

FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

RESOURCE PACK

REFLECTIVE EXERCISES & TOP TIPS

for Peer Led Family Support Groups

April 2010

Introduction

This resource pack is for members of family support groups and family support networks. It was developed in consultation with the Family Support Network, family support groups, local networks and regional networks. It is a supplement to the Good Practice Guidelines and is designed to help in developing good practice peer led support for members.

How to Use this Resource Pack?

The resource pack is laid out in five sections as follows:

- Starting a Peer Led Family Support Group
- Providing Support in a Group
- Facilitation
- Seeking External Support
- Setting up a Family Support Network

These sections are linked to the Good Practice Guidelines for Peer Led Family Support Groups and should be used in conjunction with the guidelines to help you reflect on your group's practice. If you are starting up a group, the reflective exercises will help you to think through what you will need to do. Use the questions to prompt discussion within your group and facilitate your decision making as regards the way you wish your group to operate. The top tips are there to provide further guidance and stimulate ideas. Of course, these questions and top tips will also prove useful with regard to established groups.

Topic One

Starting a Peer Led Family Support Group

The reflective exercises will help you to think through what you will need to do. Use the questions to prompt discussion within your group and facilitate your decision making as regards the way you wish your group to operate. The top tips will provide further guidance and stimulate ideas.

Reflective Exercises:

- Is there already a family support group in your area?
- If there is a family support group in your area already, is it open to new members?
- If there is no group in your area (or if there is but it is not open to new members), do you have a friend in a similar situation that could help you to get the group started?
- How many people in your area do you think might need help?
- Do you have up-to-date information about the number of minority groups in your area?
- Is there a Local Drugs Task Force, drug and alcohol forum or community drugs project that you can link into and make people aware of your new group?
- Have you made community organisations working with minority groups aware of your new group?
- How will people know your group exists and that they can join?
- How will you promote your group, e.g. will you use leaflets or posters or rely on word of mouth or a combination of approaches?
- Is your promotional material accessible, e.g. does it have pictures to explain the text or is it available in different languages?
- Do the promotional materials show different minorities attending your group?
- Can you leave leaflets in the local Garda station, pharmacy, supermarket, community hall, G.P. surgery, school etc?
- Is there a venue that offers a safe space that you can use to hold your meetings?
 - ◆ Will it cost you anything?
 - ◆ Does it have comfortable furniture?
 - ◆ Is it warm?
 - ◆ Is it accessible, e.g. is there wheelchair accessibility?
 - ◆ Can you use it when you need it?
 - ◆ Who will book it, open it and close it?
 - ◆ Do you need to get insurance cover to use the space?
- What will be your Code of Ethics or guiding principles (see Top Tips)?
- How will you decide on these principles?
- Will you write them down?
- What happens when a person wants to join your group?

- ◆ Who will they contact?
- ◆ Who will tell them about the group and its principles and when it meets?
- ◆ Who will answer their questions?
- ◆ Who will make them welcome on their first day?
- Will you use a personal phone number for people to contact or a group mobile number?
- Will one person hold this phone or will it be rotated around the group?
- How large do you want your group to be?
- What is a manageable size?

Top Tips for Starting a Family Support Group

Tip 1

Your principles or code of ethics might include the following:

- ◆ who the group is for,
- ◆ that confidentiality applies,
- ◆ that it is inclusive,
- ◆ that it is non-judgmental,
- ◆ that listening is as important as talking,
- ◆ that you will respect each other,
- ◆ that you will care for each other,
- ◆ that commitment is required,
- ◆ that you will resist giving advice.

Tip 2

Seek guidance and get as much information as possible from other established family support groups and the Family Support Network.

Tip 3

Have information days and provide leaflets and posters to increase awareness of your group. Emphasise who the group is for, what its ethos is and what the benefits of joining are.

Tip 4

If you advertise your group, for safety reasons give a contact number **only** in any promotional material and not an address unless the group is linked into a local organisation.

Tip 5

Have a supportive first point of contact at the end of the advertised phone line.

Tip 6

Set the seating arrangements in your meeting room in a circle so that everyone can see and hear each other. Make sure the room is warm and the seating is comfortable. Have tea, coffee and water available.

Tip 7

Light a candle at the start of each meeting as a symbol of hope and to tell everyone that what is said from then on is confidential and remains within the group. Get a member of the group to read out your principles to start the meeting and to remind everyone what the group is for. Spell out the importance of confidentiality every week at every session.

Tip 8

Most groups meet once a week for around two hours. Ideally, everyone is given the opportunity to tell their story. However, if someone is in particular pain or crisis, they are given as much time as they need within the agreed time frame of the meeting.

Tip 9

Always end the meeting on a hopeful and supportive note, e.g. ask everyone in the room to highlight one good thing that has happened to them in the last few weeks. Make sure you leave time after the group session ends for people to mingle and chat.

Tip 10

Members should bear in mind the following:

- ◆ Do talk about your own situation.
- ◆ Do share your own experience.
- ◆ Do discuss what you are getting from the group.
- ◆ Do give general information about the group and network on behalf of the group.
- ◆ Honour the confidentiality of the other members of your group.
- ◆ Be aware of serious situations with regard to confidentiality and legal issues.
- ◆ Remember another person's story is their own and must be treated with respect.
- ◆ Agree to talk only about those present at a group meeting and not to bring up the issues of others who are not present.
- ◆ Do offer words of wisdom or examples from your own experience but do not give advice as each person must find what works best in their situation.

Topic Two

Providing Support in a Group

The reflective exercises will help you to think through what you will need to do. Use the questions to prompt discussion within your group and facilitate your decision making as regards the way you wish your group to operate. The top tips will provide further guidance and stimulate ideas.

Reflective Exercises:

- Who is your group for?
- Is it open to all or only for certain family members such as fathers or siblings?
- What stage of development is your group at – starting, early stages of development, group is developed and works well together?
- How does your group's development stage affect how you support each other?
- How supportive are you of each other?
- How do you nurture each other?
- Have you an agreed plan of how to manage when someone makes a serious disclosure, e.g. harm to others, suicide, murder, child abuse or damage to buildings occupied or unoccupied?
- Is your group aware of any policy guidelines concerning disclosure as outlined by the Family Support Network?
- Have you agreed how you will support each other, if necessary, outside of group meetings?
- Who will facilitate your group – the person who started it, an external person, rotation around the members of the group, a smaller number of members who have trained to be facilitators?
- What roles do members play?
 - ◆ Who calls the meetings?
 - ◆ Who opens and closes the place where you meet?
 - ◆ Who gets the meetings started?
 - ◆ Who makes contact with external agencies or sources of support?
 - ◆ Who seeks out information (e.g. about different drugs, about training, about external help)?
 - ◆ Who greets new members and makes them welcome?
 - ◆ Who sets the 'agenda' – the leader, the members, the facilitator, the support worker?
 - ◆ Who organises refreshments and how will these be paid for?
 - ◆ Who is the initial contact person for new members?
- Have members left the group in recent times and if so do you know the reasons for this, i.e. are they positive reasons or otherwise?
- If not, how might your group reflect and learn from their leaving?

- Have you asked people who are resistant to join the group why this is so?

Top Tips for Providing Support in your Group

Tip 1

Develop a 'buddy' system where members can pair off to support each other outside of the times the group meets. Share telephone numbers and email addresses. If someone is particularly upset after a meeting, agree with them that a member they get on with will check up on them the next day.

Tip 2

When someone new joins, invite a member who has been with the group for some time and who is strong in themselves to tell their story so that the new member can see they are not alone. Encourage (gently and without pressure) the new member to speak. If they do not want to speak, let them know that it's okay to listen. If possible provide the option of one-to-one facilitation.

Tip 3

When you have newcomers joining an already established group, consider having a separate group for newcomers until they feel comfortable with the process and able to join the meetings of the established group.

Tip 4

Emphasise that the group is for the people themselves, not the drug user.

Tip 5

Keep a simple record of activities, training or information that the group has found useful for future reference.

Tip 6

If the group seems to be stuck in a rut, consider ways to reinvigorate e.g. invite in speakers to do information sessions, watch a relevant DVD to get some discussion going, explore if a group outing can be organised or even review the goals of the group to see if they are still relevant.

Tip 7

Access training to keep the group focused, e.g. facilitation skills, drug awareness, suicide awareness and prevention, stress management, crisis intervention, anti-racism etc.

Topic Three Facilitation

The reflective exercises will help you to think through what you will need to do. Use the questions to prompt discussion within your group and facilitate your decision making as regards the way you wish your group to operate. The top tips will provide further guidance and stimulate ideas.

Reflective Exercises:

- Who will facilitate your group?
- If the group wishes to facilitate itself, who amongst you will train to be facilitators?
- Have you sourced facilitation training?
- Have you sourced funding for the training?
- If you decide to use an external facilitator, are they trained in facilitation techniques?
- How long do you plan to have your meetings for?
- Will everyone get a turn to speak?
- If someone is very quiet, how will you ensure that they do not feel excluded or that other members do not feel uncomfortable?
- If someone is disruptive, how will you address this?
- What local sources of expertise or professional help can you draw on to assist members?
- Who will provide support and supervision to the facilitator?

Top Tips for Facilitation of Family Support Groups

Tip 1

At the first meeting, or when a new member joins, invite everyone to introduce themselves. It is good to evoke an atmosphere that is relaxed and welcoming and it is good to encourage members to share their expectations or wishes for the meeting.

Tip 2

A member who never shares their experience or who is reluctant to talk can evoke a sense of discomfort and/or tension within the group and it is worth exploring the underlying causes. Over time this situation might ease as people relax. However, if it persists it is important to ask them how they are feeling. It might be that they feel excluded or discriminated or they feel that trust has been broken or they feel there are cliques in the group operating their own agenda or they may be shy. They may feel that their story is not important enough or serious enough to discuss having heard the stories of others or they may feel frightened by the stories of others.

Tip 3

If a member's behaviour is disruptive, the group needs to examine the scenario and seek constructive ways to address this. Explore the way the group process is unfolding, seek out behaviour patterns and possible ways to change these patterns if they are not for the greater good of the group. For example, establish who is interrupting, who is listening, who is responding, who rarely speaks or speaks very little, when does the disruptive behaviour happen and what are the triggers for this? Rather than trying to discourage domineering behaviour, encourage more active and constructive participation. It may be necessary to break up into smaller groups or pairs to give everyone opportunities for self-expression.

Tip 4

Be prepared to follow-up on issues after the group session has ended.

Topic Four

Seeking External Support

The reflective exercises will help you to think through what you will need to do. Use the questions to prompt discussion within your group and facilitate your decision making as regards the way you wish your group to operate. The top tips will provide further guidance and stimulate ideas.

Reflective Exercises:

- What are the most common topics that come up for discussion in your group?
- Has your group developed a list of useful local sources of information or websites to share with existing and new members?
- Do you keep up-to-date with new drugs and 'street' names for drugs?
- Has your group discussed training needs?
- If so, have you prioritised these needs?
- Has your group sourced suitable courses?
- Will the courses provide accreditation?
- Do you know anyone who has attended the courses that could give you feedback about their relevance and quality?
- How much will the courses cost?
- Has your group sourced funding for training?

Top Tips for Seeking External Support

Tip 1

Sources of information include the national Family Support Network (telephone: 01-8365168 and www.fsn.ie), your local Citizens Information Service, Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS), Community Drugs Projects or Task Forces, Family Resource Centres, Pavee Point and your Local Employment Service.

Tip 2

Most training courses incur a cost. Your Local Drugs Task Force or community drugs project may have funding available to it to support you to access relevant training. Other sources of funding include Pobal (www.pobal.ie) and Dormant Accounts, the HSE, and the Family Support Agency. You may need to fundraise. If your group decides to fundraise locally you will need to apply to the Gardaí for permission to do so. It is wise when fundraising to emphasise that it is for a local cause.

Tip 3

If one of your group members has attended training in a personal or professional capacity, invite them to share their experience of the course with the other group members.

Topic Five

Setting up a Family Support Network

The reflective exercises will help you to think through what you will need to do. Use the questions to prompt discussion within your group and facilitate your decision making as regards the way you wish your group to operate. The top tips will provide further guidance and stimulate ideas.

Reflective Exercises:

- How have you determined the need for a local or regional network?
- Is there a network already in existence that you could link into?
- What do you need the network to do?
- How can it support local family support groups?
- Who will it link into?
- Who will take responsibility for organising the first meeting to discuss setting up a network?
- How will the network operate?
- Is it open to all local family support groups?
- Who will facilitate it?
- What will be its membership terms?
- Will there be a membership fee?
- How often will it meet?
- Where will it meet?
- Who will be the chairperson, secretary and treasurer?
- How will you decide on the selection of people for these posts?
- How many representatives will each family support group nominate to attend network meetings?
- Are issues affecting minority groups discussed and brought to network meetings?
- Have you agreed the aims and objectives of the network?
- Have you agreed a 'work plan', e.g. the work plan should include actions in relation to issues, training, funding, events and networking that members want to focus on?
- When will you hold your Annual General Meeting (AGM)?
- Who will be invited to your AGM?
- Is there provision for an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)?

Top Tips for Setting up a Network

Tip 1

Rotating the venue for network meetings around the local family support groups that are part of the network is a good way for members to get to know each other and to share the work of

organising and running the network. Networks typically meet monthly or bi-monthly.

Tip 2

As your network develops and its members become more confident and experienced, you may need to consider registering it as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. While this will bring extra paperwork, it will make it easier to apply for State funding, it will help you to structure your network and it will help you organise your finances in a way that does not put each member's personal assets at risk.

Tip 3

Support in setting up a network can be provided by the national Family Support Network. Telephone: 01-8365168 or www.fsn.ie