INTERESTED SUPPORT GROUP LEADER TRAINING PART 5

HOSTING YOUR FIRST SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9

AGENDA:

- Looking at your First Meeting, and Meetings going forward
- Meeting Planner Breakdown
- Support Group Value Statement

By the time you are ready to host your own Support Group SADAG would have:

- **Sent you:**
  - Hand-outs
  - Brochures
  - Ice-breakers
  - Meeting Planner
  - Meeting topic list
  - Customised promotional materials advertising your Group
  - Registers

- **Offered telephonic Counselling and Support**

- **Advertised the launch of your Group on:**
  - Social Media
  - Newsletter
  - Press
  - Email

MEETINGS IN GENERAL

Almost everything in life has a beginning, middle and end, and a Support Group is no exception.

There is the beginning, middle and end of a Support Group. Although when we set out at the beginning, we often focus on the journey ahead, and may not know when the Group will end or how it will transform over time.

Each Support Group Meeting also has a beginning, middle and end, and monitoring this during the meeting will ensure that everyone has an opportunity to talk, share and offer their own experiences.

Your first meeting is very important as it sets the tone of what to expect and gives Members an idea of how things will continue.

LOOKING AT YOUR FIRST MEETING & MEETINGS GOING FORWARD

Suggestions for your Support Group Meetings:

- Set-up
- Introduction and Welcome (Beginning)
- Group Discussion (Middle)
- Group Closing (End)
- Debriefing
- Leftovers
- Growing & Maintaining Your Group

Launching your Support Group

- Your first Group meeting may look slightly different to meetings going forward
- You may find yourself talking more than your Members in the meeting
- Keep in mind that the first meeting can really establish what you are hoping for in meetings going forward, so try to encourage as much discussion and participation as possible. Be aware of what you may be modelling to your Members
- The focus of your first meeting should be an Introduction to Support Groups
  - What they are
  - What they do
  - How can they help
- But it can also very much be an exploration and open discussion about what you and your Members may want or hope for in the Group

Setting up for you first meeting

Keep a notebook handy should you want to remind yourself of important points, possible topics and leftovers that may need to be discussed at your next meeting

- Ask Members to fill in a register
  - Provides a data base to send messages, reminders, invites and information to your Support Group Members

Online:

- Set up a recurring meeting in advance, it helps to use the same link each time to avoid confusion
- Host a test run with friends and family Members so that you feel comfortable with the platform
- Having a 'welcome' slide prepared will show Members they are in the right place

Face to Face:

- Check in with your venue to make sure everything is in order beforehand, ensuring that you will have access to the venue during your meeting

Set-up – Face to Face

Arrive early at the venue

- Makes you feel less stressed
- Early comers won't feel lost
- Gives you time to prepare

Set-up your seating arrangement

- See if you can organise this with your venue beforehand
- Circle arrangement works best
- Check that the room is tidy
- Having a box of tissues handy and visible always helps

Set up a Registration table

- Shows members they are in the right place
- Space for people to fill in the register
    - Helps you track who's coming to your Group and how often.
    - Keep track of the topics your Group has covered
    - A nice place to display brochures, handouts, and articles

Set up tea and coffee table if applicable

Set-up – Online

Prior to your meeting make sure you are comfortable with the online logistics and functioning

- Makes you feel less stressed
- Gives you time to prepare
- Start the meeting a few minutes early to make sure there aren't any issues
- Be aware of what others may see in your background
- Ensure that you are in a quiet and private environment
- Test your sound and any tech requirements you may be using during the meeting such as a presentation, music or a video

General meeting arrangement

- Keep a meeting register so you can track topics
- You may want to prepare an introduction slide reminding members of online Group etiquette. This will also indicate to members that they are in the right place

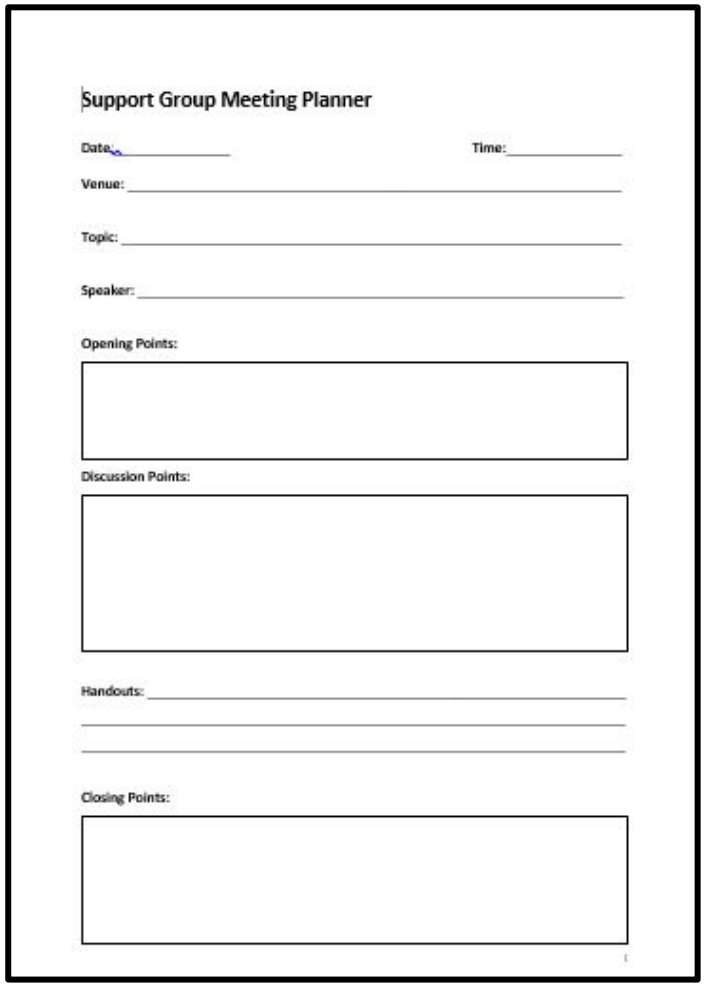
General Online Support Group etiquette that everyone will benefit from:

- Background noise can be exceptionally distracting – If you're not talking – mute your mic
- Find a quiet space, where you won't be interrupted by people / and pets
- Where possible, turn on your camera – feels more intimate, personal and less intimidating when people can see each other – even if it's just at the beginning and end of the meeting. This also makes other members feel more comfortable
- Don't move around
- Place your device on a stable surface
- Think about what others can see in your background, do you have religious content? An unmade bed? Is there a light source behind you
- Horizontal is better than vertical
- 'Putting your hand up' can indicate you want to talk without potentially interrupting someone
- You may want to put something under your device to make it higher – your camera should be at your eye level
- Don't engage in other activities while attending a Group

Content of Conversation

What will you Group talk about and how structured will this conversation be?

- Conversation topics will depend on the type of Group being run
- Preparation, such as having a clear idea of the focus of your Groups, and who is likely to attend will put you in a good position to be able to focus and discuss relevant information and topics
- Remember that you are not a therapist or counsellor and you are not required to give advice but rather to offer Support and facilitate the Group discussion.
- When starting out, it is helpful to follow a basic agenda. Keeping a copy of your meeting planner can guide you in future meetings and remind you what has been discussed, as well as what Members may want to discuss going forward
- Start the Group Meeting with the agenda in mind
- Keeping to the structure will help ensure the meeting does not run over time



Support Group Meeting Planner

Date: _____ Time: _____

Venue: _____

Topic: _____

Speaker: _____

Opening Points:

Discussion Points:

Handouts: _____

Closing Points:

Introductions are very powerful, they can:

- Set the tone for the rest of the meeting
- Make a Group feel united
- Break the ice
- Get Members talking
- Make the Group feel familiar

Including an ice-breaker in an introduction can:

- Put Members at ease
- Make them feel relaxed and safe
- Get Members to laugh, which can reduce Anxiety
- It also gets Members talking, especially in a first meeting when they are unsure of what to expect and may be feeling shy or a little anxious

Planning for your First Meeting: Introducing what a Support Group is:

Some of your Members may want more info on what a Support Group is/does. You could start the meeting by explaining:

How would you describe a Support Group?
For example: "A Support Group is a Group of people who have similar personal experience of the same problem or life situation and are there to help each other feel supported. **OR**
Support Groups are building-blocks of support which allow people to come together to exchange experiences, views, information and advice

Why do YOU think someone should join a Support Group?
For example: A Support Group is a non-judgmental space where you can feel supported and understood. It is a place where you can help others and get help for yourself.

What is the purpose and role of the Support Group?
Use this as an opportunity to discuss people's possible expectations

Introducing yourself to the Group, some topics you can cover:

- Name
- Why did you start the Support Group
- Why did you feel there was a need for the Group
- Where does your interest in Mental Health come from
- Explain your role as the Group Leader and emphasise that you are not a Therapist or trained Mental Health Professional, but you are there to facilitate Support and discussion
- What would you like to achieve with the Group
- Interesting facts about yourself, these could be funny or personal
- Include an ice-breaker

Introducing Members to the Group

Ask Members to introduce themselves.
Some topics they could cover:

- Their name
- Where they are from
- Why they joined the Group
- Their favourite colour, animal or food and why
- A funny fact about themselves
- Something someone would say about them

- Some Members may not want to say anything at first. This is totally OK and normal. They will speak when they are ready.
- It is also a good idea to ask what they feel the purpose of the Group is or should be, you can use this information to guide your Group, but also to highlight what the Group is and isn't able to provide

New Members will join your Group all the time. So, covering the introduction information once off may not be sufficient

When a new Member joins the Group, you may want to have a one-on-one conversation with them first to cover information such as

- who you are,
- why you started a Group,
- what to expect from the Group

This is also a good way to find out

- why they are joining the Group?
- what they are hoping for from the Group and
- what they think they can expect from the Group

- If several new Members are joining at the same time, you may want to do a brief recap of your introductory meeting to get everyone up to speed and on the same page

- Make sure that your recap sessions are just as valuable to 'old' Members as 'new' Members – you can do this by introducing new icebreakers or different introduction questions

- We want new Members to feel a warm welcome from the Group, but we also don't want to bore our current Members. So don't expect current Members to recap their life stories every time someone joins. However, you can allow the new Member some extra time in their first meeting to introduce themselves if they feel comfortable doing so

(The middle) Opening the Group for Discussion

In the First Meeting, you may find that your Members introductions take a little longer, so you may not feel the need for a 'middle'. It is a nice idea to start discussing your Group Value Statement during this time and unpacking expectations and purpose

Some ideas to look at for Group Discussion or Guest Speaker

- Members can share things that have happened since the last meeting or personal things they may be going through
- New Members can share why they joined the Group, or share their personal journey
- Introduce a meeting topic
- Share handouts
- Discuss an article or something that has happened recently
- Watch a video
- Have a Guest Speaker present

Closing the Group

Ending discussions and closing ideas:

- Highlighting key themes/ ideas that were discussed during the meeting
- Take suggestions for the next meeting topic from the Members in the Group
- Mentioning or introducing what will be discussed at the next meeting

Closing and Take-Home message ideas:

- Thank everyone for attending
- Members can share:
  - Their experience of the meeting
  - Their take home message
  - How they feel
- End by reading a positive quote/saying/poem
- Enjoy a cup of tea together

When Closing a Meeting, You Can:

- Offer a summary of the main themes and topics that were discussed
- Address unfinished questions/topics, perhaps make notes so that you can pick up where you left off at the next meeting
- You can ask Members to say how they experienced the Group today, and to name one thing they want to achieve before the next meeting
- You can also invite Members to share the highlights of the meeting for them, was there a particular moment that grabbed them? Did they learn something new? Are they going to try to implement some of the suggestions that may have been shared with them
- Note: some Groups are more unstructured, familiar, relaxed, educational or activity-based, and may differ from this format. Remember this is just a guideline that you and your Group can adapt to make work for you

Debriefing

- Setting aside a few minutes after each Group, can be an invaluable time to reflect on the meeting
- It can give you the space and opportunity to grow, learn, and improve the functioning of your Support Group
- Allows you to process what has happened in the Group
- You can do this by yourself, with your co-facilitator, or even discuss it with a partner, loved one or friend (remembering to ensure confidentiality)
- Some Support Group Leaders find that taking notes is helpful, while others are comfortable just discussing/thinking about it
- Jotting down difficult questions/fears/anxieties/etc. you had during the Group, can help if you want to discuss something particular with the SADAG
- Remember, SADAG also provides debriefing offered by our Counsellors and Mental Health Practitioners, if you or one of your Members needs some further assistance

- Thank you, and **CONGRATULATIONS** on attending **Part 5** of SADAG's Support Group Leader online Training

- To continue with Part 6 of the Training and/or to let us know how the Training was for you, please complete the evaluation and assessment survey https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2025SGLTPart5

Case Studies and Role Play Scenarios

POLL NUMBER 1 QUESTION

POLL NUMBER 1 ANSWER AND DISCUSSION

POLL NUMBER 2 QUESTION

POLL NUMBER 2 ANSWER AND DISCUSSION

Questions and Answers

For more information, please email
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