to share their thoughts and feelings
- Remind members about the Groups values and ground rules
- Don't be afraid to be firm when someone isn't respecting the Group's values
- Be observant. Consider each Members posture, expressions and body language. What are they saying about them and how they are feeling?
- **But most importantly to create a safe-space that allows for**
  - Equal opportunity
  - Non-judgmental environment
  - Respect
  - Understanding
  - Sharing

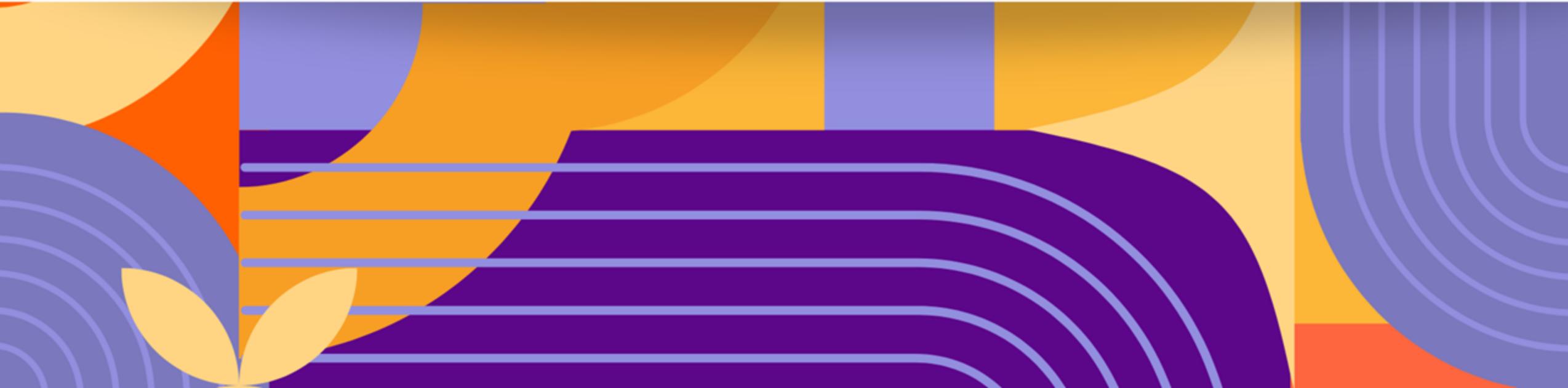


**When do you  
decide to continue  
with a session?  
What if only one  
person attends?**

Making a difference in even one person's life is still making a difference. Two Members plus you is already 3, which constitutes the definition of a Group.

Your Group may be slow to gain Members at the beginning, or you may find that after a time, your Group numbers have dwindled. That doesn't mean that there isn't a need out there, it just means that people may not know about Support Groups and how to join.

So, if you do see a decline in members over a few consecutive meetings, or you only have one or two Members to start with, we will promote your Group more with additional advertising and awareness. Just keep us up to date with any problems and we will see how best to support you.



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

