

Tips for a Successful Support Group

When you are in a support group, it is the group that will decide how the group should be structured. The Support Group Task Force offers some suggestions that you and your group may find helpful as you decide how your group should proceed. There are a lot of suggestions – the group may accept all or none of the suggestions.

Also, if you have a tip or an idea about support groups, we welcome you to share it with the task force and the community. Email your tip and we will be happy to review it for possible inclusion to the list.

(1) Time

1. Keeping time helps! Arrive on time/Leave on time. This is a matter of respect for yourself and others.
2. Agree at the beginning of your meeting what time you will end the meeting. Divide the remaining time by the number of people present, and decide how much time each person will have for sharing and feedback.
3. Using a timer works well. Don't be afraid to interrupt to notify the speaker(s) when time is up! Leave time at the end for a closing exercise, planning for next meeting, and goodbyes.

(2) Group Agreements – May be helpful to review from time to time

1. I will not do or say anything that will betray another person's confidences.
2. I will not interrupt others.
3. I will respect the opinions and experience of others.
4. I will deliver withholds in a timely and responsible manner.
5. I will make choices to take care of myself, and to stretch to grow.
6. I will own my feelings and behaviors, speak in "I" statements, and avoid giving advice.
7. I will make every effort to be on time and to attend all support group meetings.
8. I will notify the contact person if I am going to miss a meeting, be late, or must leave early.
9. I make a commitment to do my work.
10. I will minimize distractions that will take me away from being present, including turning off my cell phone.

(3) Size of Support Groups

1. Support groups seem to thrive with 7-8 grads minimum. This allows the group to function well when our busy lives call us away from our work of giving and receiving support.
2. A group as small as 4-5 can operate well when all members are very committed to attending.
3. When starting a support group, it is better to have a group of 6 or more so that scheduling conflicts don't hinder the group's growing connection and commitment.

(4) Socialize before the Support Group Begins.

Plan socializing time (15-30 minutes) before the meeting starts.

(5) General suggestions for supportive behaviors

1. **Sit erect**, having both of your feet flat on the floor, closing your eyes, and taking some deep breaths help many in preparation for their work in support groups.
2. **No intoxicating substances.** Alcohol or drug consumption before or during your support group can interfere with your efforts to be fully present and do your work, and can be disruptive to the group.
3. **Be authentic when sharing, giving feedback and delivering withholds.** Remember, being real is not necessarily being “nice.” How does my group deal with being real? Do we need to discuss it?
4. **Listen** – When in support group, support the person speaking. Be attentive, present and in open body posture.
5. **Be open, honest and caring** – Our best work is done when we open ourselves to others, share ourselves with them and withhold judgment when we respond to the sharing of others.
6. **Participate fully in your support group.** Support groups are a great way to continue the work begun in the EE workshop. Everyone needs support!
7. **Use your contract** as the focus of your work in your support group often works well. Discussing and asking for support on your priority plan can aid your ability to follow through with your work.

(6) Potential Exercises

1. **Stems can be a great exercise.** For example, “The thing I liked best about my day is _____”; or “What I would like to get from support group today is _____”.
2. **Re-visiting some of the exercises from the workshop** may be a powerful resource for you. Perhaps the host for each meeting could choose an exercise to redo or discuss, or you could rotate through group members.
3. **Centering/opening/closing exercises/rituals.** For example – intentional breathing, group hug, light a candle at the beginning and blow it out at the end, serenity prayer, use a stem.
4. **Choosing a book to follow can augment your support group meeting.** Ask the Community for suggestions of books on personal-growth or more specific topics. Maybe read a chapter a week and discuss at group.
5. **Periodically discuss what is working and not working for the group.** Explore other options.

(7) Sharing

1. **Decide how much time each person will have** for sharing and feedback.
2. **Each person’s time to share is their own to use how they wish.** Personal sharing during support group is a choice and an opportunity!
3. **Except for time reminders, don’t interrupt** when others are speaking – it breaks continuity.

(8) Feedback

1. When giving feedback, speak in “I” statements and avoid giving advice.

2. Using a stem can be helpful in giving feedback, for example “When I heard you say _____ I felt _____.” or “When you shared, I felt _____.”
3. When others trigger us, there is opportunity for growth as well as coming together as a group.

(9) Some Definitions

1. **“Being Real”** means being grounded enough in one’s own essence to say and do from a place of truth, authenticity, and integrity. One must keep in mind; however, that self-respect also means respect for others. So remember, when “being real” be aware of how that is conveyed and how it may affect others.
2. **Withholds:**
 1. Statements of one’s feelings toward another, which, if not expressed, would leave a cloud over the relationship.
 2. Something which must be said to another in order for that relationship to continue unimpeded by feelings unexpressed.
 3. Are best delivered while feelings are still fresh and open.
 4. Clears the air for all. Real communication between individuals will lead to a healthier group dynamic.

(10) Some questions to ask yourselves

1. What is working or not working with your group? How can the group address what is not working?
2. How does our group deal with withholds? Do we ever deliver withholds? Do we need to practice withholds?
3. What does support mean to you? What do you need from your group? What works for you? Remember to ask for what you want.

(11) Please remember that members of the Support Group Task Force are available for mediation and advice.