



LEADING A GROUP

SECTION THREE
CARER SUPPORT GROUP
FACILITATOR GUIDE

CONTENTS

Core Principles	1
Managing the group	1
Facilitator role	2
Qualities of a facilitator	3
Who is in your team?	3
Managing boundaries	4
Managing conflict	6

CORE PRINCIPLES

The type, size and purpose of the group will determine how the group will need to be managed. The group should be flexible enough to adjust and change, depending on the needs of the members and growth or reach of the group. There are some fundamentals which apply to all types of carer support groups.

From the outset, establish the core principles that the group will follow.

For example:

- confidentiality
- respect
- empathy
- non-judgemental
- focus on listening
- agreement.

MANAGING THE GROUP

One person cannot do everything on their own. The primary purpose of a carer support group is to support one another by sharing and collaboration.

In consultation with the group define the guidelines of how the group will run.

For example:

- The group will meet every third Monday of the month for two hours between 1.00pm and 3.00pm.
- The primary contact is the facilitator Ava Brown.
- People will listen respectfully to one another.
- Every member will be given the opportunity to speak and contribute.
- The group is a collaborative group and encourages the sharing of information and resources and support of one another.
- Confidentiality is essential, what is said in the group stays within the group.
- We will make everyone welcome and be inclusive of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, non-binary, intersex, queer, questioning and asexual (LGBTIQ+), culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Privacy is respected and people will only share what they wish to share.

FACILITATOR ROLE

The role of the facilitator is to:

- create a safe welcoming environment for group members to feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences and learning from one another
- run or lead the group and meetings
- keep discussions on-track and in line with the purpose of the group
- be the main contact point for members or new members
- encourage everyone to participate
- share and delegate
- facilitate group consensus (decisions, activities, schedule)
- use available resources
- co-ordinate with other organisations
- address and resolve conflicts if/when they occur
- assist the group to achieve its purpose.

“An effective facilitator will encourage group members to share the facilitation and other roles so that the skills are passed along, while making sure that the group stays true to its purpose-support. ”

From www.carersvic.com.au/guide-for-peer-facilitators



TIP Be aware of your own limits – identify other people in the group who have specific skills who can help out and lead or manage different aspects of your group’s activities.

Carer support group facilitators need to remember not to give advice, but to point people in the right direction to get information.

QUALITIES OF A FACILITATOR

Some useful skills for a facilitator:

- good active listener
- engages people
- encourages and supports
- aware of different personalities
- positive in their role
- encourages communication
- not overbearing
- non-judgemental
- sensitive to each member's needs
- ensures confidentiality within the carer support group
- resolves conflict
- knows their limitations and is able to refer on
- send reminders to members about when the carer support group meets, and make follow up phone calls to some carers to encourage them to attend.

WHO IS IN YOUR TEAM?

Assign or ask members to volunteer for different tasks to help the group run smoothly and encourage involvement.

In addition to the facilitator role, tasks might include:

- Secretary: looks after paperwork, sends out meeting reminders
- Treasurer: pays the bills, receives incoming monies, keeps financial records
- Venue booker
- Activity organiser
- Sponsorship secretary
- Publicity and promotion
- Speaker organiser
- Communications Officer.

The different roles and structure of the group will depend on the size, purpose and model/mode and may change over time from the informal to formal.

To share both the experience and the responsibility, identify another member who you can work with you as a co-facilitator. The benefits of this include:

- Sharing ideas, concerns or issues about the group to help you in your role
- Sharing the responsibility of the group
- Ensuring someone is ready to keep the group running in case of an emergency
- Another member is prepared for succession (see succession planning).

If you want to raise money, apply for grants, look for local sponsorship or hire premises for the group to meet in you may need to become incorporated and follow specific regulations.

If you want to remain less structured but still deal with money or need insurance, consider being auspiced by an existing incorporated body. This could be your local Neighbourhood House, Senior Citizens Centre, Community Health Centre or peak body, such as Dementia Australia, or Amaze.

See Section 5 for details on setting up a formal structure.

Source: Courtesy of Carers NSW adapted from: Setting up Carers Support Group, Carers NSW, 2010.

MANAGING BOUNDARIES

As a group facilitator or coordinator your focus is on supporting others not yourself, although this will likely happen through your role. Consider the following guidelines:

- The facilitator is responsible for creating a safe space where people feel comfortable in sharing their practical and emotional stories.
- The facilitator may need to manage their own emotions, and others, when members are discussing their experiences. This can be challenging.
- Be mindful you are providing support, not answers and be aware of where people can be referred to if they need additional help. For example referral to Carers Victoria's Counselling Service, to a government service or, to a condition specific organisation.
- By having a clear group agreement in place, all members should be aware of what is appropriate within the group.
- All members should acknowledge that what is discussed in the group is not revealed outside the group. If members interact socially or in the community, group discussions should not flow into chat at the school gate, the supermarket, a dinner party or sporting event.

As a facilitator, to ensure you do not become overburdened by the expectation that you take on the responsibility for solving group member problems, it is important to set clear boundaries on when, why and how you can be contacted outside of the group meetings and within meetings. Boundaries may include:

- Providing group members with your preferred method of contact, phone or email, and making it clear it's use is only for group matters.
- Being clear that you are not available at all times of the night and day. You should only be contactable about the meeting. If someone needs that level of support they should be referred to a professional.
- Setting up a buddy system if a particular member needs additional support between meetings. The buddy could check in with you if additional support is needed from a professional.
- Knowing who or which organisation you can refer people to for specific issues.



TIP Attend face-to-face training such as the Carer Support Group Facilitators Training through Carers Victoria for more information and help.

MANAGING CONFLICT

In a committed and passionate group of people, two main types of conflict might arise:

- Between you and an individual or between one or more individuals in the group, and/or
- Amongst members taking sides over an issue or situation.

Conflict can put a stop to group collaboration and support, stifling the participation of other team members. Learning how to diffuse conflict can help maintain and sustain the group.

Managing conflict between individuals

Steps to take include:

- acting quickly is the key to managing conflict
- take the initiative and bring up the issue with the individual
- acknowledge the conflict, don't ignore it
- address the problem, not the person
- ask the person what the issue or problem is and listen to their perspective
- focus on the problem and finding a solution
- find something which can be agreed on
- if you have contributed to the situation, take responsibility and apologise
- avoid accusations and blame
- avoid being defensive
- be prepared to be open and listen.

Take the person or people aside and talk to them privately. Put some thought into talking with the person/people. You need a quiet location and may need time to address the issue.

Managing conflict in a group meeting

Sometimes people will hold very strong opinions or have specific ideas which they believe should be agreed with or acted on. Others may disagree and have alternatives and voice them in groups. These scenarios can lead to conflict within the entire group.

As the facilitator you need to de-escalate this conflict. Take action immediately. Leaving or ignoring conflict will allow the conflict to disrupt the meeting, and perhaps future meetings, along with the group's ability to support one another.

Steps to take include:

- Depersonalise. Focus on the facts not the emotions.
- Acknowledge the conflict.
- Remain calm as you try to identify the cause of the conflict and work towards a resolution.
- Remove or reduce the perceived threat – conflict may arise when people think they or something they believe in is threatened. There are two parts: the perception of threat and the threat itself. You need to explore the issue and come to a full understanding of what it is. Maybe the perception is correct and the person has a right to feel threatened. In this case you need to address and resolve the situation.
- Take things out of the meeting. Acknowledge the disagreement and arrange to discuss it later at a specific time.
- Get specific. Ask for suggestions on how they can turn around the disagreeable point to something more acceptable to them.
- Connect with all group members in an effort to identify the root cause of the conflict. Depending on the situation, do this on an individual level or in an open team environment.
- Encourage honest and open communication.
- Take a break if needed to avoid further conflict and tension.
- Reconvene when all group members have had a chance to think about the causes of the conflict and come back with possible solutions.
- Take steps to identify solutions that will help bring all sides of the conflict together.
- Regular communication can help you stay ahead of possible conflicts and defuse them before the meeting.



TIP Always give group members a chance to address concerns privately and directly with you. Resolve matters in a personal setting.

Other references which might help

How to Diffuse Workplace Conflict at a Team Meeting

www.carersvic.com.au/diffuse-workplace-conflict

5 Tips for Managing Conflict in a Team Meeting

www.carersvic.com.au/provetccg

Carers Victoria Carer Support Group Facilitators Online Facebook group

Sign-up to connect with other facilitators and get tips and advice on managing groups.

www.facebook.com/groups/carersupportgroupfacilitatorsonline



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Carers Victoria receives funding from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and the Australian Department of Social Services.