

# FACILITATING A SUPPORT GROUP |

## a ConnectGroups Fact Sheet



### Facilitation

The act of helping other people deal with a process or reach an agreement or solution without getting involved in the process or discussion yourself.

### THE ROLE OF A SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR

A Facilitator's responsibility is to 'make it easier' for the Group to do its work. A Support Group Facilitator has a wide range of tasks to perform so that members can participate effectively in a group meeting. Common tasks include:

- Creating a safe and welcoming environment
- Stimulating discussion and encouraging interaction between members
- Ensuring that everyone has a chance to have their ideas and feelings expressed
- Mediating if there are confrontations or triggers
- Adhering to the group's code of conduct, guiding principles and confidentiality agreement
- Directing and refocusing the group and keeping track of the conversation
- Steering the group to come to its own decision
- Managing any conflict that may arise

Support Group Facilitators must have a clear understanding of the group's vision,

purpose, values, and guiding principles. This knowledge of the workings of the group will enable the Facilitator to keep the group on track and on task.

### THE TRAITS OF AN EFFECTIVE SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR

A Support Group Facilitator acts as a guide to help members move through a process to achieve their goal. To do this effectively, a facilitator should possess the following traits:

- The ability to work collaboratively, resolve conflict, and mediate
- Be empathetic, personable, and welcoming
- The ability to maintain objectivity, regardless of their own perspectives or needs
- Good organisation and time management skills
- Good communication and listening skills

Remember: you more than likely already possess many of these traits and if you feel that you may be lacking in some areas, you can learn. Practice really does make progress.

### THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE IN THE SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Support Group meetings can be held in many ways, ranging from informal get-togethers at a local café, to a structured meeting in a community hall. Whatever type of meeting you are facilitating, it is important

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to ensure that the meeting takes place in a safe, friendly, and welcoming environment. Remember, people are often sharing their experiences for the first time.

The Support Group meeting is commonly broken up into 4 parts:

### 1. Before the Meeting

Facilitators should arrive before the start time to ensure the logistics are taken care of:

- Open the venue and make sure it is presentable
- Arrange chairs
- Lay out refreshments (if provided)
- Ensure new members are welcomed

### 2. Starting the Meeting

Each Support Group will have its own structure based upon the needs of the group. A typical start to a meeting might include:

- The Welcome
- Housekeeping; location of bathrooms and fire exits
- Reading the agenda and guidelines
- Round robin introductions; asking members to introduce themselves, their reason for coming and what they hope to achieve from attending.

### 3. The Meeting

Using their knowledge of the group's aims and objectives and employing active listening skills, the Facilitator can encourage sharing in the group by:

- Stimulating discussions that support and encourage growth and reflection
- Responding appropriately the group and individuals verbal and nonverbal cues
- Validating the feelings and experiences of members
- Encouraging members to continue with a line of thought
- Asking probing questions to direct the conversation
- Ensuring all members have the chance to speak.

### 4. Ending the Meeting

It is good practice to make sure that meetings start and end on time.

- Provide a 15-minute warning before the group is scheduled to end
- Invite members to make final comments, perhaps ask the group to share how the meeting has helped them
- Provide a summary of what has happened during the meeting
- Thank the group for coming and for their participation
- Announce the location, date and time of the next meeting

**For more information on facilitating a Support Group, listen to ConnectGroups' Facilitation Podcast, available via its website. ConnectGroups can also support you via workshops, intensive support, and online resources. Please contact us on (08) 9364 6909 or email [info@connectgroups.org.au](mailto:info@connectgroups.org.au)**