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## Carer Support Groups

### **SECTION ONE**

#### CARER SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR GUIDE

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# Carer Support Groups

The key factor about peer support groups which makes them different from other groups is that the people involved have shared experiences or problems which bring them together.

Carer support groups are all about carers supporting other carers. They are about carers coming together with others who are in similar situations and understand how they're feeling. They are about carers coming together to share problems and solutions.

Carers in carer support groups share experiences and knowledge and gain and offer support to one another in emotional, social or practical ways.

Research by Carers NSW has shown that carers consider carer support groups to be a good source of emotional support and information. Carers value the opinions of other carers about the quality of services available to them. These groups can also reduce the social isolation of carers, who often feel they are the only person in that situation. It is often a relief for a carer to realise that they are not alone.

## Why Start a Carer Support Group?

You might want to start a carer support group to share experiences and help other carers. Write up a group purpose statement or Terms of Reference so potential members are clear about what to expect and the benefits they will gain from the group. This should include clear, concise statements about key aspects of your group. You may have friends or know other people who would like to get together for mutual support. You might feel isolated and want to connect with other carers of people who have the same condition as the person you care for. You possibly live in an area where there are few services that can assist you but think a group would be supportive for all members.

Carer support groups can:

- › provide a safe space amongst others who understand
- › teach practical aspects of caring
- › provide encouragement, support and acceptance
- › share personal experiences and real life situations
- › support a carer's wellbeing
- › provide support with developing coping strategies
- › provide relevant information
- › help people understand more about the condition and needs of the person they care for
- › learn about community services and how to use them
- › provide support to set goals identified by the carer

- › discover ways of alleviating stress and relaxing
- › be a place for a carer to bounce ideas off
- › enable members to develop new skills
- › be a fun, social outing.

Before getting started be clear about the answers to the following questions:

- › What are your expectations for the support group?
- › How do you hope to benefit?
- › How will it affect you if the group does not meet your expectations?
- › How much time do you have to devote to it?
- › How do you hope others will benefit?



**TIP** Double check there is not already a group which does what you want to do and which you could join.

Whatever the reason for starting a carer support group, or being in a group, use these resources to you get started.



# Define the Purpose of the Group

The key to establishing and maintaining a group is to be clear about:

- › the purpose of the group, and
- › the objectives of the group.

Think about what carer support groups can provide and your reasons for setting up the group, along with what you and other carers will get out of membership of the group.

Is the reason:

- › to learn more about being a carer?
- › to learn more about managing a condition?
- › to become more informed about a condition?
- › to have a social outlet?
- › to share experiences?
- › to seek and give advice?
- › to improve wellbeing?

Define the group's purpose with a statement for yourself and for all current and future group members. The statement needs to outline the group's aims and proposed outcome, and anticipated achievements of the group.

## As an example

"The purpose of the group is to bring together carers of people with dementia to discuss the impact of dementia on their lives and the lives of the person they care for, as well as receiving information, encouragement and support." Dementia Australia [www.dementia.org.au](http://www.dementia.org.au)

You might want to go into more detail and write up a Plan of Purpose with Objectives or Terms of Reference. (See Section 5 - Setting Up A Not-For-Profit for details)

**What is the purpose of your group?**

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Carers Victoria is supported by the Victorian Government and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

ABN 12 533 636 427 ACN 143 579 257



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