



# **FosterParentNet**

## **Leading Foster and Adoptive Parent Support Groups:**

### ***A Guide for Parents***



Treatment Foster Care  
and Family-Based Services

A collaboration of  
Professional Association of Treatment Homes, Inc.  
and the National Foster Parent Association, Inc.

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# **Leading Foster and Adoptive Parent Support Groups: A Guide for Parents**

Second Edition

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\*Trainer Exercises are designed to be used by trainers working with foster/adoptive parents who plan to start and lead foster/adoptive parent support groups. All other exercises are designed to be used by foster/adoptive parents facilitating support groups with other parents (Facilitator Exercises)

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## **SECTION - I: Introduction**

**Need for Foster/Adoptive  
Parent Support Groups**

**Support Group Benefits**

**Thoughts on Leadership**



***How can a foster/adoptive  
parent support group help me?***

**Section I: Introduction**

## **The Need for Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Groups**

“My assumption is that the story of anyone of us  
is in some measure the story of us all.”

- Frederick Buechner

***You and your family have made a commitment to share your love and your home with a child. After the first child was placed, however, you probably realized that foster/adoptive parenting was going to be one of the biggest challenges of your life. The positive parenting classes you sailed through have in no way prepared you for this child, who likes getting up in the middle of the night, turning on the stove, and tossing his soiled underwear on the burners. Your social worker forgot to tell you that the child's biological mom is addicted to cocaine and that you will have to interact with her. The placement agency told you they would provide 24/7 social service support. But that only works when your worker is not in the hospital having a baby!***

A foster/adoptive parent support group can't eliminate all these challenges, but the other parents in the group will be there to listen and to offer advice and understanding. Groups can help you through your problems and may help you decide to stick with it. Other foster/adoptive parents who have “been there, done that,” have the kind of real experience you need for advice. Foster/adoptive parents who are in support groups say they provide emotional support to one another, learn ways to cope, and help others while helping themselves.

A support group is by definition a group of individuals who gather voluntarily on a regular basis to meet certain needs that they have in common. Groups are widely used as a means of helping people cope with stressful life events. They are also a way of sharing experiences and knowledge with others in similar situations.

If you have tried to get your needs met in general parenting support groups, you know they don't address the unique issues that surface in foster households. Issues that confront foster/adoptive parents include confidentiality, grief and loss feelings associated with placements, conflicts with the birth family, birth child vs. foster/adoptive child rivalry, and isolation. Sometimes a huge void exists between foster/adoptive parents and parents who are rearing only their biological children. You've probably been there and realize you need more.

A foster/adoptive parent support group may be what you are looking for. Evidence

## Leading Foster and Adoptive Parent Support Groups: A Guide for Parents

### Section I: Introduction

shows that support groups designed specifically for foster/adoptive parents enhance their ability to meet the needs of children. For instance, 94% of surveyed foster parents participating in support groups funded by FosterParentNet said that support groups gave them the encouragement and resources

to continue foster parenting. Even if such groups do not exist in your community, this workbook is designed to help you begin a support group. You can create the support group that you and other foster/adoptive parents have been waiting for!

### Support Group Benefits

***Groups that are supportive, encouraging, accepting, expressive, honest, and non-judgmental create an atmosphere where members are comfortable enough to openly express their fears, challenges, and successes. Below are some additional benefits of support groups, many of which FosterParentNet support group members identified in our study. Ultimately, the groups help foster/adoptive parents manage challenges they encounter in caring for children.***

#### Support Groups ...

- Lessen feelings of isolation
- Provide opportunities to make new friends
- Validate thoughts such as “I know I am not crazy or a bad person because others have the same problems.”
- Enable members to draw wisdom from others who have “been there”
- Provide opportunities to mentor others or receive mentorship
- Become a gathering place for hope and encouragement
- Unite foster/adoptive parents for a common goal
- Provide respite from life’s daily stresses
- Give a sense of community and group cohesiveness, “We’re all in this together.”
- Provide education, resources, and networking
- Are fun
- Are a safe haven for sharing problems and feelings

**Section I: Introduction**



**Exercise 1**

**Support Group Benefits**

**Objective:** Recognize the benefits of support groups

**Equipment:** Flip chart (or large visible board), markers, and strips of colored paper

**Directions:** Divide the participants into small groups of four to six people. Ask each group to do the following:

- Talk about any personal experiences, positive or negative, they have had with support groups. (It does not have to be a foster/adoptive parent support group.)
- Share the benefits they have gained as a result of being part of a support group. Each group should record their responses on colored strips of paper.

Write “Support Group Benefits” on the flip chart. Ask a representative from each group to discuss their responses with the larger group and place their colored sentence strips on the flip chart.

Show participants the list of support group benefits on page 15. You can display it on an overhead transparency or pass it out as a handout. Discuss how the groups’ ideas are in line with this list.

## Thoughts on Leadership

***Never underestimate the power and resilience of one committed and passionate soul. If you care about supporting foster/adoptive parents and are dedicated to starting a group, you can lead a foster/adoptive parent support group. It is only natural to doubt your abilities if you have never held an official position or if people around you have not called you a leader. Anyone can be a leader in his or her own way. All you have to do is have a vision and get others to believe in and support your ideas. The leader is the initial visionary and the life force for the group.***

You may be hesitant about taking on the role of starting up and organizing a group, but don't let your fears hold you back. This may be a role that is totally unfamiliar to you. Still, you came up with this idea, or perhaps were chosen to be a leader by an agency supervisor, religious leader, school official, peers, or others that saw your potential and passion. Your challenge now is to overcome your fears and inhibitions and turn your vision into a reality. All leaders face this challenge if they want to reach their goals.

Don't compare yourself to other leaders you admire and think that you don't measure up. Instead, focus on the character traits that you possess that make you an effective leader and bring them into your work. While identifying other leaders' good qualities, note some flaws they may have. You will find that all leaders have strengths and weaknesses. Some may be natural leaders. But just like in parenting, leadership can be learned through practice and experience.

Once you have decided to be a leader, others will come to depend on you and look up to you. When you bring people together and start talking about forming a group, making changes in the system, educating prospective foster families, or planning a community function, people get excited. Your energy, drive, vision, and passion can be a powerful force that brings people together.

Keep in mind that you don't have to do it alone. Step by step with the members of your group, you will start to make significant accomplishments. Every successful leader has a plan of action. A foster/adoptive parent support group leader needs one as well. The first item in Section 2 is Creating a Plan which will help you take the necessary first steps as a leader.

Starting a foster/adoptive parent support group is an exciting, yet scary, challenge for most people. It is important to capitalize on your strengths and recognize that together, you and your group have what it takes to make your group a success!

**Section I: Introduction**

**Qualities of Effective Leaders**

- Open to new ideas
- Ability to motivate and inspire others
- Courage to make decisions that aren't always popular
- Dedication to improving their communication skills
- Ability to share the work, power, and glory
- Passionate about what they are doing
- Patient
- Ability to see issues from multiple perspectives
- Accountable and honest
- Ability to identify strengths in others
- Serve as a mentor for others
- Focused on solutions
- Energetic
- Tolerant of imperfections in others
- Confident enough to admit when they have made a mistake or need help



Leading Foster and Adoptive Parent Support Groups: A Guide for Parents  
Section I: Introduction



**Exercise 2**

**Traits of a Good Leader**

**Objective:** Illustrate the leadership responsibilities that exist in our daily lives

**Equipment:** Flip chart (or large visible board) and markers

**Directions:** Divide participants into small groups of no more than 6 people. Give each group a sheet of chart paper and ask them to do the following:

- Divide the paper in half and label column 1 “Traits of a Good Leader” and column 2 “Traits of a Good Parent.”
- Identify the traits of a good leader and record their responses on the chart paper.
- Also identify the traits of a good parent and record their responses on the chart paper.
- Select a spokesperson to report on the group’s responses.

Now write down the responses on the flip chart and draw lines connecting similar traits that appear in both categories. Even if the words are not exactly the same, the traits may be similar (ex. reliable and consistent, energetic and dedicated).

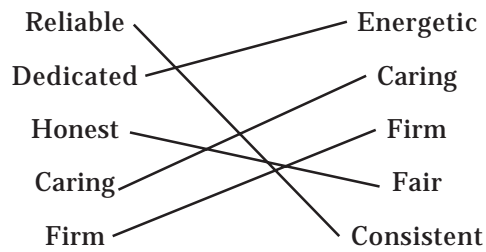
**Section I: Introduction**



**Exercise 2 continued**

**Traits of a Good Leader**

**Traits of a Good Leader Traits of a Good Parent**



Point out that many of their skills as parents have prepared them to be good leaders.

Alternative directions: Assign some groups to list the traits of a good leader and others to list the traits of a good parent. Identify the similarities when the groups return and share their ideas.

Tip – Remember to record all responses so everyone is encouraged to participate. If a response is mentioned more than once, place a check mark beside it each time it is said so that participants still feel acknowledged.

## You Have What it Takes to Be a Leader

- Never underestimate the power and resilience of one committed and passionate soul
- Don't compare yourself to other leaders you admire and think that you don't measure up
- Focus on the character traits that you possess that make you an effective leader
- One of the biggest challenges for all leaders is to overcome fears and turn a vision into reality
- All leaders have strengths and weaknesses
- Leadership skills can be learned through practice and experience
- Your energy, drive, vision, and passion can be a powerful force that brings people together
- You don't have to do it alone



**Leading Foster and Adoptive Parent Support Groups: A Guide for Parents**  
**Section I: Introduction**

## **SECTION - II: Starting a Support Group**

**Creating a Plan**

**Recruiting Group Members**

**Developing a Purpose Statement**

**Learning about Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Groups**

**Choosing a Group Type**

**Making a Business Plan**



***What should our group be like?***

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Creating a Plan



***There are many steps you must take as you start your group. In order to proceed through the startup process successfully, it is critical that you have a plan. A plan will provide you with a roadmap of all the things you hope to accomplish and the order in which they should be completed. As the old saying goes -***

***“If you fail to plan,  
you plan to fail.”***

If you are the leader of the group, it is important to think in terms of “we.” Including others during the planning process is critical to the success of the group. If you are a new group, make sure you have recruited a core group of members before you proceed with the planning process (recruitment is discussed on the next page 23).

As you begin the planning process, remember that while it may be easier to make decisions alone and expect others to go along with the program, acting alone may chase away your members. People want to feel like their opinions matter. They also want to feel like they have some control in the direction of the group. Don't take this away! Encourage everyone to participate in the planning. Consensus! Consensus! Consensus! is the name of the game when developing a group plan (consensus is discussed on page 96). Remember, he or she who plans alone may very well meet alone.

#### **Critical areas of planning include:**

- Identifying ways to recruit members
- Developing a purpose statement
- Learning about foster/adoptive parent support groups
- Determining what type of group you will be
- Clarifying financial needs and creating a business plan

#### **Other possible planning areas:**

- Developing a meeting structure
- Assigning any desired group roles or responsibilities
- Establishing goals connected to the group purpose and steps to accomplish these goals
- Listing education/speaker topics of interest

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Recruiting Group Members**  
**How do we find members for our group?**



***Without members it is impossible to have a group. Therefore, recruitment is an essential part of beginning and maintaining any foster/adoptive parent support group. Sometimes a number of people have already come together and decided that they want to form a group or they have been assigned to a group by an agency, in which case they can move directly into determining the group's purpose statement. However, if members have not been identified, the leader must do some work to find other people interested in participating in a foster/adoptive parent support group.***

Even for groups that have been in existence for awhile, recruitment is an important thing to keep in mind. Being able to replace members as they leave the group is essential to the existence of a small group. Once again, this may not be an issue for groups sponsored by an agency, because as new foster/adoptive parents are recruited into the agency they are matched with a group. In regional groups one of the goals might be to touch the lives of as many foster/adoptive parents as possible in a specified radius, in which case recruitment will be an ongoing part of the group's work.

While all of the above suggestions are great, nothing beats word-of-mouth advertising. Spread the word and encourage others to spread it.

As new people join your group it may be helpful to keep track of how they heard about it. Over time this may give you insight on which recruitment efforts are the most effective for your particular community.

For many foster/adoptive parent groups, recruitment is not an immediate concern because the membership base is already in place. Regardless of the level of urgency in this area, however, a recruitment plan is helpful. It assists your group in maintaining a desired level of membership. On the following page is an exercise that will help your group develop a recruitment plan.

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Suggestions for Recruiting New Members

- Ask people to become members. One of the most basic things to remember when recruiting potential members is that people will not naturally seek out your group. You need to find them.
- Send meeting announcements to foster/adoptive parents; public and private agencies are sometimes willing to assist in this task.
- Use advertising for recruiting participants such as flyers, brochures, newsletters, and news releases.
- Consider schools, religious communities, and social service organizations as good places for getting the message out about a new support group.



- Contact organizations to see if they are willing to list your group on their website or to inform their members through the use of a distribution list.
- Write letters to the editor of local newspapers.
- Notify appropriate professionals that work with foster/adoptive parents and ask them to spread the word.

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**



**Exercise 3**

**Developing a Recruitment Plan**

**Objective:** To brainstorm effective ways of recruiting support group members.

**Equipment:** Index cards with stars, pens or pencils, sentence strips, markers, flip chart (or large visible board), list of recruitment ideas from page 24 written on a piece of flip chart paper

**Directions:**

- In order to divide the participants into groups, pass out index cards as they walk in the room. Each card should have a colored star drawn on the corner. If you need 2 groups of 5 people you could mark 5 cards with a blue star and 5 cards with a red star. When it is time to begin the exercise, ask people to gather with the other participants with the same colored star.
- First, tell each person to independently list as many ways to find members for support groups as possible in 5 minute time period. NOTE: Remind everyone to think of creative ways—not just simple or typical ways.
- Ask each small group to choose 3-5 of their most promising and creative ideas to share with the entire group. They should write each idea on a sentence strip and then tape them up under the heading “Getting New Members” on the flip chart. Each group will select a volunteer to go up to the front of the room and share the sentence strip ideas with the large group.
- Now share the list of recruitment ideas from page 24. You can check for similarities and differences and discuss all the ideas that have been listed. Remember to congratulate the group on their creativity!

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Developing a Purpose Statement



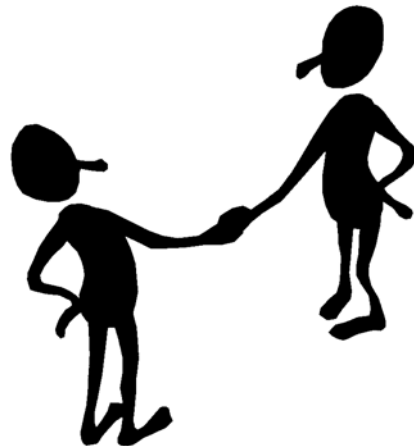
***Before moving forward with your group, it is important to develop a purpose statement with input from all your members. Groups that have no consensus on purpose are setting themselves up for a short and frustrating life or no life at all. Clearly defining and communicating your group's purpose is a part of giving your group an identity and a reason to exist.***

Try to define the larger goals you are trying to accomplish. Your purpose for getting together isn't only to start a group. The reason for giving life to a group involves solving a problem or addressing a common need. It is important to ask yourself and others, "Why is a group like this needed?" You might find it helpful to research existing foster/adoptive parent support groups. A good place to start is the National Foster Parent Association

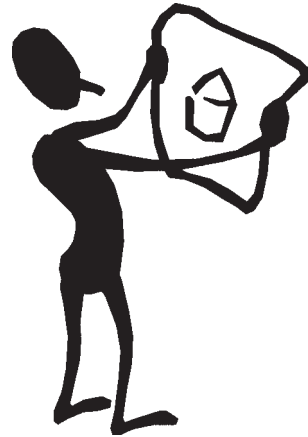
(NFPA – [www.nfpainc.org](http://www.nfpainc.org)). They have information on support groups nationwide.

Once your purpose is clear, write it down. Draft a purpose statement for your group and develop a few key goals. This will serve to guide your group when things get murky. Your purpose statement can also be used in correspondence or as a speaking point to others.

It is possible for groups to have more than one purpose. The purpose may change over time. For instance, a group may originally form for socialization and education but as the group matures they may want to expand to include child advocacy and public policy. Our life, our family, our community, our philosophy, our needs, and our world are dynamic and fluid. Since change is the norm, we should allow the mission of the group to change when it is necessary. The important thing to remember is that having a clearly defined purpose for the group increases the likelihood of success. On the following page are exercises that may be used to determine your group's vision for the future and purpose statement.



## Section II: Starting a Support Group



### Identifying a Group's Purpose

- Discuss your reason for starting the support group with the rest of the members as well as other foster/adoptive parents you know. Listen to the reasons they think support groups are necessary.
- Determine if similar groups exist in your community and if they address the issues that are driving you to start a group. If so, are you duplicating efforts made by the other groups? If not, what makes your group different?
- Become informed about issues that affect potential members, i.e., "What resources are they missing?" "What challenges do they face daily?"
- Look at purpose statements of support groups and other organizations. This will give you an idea of what different groups see as their purpose.

### Creating a Purpose Statement

- Start a committee of others interested in developing a purpose statement.
- Make sure there is agreement among the membership on the purpose of the group.
- Contact local associations and organizations; share your ideas with them and ask for suggestions and help.
- Surf the Internet to locate on-line resources that may be helpful.
- Talk to other foster/adoptive parents and ask for their feedback.
- Use the exercises on the upcoming pages!

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**



**Exercise 4**

**Letter to a Significant Child:  
Our Vision for Foster Care/Adoption**

**Objective:** Think about the group's ideal vision for the future of foster care, adoption, and foster/adoptive parenting. Prepare to write a purpose statement.

**Equipment:** Paper, pens or pencils, a flip chart (or large visible board), and markers

**Directions:**

- Give each person paper and a writing utensil and read the following prompt:
- Imagine that somehow you are able to look into the future and you have just caught a glimpse of the year 2025. A significant child in your life (maybe a birth child, foster/adoptive child, grandchild, or close family friend) has just become a foster/adoptive parent. Returning to the present, write a letter to this important child in your life describing how you hope the experience of foster/adoptive parenting will be for them in the year 2025.
- Once everyone has had sufficient time to write (probably 20-30 minutes), ask people to share some of their hopes for the future of foster care, adoption, and parenting. You can write these ideas on a large piece of paper entitled "Our Vision for Foster/Adoptive parenting." This sheet may be helpful as your group begins to write its purpose statement.

## Section II: Starting a Support Group



### Exercise 5

## Developing a Purpose Statement

**Objective:** Develop a common purpose (or mission) for the group

**Equipment:** Flip chart (or a large visible board) and markers

**Time:** Approximately 1 hour

**Directions:**

Ask the group members to imagine they have just awakened from a long night's sleep and something magical happened while they were asleep. A year has passed and the group is one year old. They are in a meeting discussing the success of the group over the past months.

- Ask members to describe what they see, hear, and feel as the group's success is being discussed. Encourage them to be specific, to "dream" where they'd like to be.
- Write key words and phrases from each person on the flip chart or board.
- When the process is complete, ask if they can accept the view "one year from now" as the group vision. If there is a strong disagreement to some parts of the vision, identify the common areas and differences.
- Discuss the differences to see if an understanding can be reached. Otherwise, use the common areas as the basis of your purpose statement.
- Ask the group to develop an inspiring sentence that captures the essence of the vision. Keep it short, 12 words or less. This will help everyone remember it. This sentence can serve as the purpose of the group.

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Learning About Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Groups**



***You have accomplished a major step by finding group members and establishing a purpose. Now it is important that you take the time to learn about support groups and how they work. This will help you decide what kind of group you want to be (different group types are discussed in depth throughout the following pages) and help you plan for your group more effectively.***

**To learn about how support groups work:**

- Contact the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA)
- Visit existing support groups
- Talk to support group facilitators and members
- Ask support group participants what they like and dislike about their group
- Read books on support groups (see bibliography)
- Visit web sites geared towards foster/adoptive parent issues
- Attend a conference or a workshop on support groups



## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Choosing a Support Group Type

***The basic purpose of any foster/adoptive parent support group is to meet the needs of foster/adoptive parents so they can meet the needs of children. Although there are many ways to be a foster/adoptive parent group, it is helpful to identify three major types based on group size and mission.***

#### **Community-Based Local Groups:**

Community-based groups include foster/adoptive parent-led groups and agency-sponsored groups. The main focus of these groups is to provide a place where foster/adoptive parents can come together for emotional support, sharing of experiences, socialization, networking, education, and fun. These groups are generally small (approximately 3 to 12 participants). They may or may not have a formal business structure (i.e., elected officials, 501(c) 3 IRS status). These groups often receive financial support through membership dues or if the group is agency-sponsored, the agency's resources support it.

#### **Intermediate or Regional Groups:**

These groups are usually larger than the community-based groups and are designed to unify foster/adoptive parents from different communities. The main goals of a regional foster/adoptive parent group might include advocacy, training, large events for children

and foster/adoptive parents, networking, supporting local support groups, public awareness campaigns, and fundraising. In addition to these goals, they share goals of the community-based groups to provide emotional support, socialization, and fun for foster/adoptive parents. In order for a regional group to conduct fundraising activities, it must have a formal nonprofit business structure (IRS 501(c) 3 status) and elected officials. This framework is optional at the local community group level.

#### **State and National Associations:**

These groups work to unify foster/adoptive parents on a state and national level. Their membership is generally large and includes agencies as well as individuals. Their primary goals are advocacy, improvements in public policy on behalf of foster/adoptive parents and children, conducting state and local conferences, recruitment and retention of foster/adoptive parents, program development, public education, and fundraising. They also provide technical support and resources to affiliated groups on community and regional levels. State and national associations have formal nonprofit business structures with elected officials just as do regional groups.

Look at table 2.1 on page 32 to help you identify which type of group is best for your members. There is some overlap in the purpose and characteristics between the different group types. Careful thinking about these group categories can help clarify how formal you want your group's structure to be.

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

<p><b>Table 2.1 Three Support Group Types</b> Range of supports offered to foster/adoptive parents from the local to the national level</p>	
<p><b>LOCAL SUPPORT GROUPS</b></p> <p><b>Purpose or Mission</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional support</li> <li>• Sharing of experiences</li> <li>• Socializing and networking</li> <li>• Retention</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• FUN</li> </ul>	<p><b>Characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion group</li> <li>• Speakers are sometimes invited</li> <li>• Limited membership, generally 3-12 members</li> <li>• Childcare provided</li> <li>• Agency-based or community-based</li> <li>• Regular, informal meetings usually on a monthly basis</li> <li>• May be organized and supported by a sponsoring agency</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTERMEDIATE GROUP — REGIONAL Foster/Adoptive parent Association</b></p>	
<p><b>Purpose or Mission</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unite foster/adoptive parents in a given locality</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Special events and programs for foster kids and their foster families</li> <li>• Resource gathering and sharing</li> <li>• Provide services for foster/adoptive parents</li> <li>• Foster/adoptive parent training, education, recruitment, and retention</li> <li>• Start up and support of local groups</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Lobby for new laws or policy changes on behalf of children</li> <li>• Public awareness of foster/adoptive parent issues</li> <li>• Socializing and networking</li> <li>• FUN</li> </ul>	<p><b>Characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event and advocacy group</li> <li>• Kids are involved in some activities</li> <li>• Larger membership, can vary from a few families to hundreds of families</li> <li>• Formal nonprofit status</li> <li>• Receive and budget resources from state associations, grants, dues, charitable contributions, fundraising events, etc.</li> <li>• Activities are varied</li> <li>• Officers and committees are appointed to handle various functions</li> <li>• Representatives interact with local support groups and state and national foster/adoptive parent organizations</li> </ul>
<p><b>STATE OR NATIONAL Foster/Adoptive parent Association</b></p>	
<p><b>Purpose or Mission</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unify foster/adoptive parent support groups on a state or national level</li> <li>• Advocate for foster/adoptive parents and children</li> <li>• Lobby at state or national level for new laws or policy changes</li> <li>• Socializing and networking</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Public awareness</li> <li>• Support and aid developing foster/adoptive parent support groups or associations at the local and regional level</li> <li>• Conferences</li> <li>• Research and program development</li> <li>• Represent and intervene for foster/adoptive parents in the child welfare system</li> </ul>	<p><b>Characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy/political group</li> <li>• Volunteer and paid staff</li> <li>• Focus on planning and development</li> <li>• Representatives from local and regional groups attend state and national conventions</li> <li>• Major focus on research, education and training at conferences</li> <li>• Membership requires enrollment and paid dues</li> <li>• Agencies can be members</li> <li>• Formal business structure and nonprofit status</li> <li>• Receive and budget resources and funding from dues, federal grants, charitable contributions, fundraising events and other sources</li> <li>• Officials are elected through a formal structure</li> <li>• National networking capability</li> </ul>

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Community-Based Local Groups**  
**Foster/Adoptive Parent-Led Groups**



***If you are looking for a close-knit group whose members are interested in supporting one another emotionally and sharing the unique experiences associated with foster/adoptive parenting, the community-based support group is what you are looking for. Foster/adoptive parent-led groups are one type of community-based support group, while agency sponsored are another. Groups at this level are centered on the basic human need and desire to feel connected to a community and also to feel validated and supported by peers. They mainly offer emotional support, training, validation, and fun.***

Many of the foster/adoptive parents who participate in foster/adoptive parent-led groups care for children with complex issues while juggling employment and trying to make sense of the social service system. They want a place to let down their hair and share their daily experiences with other adults who understand. Generally the participants enjoy the freedom of being able to meet without direction from agency professionals.

In the beginning stages of development, members usually are not concerned with formality. Participants just want a place to share and get support. These groups are most successful if the membership is kept small (3 to 12 members). Group bonding and communication might be hindered if the group gets too large. Meeting in a cozy living room with light refreshments is perfectly fine.

Membership dues or sponsorship gives financial support to many community-based groups. Unless they have gone through the state and federal procedures to acquire a 501(c) 3 nonprofit business status, community-based groups cannot legally conduct fundraising activities.



**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Community-Based Local Groups**

**Agency-sponsored Groups**

***Agencies that provide services to foster families often have local support groups for foster/adoptive parents. These groups are designed to provide education as well as a support network. Agency groups have the benefit of having accessible meeting space, trained professionals, and other resources that might otherwise be difficult for a small group to obtain. The majority of these groups are led and facilitated by agency staff.***

While there are numerous benefits to agency-based groups, there are also challenges. For instance, social workers may facilitate groups that include foster/adoptive parents who are on their caseload. According to some foster parents who participated in FosterParentNet focus groups at PATH, Inc. (Professional Association of Treatment Homes, Inc.) this is a definite drawback to sharing in a group, especially if members want to discuss agency staff or services. They also indicated that sometimes the purposes of agency groups are unclear. Is the group designed for foster/adoptive parent support or is it for the agency's fulfillment of programming requirements? It can be a drain on participation if group members are made to feel as though

they have to participate in a group when they don't want to.

Another concern expressed by foster/adoptive parents in relation to agency groups is that sometimes there is so much structure they are not comfortable. Parents feel as though the opportunity for emotional release and fun don't exist. It is important that group members and agency staff work together in designing groups that meet the needs of participants.

Below are some suggestions that might be helpful in the design of foster/adoptive parent support groups sponsored by an agency.

- Make sure there is consensus on the purpose of the group
- Clarify the role of the agency staff member as facilitator
- Create clear guidelines regarding confidentiality
- Ensure that foster/adoptive parents have a voice and control in the design and structure of the group
- Address group concerns in a timely manner
- Utilize trained foster/adoptive parents, volunteers, or staff who are not directly responsible for supervision of the members as facilitators
- Provide facilitators with training on how to work with groups (i.e., through FosterParentNet, foster/adoptive parent association workshops, or conferences)

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Regional Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Groups**

***Perhaps you already belong to a support group but you are looking to unite a larger number of foster/adoptive parents. You are interested in lobbying for children, fundraising for special events and projects, increasing training opportunities, and providing resources and support for local support groups. You may be interested in belonging to a regional group.***

While regional groups may address support needs, their primary focus is more project and task oriented. Due to their size, it may be difficult to experience the level of emotional support and sharing that exists in community-based groups. Still, there is no one way for a group to exist. For instance, a group in

California started as a small community-based group and has since grown to over 200 members. Their purpose has changed to include advocacy and events geared for larger groups.

FosterParentNet has provided mini-grants to many regional and state groups. These groups have conducted a range of activities, including:

- developing networks of local support groups
- mentoring and training foster/adoptive parents to start support groups
- recruiting foster/adoptive parents through efforts such as movie theater slide shows
- establishing funds to reimburse families for expenses not covered by the state such as tutoring, school supplies, or sports lessons
- family activities (potluck dinners, roller skating, farm outings)
- creating websites or support lines with resources for foster/adoptive parents

**Groups Funded by FosterParentNet**

Alaska Foster Parent Training Center (Alaska)

Shelby County Foster Parent Association (Alaska)

Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents (Arizona)

National Association for Black Foster Parents and Caregivers (California)

Colorado State Foster Parent Association (Colorado)

Kids Family Center (Connecticut)

Delaware Foster/Adoptive Families Association (Delaware)

Florida State Foster Parent Association, Inc. (Florida)

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Groups funded by FosterParentNet (continued)**

Foster Families Association (Guam)  
Guam Foster Families Association (Guam)  
Hale Kipa, Inc. Foster Families Support Groups (Hawaii)  
Idaho Foster and Adoptive Parent's Coalition (Idaho)  
Boone/Story County Foster Care Support Group (Iowa)  
Northeast Area Foster/Adoptive Parent Association (Illinois)  
Indiana Foster Care and Adoption Association, Inc. (Indiana)  
Family Find (Montana)  
Foster and Adoptive Parents (Arizona) Family Services (New Jersey)  
National Association for Black Foster Parents and Caregivers (California)  
Foster Parent Association of Southern Nevada (Nevada)  
Boone/Story County Foster Care Support Group (Iowa)  
Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (Iowa)  
Kansas Foster and Adoptive Families, Inc. (Kansas)  
The Washington Parish Foster Care Association (Louisiana)  
Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc. (Maine)  
DC Metropolitan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (Maryland)  
Maryland League of Foster and Adoptive Parents, Inc. (Maryland)  
Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children  
Kid's Net Program (Massachusetts)  
Michigan Foster Adoptive Parent Association (Michigan)  
Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties Support Group (Michigan)  
Hennepin County Foster Care Association (Minnesota)  
Mississippi Foster and Adoptive Parents Association, Inc. (Mississippi)  
Foster Care and Adoptive Association (Missouri)  
Jackson County Foster and Adoption, Plus (Missouri)  
Missouri Foster Care and Adoption Association (Missouri)  
Family Find (Montana)  
Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (Nebraska)

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Groups funded by FosterParentNet (continued)**

Foster Care and Adoption Association of Nevada (Nevada)  
Foster Parent Association of Southern Nevada (Nevada)  
Sierra Association of Foster Families (Nevada)  
Foster and Adoptive Family Services (New Jersey)  
New York State Citizen's Coalition for Children, Inc. (New York)  
New York State Foster and Adoptive Association (New York)  
North Carolina Foster Parent Association (North Carolina)  
Northeast Human Service Center (North Dakota)  
Richland County Foster Parents (North Dakota)  
Ohio Family Care Association (Ohio)  
Foster Care Association of Oklahoma (Oklahoma)  
Marion Poik FPA (Oregon)  
Oregon Foster Parent Association (Oregon)  
The Foster Parent Association (Pennsylvania)  
Rhode Island Foster Parents Association (Rhode Island)  
South Carolina Foster Parents Association (South Carolina)  
Tennessee Foster Care Association (Tennessee)  
Dallas County Foster Parent Association (Texas)  
Utah Foster Care Foundation (Utah)  
Vermont Foster and Adoptive Family Association (Vermont)  
Government of the Virgin Islands of the United States  
    Department of Human Services, Division of Children, Youth and Families (Virgin Islands)  
Petersburg Area Foster Parent Support Group (Virginia)  
Foster Parents Association of Washington State (Washington)  
Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, Inc. (Wisconsin)  
Natrona County Foster Adoptive Parent Association (Wyoming)

The birth of a regional group may be the evolution of a community-based group or the creation of something new. As with community-based groups, planning is important. For instance, groups at this level must have a formal structure, i.e., by-laws, 501(c) 3 status, a budget, elected officials, and fundraising capabilities. Community-based groups may have these elements in place as well, but most are informal and focused on basic support and socialization.

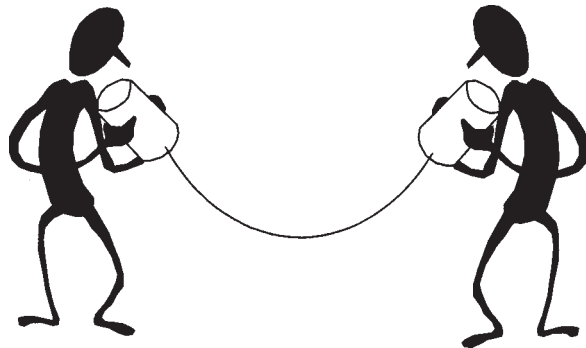
**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**State and National Associations**

***If you are interested in connecting with an organized group of foster/adoptive parents on the state or national level, a foster/adoptive parent association is probably what you are looking for. These groups work to unify foster/adoptive parents on a state and national level. Their membership is generally large and includes agencies as well as individuals. Their primary goals are advocacy, improvements in public policy on behalf of foster/adoptive parents and children, conducting state and local conferences, recruitment and retention of foster/adoptive parents, program development, public education, and fundraising. They also provide technical support and resources to affiliated groups on community and regional levels.***

The National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) is the only national level foster parent organization. NFPA strives to support foster parents and remains a consistently strong voice on behalf of all children. Membership in the NFPA is open to anyone interested in improving the foster care system and enhancing the lives of children and families. Affiliate memberships are open to local or state foster parent associations, local or state agencies, social workers, foster parents, and all other individuals interested in foster care.

The NFPA provides an annual education conference, a quarterly newsletter, a speaker's bureau, scholarships, awards, legislative input, an Internet web site, and a variety of other activities to help and inform people who are involved in the foster care system. A major purpose of NFPA is to bring together foster parents, agencies, and professionals in a coordinated, working relationship.



For more information on an association in your community, contact the National Foster Parent Association at 1 (800) 557-5238.

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

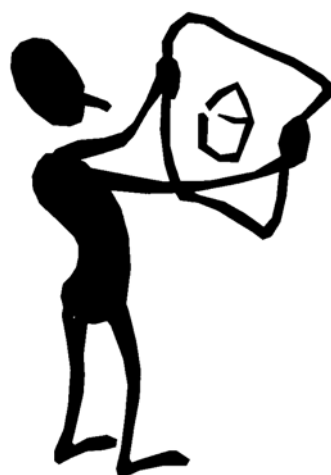
### Making a Business Plan

***Even the smallest informal community-based group may want to give some thought to the financial and resource needs of the group. Again, there is no set formula for a group. Even in the area of a business plan, it is up to your group to decide the level of structure and formality that best meets the needs and goals of the group. Many groups do well without a stated business plan. However, if you have future objectives and tasks in mind, you will find parts or all of this section helpful.***

There is a continuum of business formality for support groups. At the low end are small community-based groups who prefer to get what they need out of their scheduled meetings and that's it. On the high end would be incorporated groups that are able to legally conduct fundraising activities and events.

There are several benefits to incorporating your parent support group. Through incorporation your parent group becomes a legal entity. As a nonprofit organization, incorporation allows the group to: (1) formalize the organizational process, (2) receive grant funding, (3) gain tax-exempt status, and (4) usually protects individual group mem-

bers from liability. Although proceeding with incorporation and seeking tax-exempt status may seem like an overwhelming task, don't be discouraged. It is generally beneficial to an organization and except for the hassle of the process and required annual reports, it is usually easy.



Each state has different laws that govern incorporation. However, most are clear enough that non-lawyers can successfully manage the process and there may be assistance through local community resources. For instance, in Minnesota there is an organization called the Management Assistance Project (MAP) whose purpose is to help nonprofits. For a small fee their staff attorney will walk a person through the entire incorporation process. Also, some bar associations have a pro-bono (free) of lawyers who can help.

In developing a business structure for your group there are several processes that should take place. These tasks need to be done as quickly as possible without taking a lot of time away from more important activities.

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Key Ingredients of a Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan

1. **Identifying Accountabilities and Positions**
2. **Developing a Budget**
3. **Incorporating, including:**
  - a. **Creating By-laws**
  - b. **Creating and Articles of Incorporation**
  - c. **Nonprofit 501(c) 3 and Tax Exempt Status**
4. **Obtaining nonprofit status**
4. **Fundraising**
5. **Marketing**

**At the end of this section you will also find some additional tips for establishing a business-like operation and a list of books that can serve as resources.**

#### 1. **Identifying Accountabilities and Positions**

Identifying accountabilities and positions in the planning phase will increase the productivity of the group by sharing responsibility for projects and roles. It is extremely frustrating if group leaders constantly complain at meetings about how tired they are from all their responsibilities, including selecting a meeting location, organizing the agenda, hiring a speaker, and purchasing the snacks.

Responsibility and power should be shared. This happens by electing officials, developing subcommittees for big projects, and recruiting volunteers from the group for miscellaneous tasks.

##### **Electing Officials**

Electing officers and clearly defining the roles of the positions is a way to disperse accountability, authority, and boundaries within the group. There are a number of ways that group leaders can assign titles and tasks. Typical titles include:

**President or Chair** - This person is responsible for representing the group at community functions, presiding at meetings, serving as the group's contact person, and generally overseeing the organization.

**Vice President or Vice Chair** – This person presides in the absence of the president and may be assigned other duties as needed. For instance, in some organizations this person may schedule the speakers for the parent group meetings or plan the children's activities each month.

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan**

**1. Identifying Accountabilities and Positions (continued)**

**Secretary** – This person is responsible for taking minutes at the meetings, sending notices of upcoming meetings, and handling necessary correspondence.

**Treasurer** – This person receives income, disburses checks, handles financial records, and files required financial reports.

In addition to the above positions your group may want to include others depending on the needs of the group. For instance some groups may have a public relations person to handle advertising and recruitment or a fundraiser who focuses on raising money for the group.

**Developing Subcommittees**

In addition to identifying specific positions and roles, the group should set up a committee structure. The types of committees your group should establish are based on membership preference, as well as the purpose, size, and needs of the group. Typical committees include: Nominations; Membership, Bylaws, Public Education, Recruitment, Advocacy, Child Care, and more.

**Recruiting Volunteers**

Depending on the group's size and goals, you may not need to be formal about specific job titles. In fact, some groups find that members prefer to volunteer for a given task rather than take on an ongoing job. Groups may also establish a schedule for routine jobs. For instance, snack duty or childcare for meetings can be rotated by having individuals sign up on a calendar.

Remember when you are able to spread the responsibilities of the group you gain momentum and spark excitement among the members. This is also a means for preventing individual burnout.

**2. Develop a Budget**

A budget is helpful in identifying and planning for recurring operating expenses as well as costs related to special events. It is often beneficial to offset the expenses with revenue (money coming into the group). Remember that budgets provide estimated numbers. However, it is important to try to calculate as close as possible the expenses and revenue your group will create for the year. For instance, if you know that the cost of renting a space for your meetings is \$25.00 per month, you should multiply this expense by 12 to calculate an annual estimated cost.

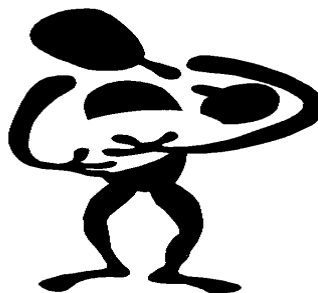
**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan**

**2. Develop a Budget (continued)**

If the group is applying for nonprofit status you will need a budget to complete the IRS forms. You will also need budget information to determine how much you will have to fundraise to accomplish your group's goals. The budget is also a way of attaching spending boundaries to group activities. Below is a sample budget:

<b>FosterParentNet Support Group Budget for 2004</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Expense</b>
Bake sale		250
Silent auction		1,000
FosterParentNet Mini Grant		2,000
Pool party for 10 families	600	
Printing for 800 newsletters	300	
Postage	250	
Snacks for meetings (\$25 per meeting x 12 meetings)	300	
Childcare expense (\$25 per meeting x 12 meetings)	300	
Speaker expense (\$100 per meeting x 12 meetings)	1,200	
Resource expense (books, tapes, computer cds)	300	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$ 3,250</b>	<b>\$3,250</b>



## **Section II: Starting a Support Group**

### **Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan**

#### **3. Incorporation**

There are several benefits to incorporating your parent support group as a nonprofit organization. Incorporation allows the group to: (1) become a legal entity (2) formalize the organizational process, (3) receive grant funding, (4) gain tax-exempt status, and (5) usually protect individual group members from liability. Although proceeding with the steps of incorporation may seem like an overwhelming task, don't be discouraged. It is generally beneficial to an organization and except for the hassle of the process and required annual reports, it is usually easy.

Each state has different laws that govern incorporation. However, most are clear enough that non-lawyers can successfully manage the process and there may be assistance through local community resources. For instance, in Minnesota there is an organization called the Management Assistance Project (MAP) whose purpose is to help nonprofits. For a small fee their staff attorney will walk a person through the entire incorporation process. Also, some bar associations have a pro-bono (free) of lawyers who can help.

##### **3a. Creating by-laws**

Organization bylaws are a formal set of rules to govern its members and regulate its affairs. When you sit down to draft your group's bylaws, you usually have substantial flexibility to fit the uniqueness of your organization. In fact, some states don't even require organizations to submit bylaws. However, for those organizations filing for 501(c) 3 nonprofit status, the bylaws must accompany the application to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) (see the exhibit section of the Companion Workbook for an example). Bylaws may include the following:

- Name, address (not a post office box) and purpose of the organization
- Membership definitions
- Meeting requirements: place, frequency, special meetings, quorum (minimum number of members required to make decisions for the group), voting, etc.
- Committees: function, power, meetings, quorum
- Fiscal management: books, documents, banking, indemnity (protection against loss, damages, injury), audits

##### **3b. Creating Articles of Incorporation**

The Articles of Incorporation reserves your group's name so that no other organization, for a limited period of time, can incorporate under that name in your state. The state will also recognize your organization as an Incorporated Nonprofit Organization (i.e., one conducting nonprofit activities for charitable, education, religious, scientific, literary or cultural purposes).

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan**

**3. Incorporation (continued)**

In order to file the appropriate forms required to apply for nonprofit incorporation, you may want to contact your local law library (located at the county court house or in a law school) and ask the law librarian to help you find the state statute which governs the incorporation process. Read it, copy it, and take it home. You can also call the general information telephone number for your state government to determine which agency handles incorporation. In most states it is the Secretary of State. Clerks in this office are usually willing to tell you exactly which forms are needed. While some states supply sample forms, some refer you to a local store that sells legal forms or to the Internet.

After completing and returning the necessary forms to the appropriate office, you may need to attach other required documents (usually the Articles of Incorporation), but the clerk will be able to tell you for certain. The clerk will also tell you if anything is missing. You will probably have to wait a few weeks for a written certificate of incorporation (see the exhibit section of the FosterParentNet Companion Workbook for an example).

**3c. Nonprofit 501(c) 3 and Tax Exempt Status**

The 501(c) 3 IRS status will allow you to legally conduct fundraising activities in your state. Without it you can't solicit money for your group. You can get the necessary forms from your local federal IRS office. At first the 501 (c) 3 form may seem overwhelming. In some states it is quite long and a bit complicated. However, don't let this stand in your way. Ask members of your parent group if they have prior experience with this form or know of someone who does. It is smart to let a lawyer review your forms before you submit them. It is common for newly established groups to complete the paperwork for the 501 (c) 3 status while they are incorporating the organization.

Many nonprofit organizations apply for tax-exempt status at the same time they apply for their 501(c) 3 forms, allowing them not to pay federal, state, or local taxes. Tax exempt status can also benefit organizations by qualifying them for grants or government funding. Application forms are available from your local federal IRS office or on the Internet (see the exhibit section of the FosterParentNet Companion Workbook for an example).

Note: Please be aware that it usually takes 4 to 6 months to go through the entire incorporation process.

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan**

**3. Incorporation (continued)**

**Books about Starting Nonprofit Organizations**

Bromberger, A.R., Hobish, R.S. and Yarvis, L., Eds. (1995). Advising Nonprofits, 4th ed. New York, NY: Council of New York Law Associates.

Blazek, J. (1999). Tax Planning and Compliance for Tax-Exempt Organizations: Forms, Checklists, Procedures, 3rd ed. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Connors, Tracy D., Ed. (1997). The Nonprofit Handbook: Management. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Hopkins, B.R. (1993). A Legal Guide to Starting and Managing a Nonprofit Organization, 2nd Ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Hummel, J.M. (1996). Starting and Running a Nonprofit Organization, 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kirschten, B.L.(1998). Nonprofit Corporation Forms Handbook. Eagan, MN: West Group.

Mancuso, A. (1997). How to Form a Nonprofit Corporation in all 50 States, 4th ed. Berkeley, CA: Nolo Pr.

Nicholas, T. (1993). The Complete Guide to Nonprofit Corporations. Chicago, IL: Enterprise-Dearborn Publishing Group.

Olenick, A.J. & Olenick, P.R. (1991). A Nonprofit Organization Operating Manual: Planning for Survival and Growth. New York: The Foundation Center.

Zeitlin, K.A. & Dorn, S.A. (1996). The Nonprofit Board's Guide to Bylaws: Creating a Framework for Effective Governance. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Nonprofit Boards.

For more books and articles on starting a nonprofit organization, try searching on the Foundation Center [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org) web site.

**4. Fundraising**

Creating revenue is a common challenge faced by most parent groups. In order to raise money, it is important to figure out what you will need money for. It is generally a good idea to write a case statement, a short statement making the "case" for why your group needs funding. A case statement will help you communicate your needs to potential funders and help you identify your financial goals.

Funding comes from five major sources: individuals, organizations, businesses, foundations, and events. There are various strategies for soliciting donations from these different sources, some of which are described below.

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan

#### 4. Fundraising (continued)

##### Individual

- **Membership Dues** – Membership dues are an excellent way to not only improve your finances but to build commitment.
- **Mail Appeals** – Donation request letters should provide a brief history of the group, the mission, accomplishments, and needs. Create a mailing list (including local therapists, school counselors, pediatricians, agencies, social workers, and religious leaders). Even if people do not donate, you have made them aware of what your organization is doing and next time they may give. It is nice to follow up on the letters with phone calls.
- **Members' Contacts** – Always remember to look to the members of your foster/adoptive parent support group to find financial support. Ask members to submit names of people they think might donate. Often this is family, friends, and acquaintances with similar interests.
- **Face to Face Solicitations** – Often people who might not give after receiving a mail solicitation will give when asked personally. Face-to-face solicitations give people the chance to ask questions and often make the issue seem more real and important to donors.
- **Information Sharing Events** – Organizing small events to inform individuals about your group's work can also encourage donations. Several families in your neighborhood could meet for a meal to learn about the purpose of your foster/adoptive parent support group.

Remember, people generally give for one of four reasons. They were asked ...

1. for the right reason (they believe in the mission of your group).
2. by the right person (there is a personal connection)
3. at the right time (they have enough money or realize how much your group needs the money)
4. in the right way (the explanation of the group's needs touched them and encouraged them to give)

##### Organizations

**Solicitations** – Donors include service clubs like the Lions, VFW, Elks, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus and religious organizations. Local community leaders who have been touched by foster care/adoption are also likely donors. Some service organizations will handle fundraising events while others will contribute cash.

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan

#### 4. Fundraising (continued)

##### Businesses

- **In-Kind Donations** – Often businesses are willing to provide financial support through in-kind donations, such as offering a product or service rather than money. If you are planning an event, ask local businesses to donate the space, food, childcare, and other supplies needed.
- **Sponsorship** – Sponsoring an event can provide businesses with a way to support your group and promote their name in the community. When businesses sponsor an event it is an opportunity to begin a relationship with them that may eventually lead to more financial support.
- **Gifts** – Larger companies may have an official foundation or a committee that makes small gifts to nonprofits. Contact the public relations department to find out more. Additionally, many companies participate in the United Way employee campaign. The United Way has a list of member agencies to which companies can donate. Contact the United Way to find out how to apply to become a member agency.

##### Foundations

Note: Foundations only support 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations

- **Grants** – Foundations give money to nonprofit organizations in the form of grants. Grants are given with the expectation that the organization will use the money for a specified purpose. For instance, an organization may apply for a grant from a foundation that supports education because they want to begin a tutoring program. If the organization receives the grant, they are required to use the money to begin the tutoring program, not for any other purpose. In order to obtain grants, organizations must follow the grant seeking process described on the following page:

##### Grant Seeking

- Create a file containing relevant information about your group or the issues surrounding the children you care for. This will be a resource that is ready to use when you begin writing your grant proposal. These materials can help you make your case to funders and demonstrate the importance of your group.
- Do thorough research to identify and learn about funding organizations that meet your needs and provide grants in your area. One way to start learning about foundations is to read their annual reports. It is critical that you find out the foundations' areas of interest (i.e. environment vs. education), the geographic area/s they serve, and their guidelines and restrictions for grants.

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan

#### 4. Fundraising (continued)

- Talk with representatives from the foundations that seem like a good fit. Whenever possible, you should talk to the people involved in making funding decisions.
- This might be the funding officer or a director of public relations or community affairs. The position title is dependent on the type of organization. These conversations should help you decide which funders are worth pursuing.
- Select one or more funders to target.
- Review the proposal submission guidelines for each grant you plan to submit. Organize the proposal according to the submission guidelines. If there are no guidelines identified, consider addressing the following categories in your proposal: purpose, need, approach/procedures, evaluation, qualifications, budget.
- Finally, remember that many foundations require that you report on the work you do with the money they provide. Make sure to keep track of how their money is spent and what it is helping your organization to accomplish. Also make sure to spend the money as you initially told the funder you would.

#### Events

Fundraising events often require more time and effort than a small group can manage and end up not being time or cost effective. However, they do have a positive publicity and community awareness component. If you are thinking of organizing an event, consider carefully the time, money, and work that will be necessary to make it happen. One tip for successful event planning is getting as many donated or reduced-priced materials and resources as possible. If you figure out that an event is workable for your group, here are suggestions of some fun ones:

- Tour of homes
- Candy sales
- Pancake breakfasts
- Yard sales
- Greeting card sales
- Bake sales
- Luncheons
- Car washes
- Craft sales
- Dances
- Donation jars
- Talent shows
- Community concerts
- Raffles
- Silent Auctions
- Conferences/
- Workshops

Note: Check with your city and county for regulations for nonprofit organizations.

## Section II: Starting a Support Group

### Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group Business Plan

#### 4. Fundraising (continued)

##### Finding Funding On-line

There is a wealth of information available on how to identify and pursue funding sources for all kinds of organizations. Here are some Internet resources that may be of use:

- **Council on Foundations – [www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org)**  
Membership organization of grantmaking foundations and giving programs. Offers many resources for grant seekers.
- **State Councils on Foundations**  
Look for a council on foundations in your state. It should have a list of the foundations in your state.
- **Grantsmanship Center – [www.tgci.com](http://www.tgci.com)**  
Offers many resources, including grant seeking and proposal writing training and low-cost publications to nonprofits.
- **Chronicle of Philanthropy – <http://philanthropy.com>**  
Publishes a bi-monthly newsletter focused on funding for nonprofits.
- **The Foundation Center – [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)**  
Offers a searchable database of grants, posts RFPs (request for proposal), and provides other resources for grantseekers, such as proposal writing guides.

#### 5. Marketing

Publicity is a tool that can be used by most groups still in the developmental stages as well as by established groups. Groups use publicity to inform and influence the public in order to: recruit new members, inspire donations, publicize services, create or change their public image.

The best results with publicity are achieved when more than one technique is used and the techniques support each other. For instance, a speaker at a special event should be publicized through news releases and promoted in advance through posters and flyers. The most successful strategy is to identify the various communities to be reached and to choose one or more appropriate and effective technique/s for getting your message across to those people.

Always remember when putting together a news release, to include all of the essential information. Write the release from the reader's perspective. The information should be of interest to the reader. Make sure that there is a reason for the reader to think your group is worth caring about.

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**Other Tips on Establishing a “Business-like” Operation**

- Determine a program plan with goals, assignments, and deadlines (it can be used as the narrative for 501(c) 3 application)
- Develop personnel policies
- Establish a record and bookkeeping system
- Register as a charity in your state
- File for a state employer identification number
- Check with local municipalities to see if a license is needed to solicit funds
- Obtain a bulk mail permit from the post office

## **SECTION - III: Planning a Meeting**

**The Importance of Planning**

**Choosing a Time and Location**

**Making an Agenda**

**Creating Ground Rules**

**Choosing Guest Speakers**

**Evaluating Meetings**

**More Tips**



**Section III: Planning a Meeting**

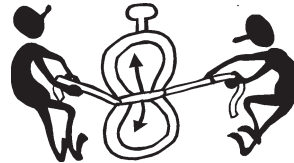
**The Importance of Planning**



***In order to run a successful meeting, it is critical that you plan in advance. Many of the things that foster parents say they do not like about support group meetings (look at the list at the end of this section on page 68) can be avoided through proper planning.***

Steps in planning a successful meeting include:

1. Choosing a time and location

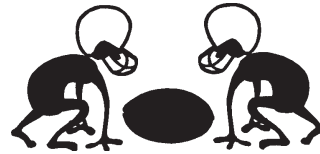


2. Providing childcare



3. Making an agenda

4. Creating ground rules



5. Choosing a speaker

6. Evaluating meetings



This section will provide suggestions for all these important areas of planning. The exercise on the following page reinforces the importance of planning.

**Section III: Planning a Meeting**



**Exercise 6**

**Off the Top of Your Head:  
The Importance of Planning!**

**Objective:** Demonstrate the importance of planning through a fun activity and identify what group leaders will need to plan for in order to run successful support group meetings.

**Equipment:** Large index cards, pencils or pens, flip chart (or large visible board)

**Directions:**

1. Distribute an index card and writing utensil to each person.
2. Tell everyone to place their index cards on top of their heads and draw a detailed picture of a house on it (they can include doors, windows, sidewalk, trees, sun, clouds).
3. Now have everyone take their cards off their heads and look at them. Most people will be looking at very funny looking drawings! Tell the group that this activity is a reminder to never do anything you want to turn out well off the top of your head.
4. Now have the group brainstorm the kinds of things they will need to plan for in order to lead successful foster/adoptive parent support group meetings. List their suggestions on the flip chart and if possible send everyone home with a copy of this list as a reminder.

### Section III: Planning a Meeting

## Choosing a Time and Location

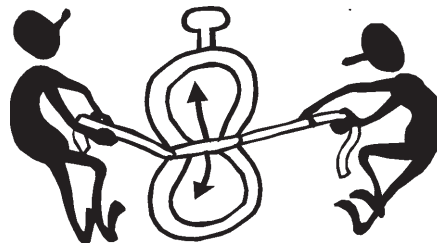
*Holding your meetings during a weekday evening will probably allow the largest attendance, since many members work in the middle of the day. During your first meeting it is a good idea to ask participants what day and time are best for future meetings. Scheduling can remain a standing agenda item, allowing you to gather feedback from the members on an ongoing basis.*

Sometimes the space can make or break a meeting. Below are attributes of a good meeting space identified by Miller (1998).

- **Privacy.** Every support group needs a certain amount of seclusion.
- **Quietness.** When a group of people is trying to converse on an intimate level, it's distracting and frustrating to have to compete with surrounding noise.
- **Good friendly lighting.** People need to see one another well. Incandescent lighting is warmer more pleasing to the eye than fluorescent lighting, which tends to cast an unnatural hue and to flicker.
- **Adequate ventilation.** People don't like to stay long periods in rooms that feel stuffy and stale.

- **Comfortable temperature.** People prefer not to be too warm or too cold. Either extreme can get in the way of group progress.
- **Comfortable seating.** The best kind of seating is light enough to be moved around with ease yet sturdy and functional for people of all shapes and sizes. Seating doesn't have to be luxurious but those who attend shouldn't be constantly squirming, trying to find the right position.
- **Adequate size.** People don't like to feel cramped, especially among people they don't know well. At the same time, a room that is much too large can feel uncomfortable too, and that may inhibit conversation.
- **Inviting aesthetics.** The overall look and feel of a room is worth taking into account. The meeting room doesn't have to look like it came from "House Beautiful," however it will help if it's attractive, clean, and uncluttered.

The location should be centralized and accessible to everyone. It is important to consider potential members who may live in outlying areas or who may have disabilities. Think carefully about a setting that will encourage participation from a diverse range of families.



### Section III: Planning a Meeting

## Providing Childcare

***Remember that childcare for members during the meetings is very important. Brainstorming in this area might give you some really creative ideas for managing this issue.***

- Rotate childcare among group members
- Solicit support from school, social service, or religious organizations
- Ask a business to provide childcare as an in-kind donation



Below are some suggestions:

- Recruit volunteers
- Provide support groups and age appropriate activities for children during meetings

## Making an Agenda

***An agenda is a road map for the group and the facilitator to follow during the course of the meeting. Its purpose is to make the best use of the time that parents have together.***

- Include allotted time and the name of the person responsible for each agenda item
- Make sure the beginning and ending times for each item and the meeting are listed and adhered to
- Include the date, time, and location for the next scheduled meeting if known

Some groups may choose to use an open agenda format where the members identify the agenda items at the beginning of the meeting.

The next three pages include a sample agenda, a worksheet to help create an agenda, and some tips of things to avoid when making an agenda.

Suggestions for creating an agenda include:

- Make a list of announcements and other things that need to be addressed at the meeting
- Be sure to allow ample time for questions, discussion and formulation of action plans

**Section III: Planning a Meeting**

**Sample Meeting Agenda  
Foster Parent Support Group  
March 16, 2004**

**The meeting is scheduled to  
begin at 6:00 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m.**

- I) Socializing ..... 6:00-6:30
- II) Share and Support (Millie, facilitator) ..... 6:30-7:15
- III) Speaker (Dr. Jackson) from Green Clinic ..... 7:15-7:45  
Topic: Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- IV) Event updates (Jerome) ..... 7:45-8:00
- V) Action Items ..... 8:00-8:20
- V) Feedback and adjourn ..... 8:20-8:30

The next meeting will be held at:

St. John's  
2458 Elmwood  
Minneapolis, MN 55114

Date:  
Tuesday, March 30, 2004

Time:  
6:00 – 8:30

**Contact Sheryl Morgan  
if you need more information  
(651) 469-3235**

**Section III: Planning a Meeting**

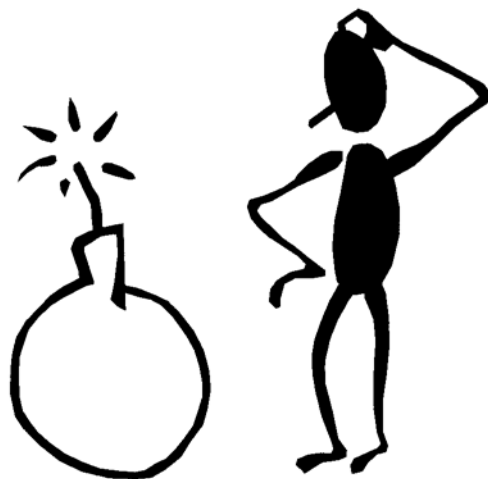
<b>Meeting Agenda Worksheet</b>			
Name of Group _____			
Date _____ Time - Start _____ End _____			
Location _____			
Pre-Meeting Preparation (Materials to bring, people to call, things to prepare)			
_____			
_____			
<b>TIME</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PERSON RESPONSIBLE</b>	<b>MAIN OBJECTIVE</b> (What the group should know, discuss or create as a result of this agenda item)

(University of Minnesota, Vol 3, 1999)

**Section III: Planning a Meeting**

**Ways to Create a Bad Agenda**

- Assume that everybody will know what you are trying to accomplish at the meeting. “Therefore I don’t have to put the agenda in writing.”
- Plan to spend the first half of the meeting prioritizing what to do in the second half of the meeting.
- If you have an agenda of difficult items, improve efficiency by skipping breaks to allow for more discussion time.
- When the most important discussion is likely to be emotionally charged, save it for last. “Hey, the group will be able to deal with it then.”
- Since everyone wants to leave on time, assume that no one will raise a topic that’s not on the agenda.
- Knowing that the agenda is too packed, assume that the meeting will run overtime. However, don’t share this with the members.
- Expect that every meeting will follow the timeline right down to the minute and start and end exactly on time.
- Decide that planning an agenda is a waste of time. “Hey, things never go the way I want them to.”



### Section III: Planning a Meeting

## Creating Ground Rules

*Ground rules are standards for behavior that govern how people interact within a group. They can be developed to ensure agreement about issues like respectful interactions, the use of time, turn taking, decision-making, and ways of managing conflict. They are important because they create guidelines to help all members feel safe. Flexibility in this area is important to allow for changes as the group grows. On the next few pages are some exercises to help your group develop ground rules.*

The ground rules should be kept to a minimum, be written down, and most importantly, be agreed upon by the entire group. This means that once a list of ground rules has been created by the group, the facilitator should ask each person to show some sign of agreement with the rules or voice their disagreements.

**Below is a sample of standard ground rules:**

- **Speak for yourself**  
Use “I” statements—“I feel frustrated” rather than “You always...”
- **Share air time**  
No one person should dominate the discussion  
Everyone also has the right to listen instead of talking
- **Listen to understand**  
Listen to what others say fully  
Don’t interrupt or immediately think of your response
- **Be respectful**  
Of others’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences  
Debate, don’t attack or criticize
- **Confidentiality**  
Confidentiality is complex and important. Please read page 60.
- **Give support, not advice**  
Only give advice when it is asked for
- **Agree to disagree**  
Sometimes people are not going to come to the same conclusions in which case they can agree to disagree rather than arguing
- **There are no wrong or right answers**  
Be open to learning from others’ views
- **Be on time for meetings and participate fully**

**Section III: Planning a Meeting**

**More about Confidentiality**

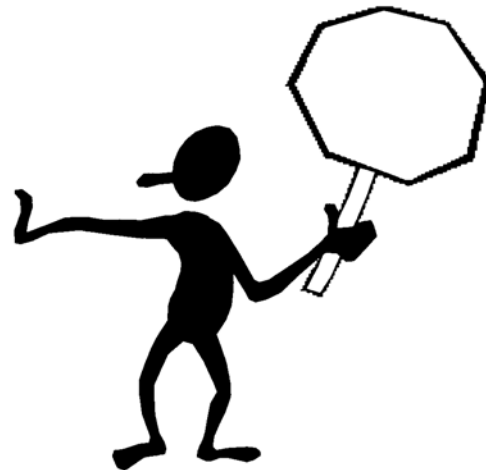


***Establishing confidentiality is always an important step to make groups feel safe. Confidentiality is not intended to prevent people from talking openly or sharing their experiences and feelings. It is designed to make sure that what is shared remains within the group and that individuals' identities are protected.***

Generally, confidentiality means that group participants agree that after meetings are over they can tell other people what they have said or the ideas that were discussed, but they will not talk about what other people said or did. Therefore it is aimed at protecting the identity of the people in the group.

In the case of foster parent support groups, it is also necessary to protect the identity of the foster children and their biological families. Therefore, in your group it will be important to add that confidentiality means not using names or other information that can make it possible to identify the children or families being discussed.

Another element that complicates the matter of confidentiality in foster/adoptive parent support groups is mandated reporting. All foster/adoptive parents and social workers are mandated reporters of child abuse or neglect. That means that anyone present at a



support group meeting is mandated to report anything they hear that makes them concerned for the safety of a foster or birth child. In such an instance, breaking confidentiality would be allowed, and in fact, required by law. If you are unsure of the mandated reporting process in your state, ask a social worker from your agency, check with the department of human services, or contact the police.

**Section III: Planning a Meeting**



**Exercise 7**

**Group Commandments:  
Our Philosophies about Ground Rules**

**Objective:** To think about one's beliefs about proper group behavior and work toward creating ground rules for the group.

**Equipment:** paper, pens or pencils

**Directions:**

- Say to the group: "You should not kill" is a commandment for human beings. There are also "shoulds" and "should nots" for members of groups like ours. Take five minutes to write five commandments that you think a member of any group should follow.
- Ask everyone to read their list aloud. Tell the group that they should not respond at this point, but simply listen. Once they are done, tell each member to re-read his or her own list silently.
- Now open up a discussion, using questions such as:  
How closely do you follow your own commandments?  
Which commandments seemed idealistic? Why?  
Which commandments seemed realistic? Why?  
Which commandments would you be willing to follow or not?  
If you were to re-write your list now, how would you change it?
- You can now have the group try to generate one list of group commandments as ground rules. Or, you can stop the exercise at this point and use a different exercise (like the one on the next page) later to actually create ground rules.

(Exercise adapted from Pfeiffer's 1989 Encyclopedia of Group Activities, pp.119-120)

**Section III: Planning a Meeting**



**Exercise 8**

**Developing Ground Rules**

**Objective:** Generate a list of ground rules for our group

**Equipment:** Post-it notes, pens or pencils, flip chart (or large visible board), and markers

**Directions:**

1. Ask the group to think of ground rules for the group that will help them to feel safe and supported, achieve their goals, and enjoy their time together. Tell the group to write each one of their ideas on a post-it.
2. Now go around and have the participants share their ideas and attach their post-its to the wall.
3. Once all the post-its are on the wall, ask the group to work together to categorize them.
4. After all the post-its have been placed in a category, tell the group to think of a summary description to place above each category (i.e. if there are cards that say “Don’t talk too much,” “Everyone deserves a chance to speak,” and “All people participate,” the description above that category could read “Share air time”).
5. Ask the group to discuss whether they are comfortable using the summary descriptions above the categories as their ground rules. Leave time for discussion as there may be some disagreement at this point.
6. Once there is consensus on the ground rules have the group decide how they will monitor and reinforce them.

(Exercise adapted from Facilitation Resources Volume 4: Managing Group Interaction, p. 4.16 by the University of Minnesota, 1999)

### Section III: Planning a Meeting

## Choosing Guest Speakers



***When choosing a guest speaker, consider an agency or community representative with expertise in a topic of interest to the group. However, remember to make sure that you always leave enough time for parents to talk and share their own experiences. The primary purpose of your group is support and parents generally do not want to be lectured to or have the sessions be too structured. One of the most powerful aspects of parent support groups is sharing stories.***

When you do choose to include outside educators or speakers, always ask your group what they are interested in. Also refer to this list of popular topics generated by foster parents participating in FosterParentNet funded support groups.

#### **Support Group Topics**

- Adolescents
- Adoption
- Allegations
- Biological Children
- Child Development
- Children with Special Needs
- Dealing with Dishonesty from Foster Children
- Discipline
- Foster/adoptive parent Recruitment
- Grief and Loss
- Helping Foster Children Fit In
- Laws and Regulations
- Medicaid
- Medication
- Multiple Placements
- Nurturing Cultural Identity
- Reactive Attachment Disorder
- Resources and Training
- Reunification
- School
- Sexual Abuse
- Specialized Training (self mutilization, anorexia, etc.)
- Substance Use and Abuse
- Transracial Foster Parenting and Adoption
- Working with Biological Families
- Working with Social Workers

## Section III: Planning a Meeting

### Evaluating Meetings

#### Why is evaluation important?

Evaluation helps identify areas of meetings that are working, those that need improvement, and areas that should be discontinued. Evaluation is also a way to see if meetings are addressing the intended goals of the group. For instance, if one of the goals of the group is to provide education for the membership and they indicate frequently on the evaluation that they aren't learning anything in the meetings, the facilitator should try to improve the education component of meetings.

#### How can I evaluate meetings?

The best way to evaluate your meetings is to get the participants' perspectives. Handing out a quick survey for participants to complete BEFORE leaving can be an effective way to evaluate your meeting. Below are some questions you may want to include on a meeting survey. You also may want to keep track of a few things on your own, such as how many new and old members attend your meetings or the number of people who arrive late.

#### Possible Survey Questions

- End Result: How well did we achieve what we needed to?
- Use of Time: How well did we use our time?
- Participation: How well did we do at involving everyone equally?
- Decision Making: How well did we make decisions? (Consider both the process used and the end result)
- Next Steps: How clear and doable are any next steps we set for our group?
- Organization: How well organized was the meeting?

- Facilitation: How well run was the meeting?
- Interest: How well did the meeting keep your interest?
- Usefulness: How useful was the meeting for you? (For instance, did it help educate you or provide you with support or encouragement?)

#### What do I do after I evaluate?



It is not enough simply to ask people what they think of the support group meetings. You must look at their responses and try to find patterns that suggest how to make the meetings better. Did a lot of people say the meeting was interesting but unorganized? Maybe you can improve or stick to your agendas. Or did many members say you reached your goals but participation was weak? In that case, try to find different activities or facilitation methods that will include more members as you accomplish your goals. Always listen to the participants' opinions—evaluation is your opportunity to learn and improve as a facilitator!

On the next page is a sample meeting evaluation used by the Hennepin County FosterParentNet support group.

**Section III: Planning a Meeting**



**FosterParentNet Support Group Survey**

**Hennepin County Foster Care  
Association Project**

This form is to be completed by all foster parent participants of the Hennepin County Foster Care Association Support Groups and other FosterParentNet grant related activities.

Date of session or event \_\_\_\_\_

Topic \_\_\_\_\_

1. This session has been of value to me in the following ways:

Please circle all that apply

- |                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| Recreationally | Emotionally |
| Educationally  | Of No Value |

2. Do you plan to attend another support group meeting?

Yes or No

Why?

3. What did you enjoy most about this session or event?

4. What did you like least about this session or event?

5. What are issues or topics that you would like to see addressed in future sessions?

6. How would you rate this session? \_\_\_\_\_

4=excellent

3=good

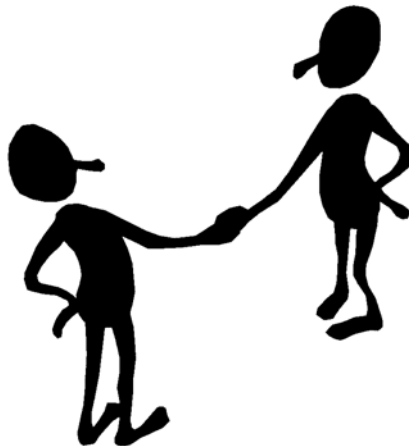
2=fair

1=poor

### Section III: Planning a Meeting

## Tips for a Smooth Meeting

- **Welcome guests** – Greet and welcome people as they arrive. Make sure every one feels welcome to refreshments and knows where the bathroom is located.
- **Sign-in** – A sign-in sheet can be passed around to serve as a record of attendance at the meeting.
- **Check-in and introduction of new members** – During the check-in, members might be asked to say their names for the benefit of new members and answer an icebreaker question. For instance, each member might be asked to describe an interaction with a member of their family that caused them to smile this week.
- **Breaks and food** – When planning your meetings don't forget the importance of providing well-spaced breaks and food. Breaks let people stretch their legs, use the restroom, make necessary phone calls, and return to the group more focused. Food is an excellent icebreaker and it has a way of establishing a friendly and warm atmosphere. Your group can decide how casual or elaborate the food should be.
- **Closing discussion** – Provides a brief opportunity for participants to share their feelings or concerns in relation to the meeting. This might also be the question and answer session after a speaker has presented.
- **Setting the date of the next meeting** – Before the meeting ends be sure to discuss the date, time, and location of the next meeting.



**Section III: Planning a Meeting**

**Pearls of Wisdom from the  
Tennessee Valley Foster Parent Association**

- Stay up to date on new policies and procedures affecting foster care issues.
- Don't become just a fundraising group or coffee club.
- Don't let your group become a gripe forum. Encourage the group to offer support and share suggestions.
- Cooperate with public and private agencies, but don't sacrifice your goals for the sake of cooperation.
- Remember the purpose for your group.
- Share the glory. Involve all of the members, not just a few.
- Communicate with your members on a regular basis. Keep them informed through monthly newsletters and reports.
- Keep your meetings as informal as possible. Speakers are good, but not if they lecture. It works best if they talk, share, and answer questions.
- Reserve time during your meetings for your members to share their problems and joys.

**Note: Groups are Not for Everyone**

Regardless of how warm and friendly your group may be, remember support groups are not for everyone. Some people are not at a place in their lives where they are ready to meet with a group around personal issues. They may not feel comfortable with the support group idea and never will be. Support groups can always be suggested and offered but they are not prescribed across the board. "What works for one will not work for another." (Miller, 1998)

### Section III: Planning a Meeting

## Support Group Members' Views on Meetings



*Data was collected on what FosterParentNet support group members liked and did not like about their group meetings. Hopefully these lists can help your group develop interesting and successful meetings. You will notice that the dislikes are often small issues that can easily be fixed through proper planning.*

#### LIKES

- Education
- Emotional support
- Feeling validated
- Food
- Fun
- Information on starting support groups
- Information on foster parenting
- Opportunity to share thoughts and feelings
- Opportunity to exchange ideas
- Realizing we are important

#### DISLIKES

- Boring
- Driving in bad weather
- Finding childcare
- Hard to hear
- No food or breaks
- One person talking a lot
- Schedule
- Speaker unskilled
- Temperature
- Topic irrelevant
- Unorganized

### Other Barriers to Support Group Participation

- Foster/adoptive parent suspicion of outsiders and strong value of self reliance
- Inconvenient meeting locations
- Weather conditions which make travel difficult
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of child care
- Inconvenient time
- Unskilled facilitator
- Unclear group purpose
- Irrelevant topic

## **SECTION - IV: Facilitation**

**The Facilitator's Role**

**Basic Facilitation Skills**

**Encouraging Participation**

**Dealing with Conflict**

**Improving Group Communication**

**Icebreakers**

**Exercises**



***Effective facilitating!***

## Section IV: Facilitation

### The Facilitator's Role



***The role of the facilitator is to be neutral and guide the group toward meeting their goals without taking power away from the group. The facilitator is not the same as the group leader. A facilitator guides the group by managing the process but leaving the content to the participants. Therefore, it is critical that facilitators understand the difference between process and content as well as the difference between leaders and facilitators.***

#### **Process vs. Content**

The simple way of understanding the difference between process and content is that process is “how” and content is “what.”

The process includes the ground rules and climate that are established, the procedures used throughout the discussion, and the

group dynamics and style of interaction among the members. Often the process is harder to identify than the content. Nevertheless, it is crucial to the functioning of the group.

The content is what is recorded on the agenda and said during the meeting. Content includes topics of conversation, problems solved, decisions made, and the goals set and accomplished. The agenda serves as a content road map. Remember, the group is responsible for the content area.

#### **Leaders vs. Facilitators**

Two important roles for any successful group are leader and facilitator. Leaders organize the group or take responsibility for the life of the group. They are also actively involved in the group's decision-making process. Facilitators, on the other hand, do not participate in decision making, but remain neutral and help the group reach its goals. Therefore, it is impossible for someone to be the leader and facilitator at the same time.

It is recommended that the role of the facilitator be rotated among the membership. This is so that all members can experience the benefits and challenges of being a support group facilitator. When group members are facilitating a group it is important that they emphasize their position of neutrality to the group.

Here are some specifics to help you understand the role of the facilitator. The text in italics are examples of things facilitators might say included in the book *The Art of Facilitation* (Hunter, Bailey, & Taylor, 1995).

## Section IV: Facilitation

### Facilitators should be able to:

- Plan for meetings (including making an agenda), but always stay flexible

*"It's time to get started. We will finish at 7:30."*

*"Everyone seems to want more time for this item, so we will continue the conversation."*
- Welcome all participants to meetings and create a positive, trusting environment

*"Let's discuss the ground rules and see if anyone has some they would like."*

*"What are your hopes and fears regarding this group?"*
- Clarify the purpose of the meeting and group

*"Where do you hope to be in three years?"*

*"What are the steps that will lead us toward this goal?"*
- Listen and watch carefully in order to understand all participants' ideas and needs

*"Is anything going on for you Corey?"*

*"You have become very quiet."*
- Keep discussions on track and end meetings with clear next steps

*"Let's put this new issue on the agenda for later."*

*"What steps can be taken to move in the right direction?"*
- Ensure all viewpoints are heard and foster cooperation among members

*"James, you've had time to state your view. Let's hear from someone else."*

*"How do these issues fit together?"*
- Manage conflict

*"Please don't interrupt when Keisha is speaking."*

*"This sounds very emotional. What do people think about it?"*
- Use consensus to help the group make decisions that include all opinions

*"We don't have an agreement. I'll write down the different perspectives on the board."*

*"Please say 'yes' if you agree, 'no' if you don't."*
- Be impartial and treat all participants equally

*"Let's go around and give everyone a turn to speak."*



## Section IV: Facilitation

### Qualities of an Effective Facilitator

- **Optimism** - Effective facilitators do not allow diverse reactions from the group to throw them off. Instead they focus on what can be achieved and draw the best from participants.
- **Openness** – It is critical that facilitators are open to all participants' experiences, ideas, and feelings.
- **Honesty and Trust** – The facilitator should model these traits for the group. If a facilitator doesn't have the answer to a question it is best to say so and ask for suggestions from the group. The facilitator needs to be honest and trust that the group has the skills to solve problems.
- **Knowledge** – Facilitators should listen carefully and get to know the participants so that they can understand their needs. Facilitators also should gather information about topics that are important to the group and continue learning about the skills of facilitation.
- **Flexibility** - Successful facilitators have an agenda for all meetings but are also willing to deviate from that agenda if it is clear that the group needs to do so.
- **Understanding** – Facilitators understand that all group members experience pressures in other parts of their lives that may affect their ability to be present and positive during support group time. Facilitators also understand how to make the support group a safe place and help members get centered for meetings.

One icebreaker activity that can help with this is called distraction banishment. As participants enter the room, ask them to write down at least three things that are on their mind from their home, personal, or work life that may distract them during the meeting. Make sure they realize this list should not include stresses related to foster parenting—after all, that's what you're here to talk about! Then ask them to place this list in an envelope, seal it, write their name on it, and place it in a box outside the room (to be picked up at the end of the meeting). Remind them that you want this time to be useful for everyone and outside distractions will take away from their participation and enjoyment.

**Section IV: Facilitation**

**Qualities of an Effective Facilitator  
(continued)**

- **Alertness** – Great facilitators pay attention to group dynamics and notice what is going on at all times. Facilitators must also be aware of their own feelings and biases and make sure that they do not affect the group.
- **Firmness** – The role of the facilitator is an active and not a passive role. It takes a great deal of assertiveness to keep people on track and manage conflict.
- **Unobtrusiveness** – The facilitator does as little talking as possible. Generally they say only enough to give instructions, stop arguments, keep things on track, and summarize the meeting.
- **Energy** – A centered facilitator brings his or her own energy to the group experience. Support group members who participated in a focus group with Scheunemann (2001) said that tired facilitators were barriers to support group participation. They indicated that a tired facilitator meant a boring and frustrating meeting.

(Some of the above characteristics were taken from Bens, *Facilitating with Ease*, 2000, p.31)

Don't get discouraged if you don't possess all of the facilitation skills listed. As with leadership skills, these skills can be learned



**Section IV: Facilitation**

**Managing Group Communication Styles**

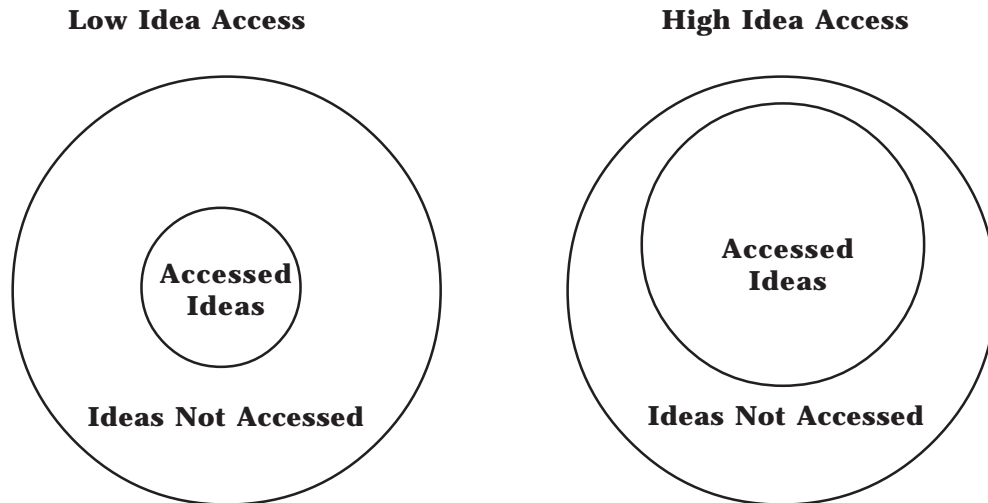


Diagram 4.1

The above diagram illustrates the range of ideas available to groups based on skills practiced by the facilitator.

**Section IV: Facilitation**

**Basic Facilitation Skills**

*There are many skills that make someone an effective facilitator. They all can be learned and will improve with practice. Facilitation skills help group members feel like what they are contributing to the group is important and understood. Attending, paraphrasing, questioning, and summarizing are common tools used in facilitating support groups (Kaner et al., 1996, Bens, 2000). They are used to ensure clarity in communication within the group and to make the group process as successful as possible. They also can be used to encourage participation or deal with conflict, however specific skills will also be presented for those situations.*

**Attending:** In order to meet needs of the individuals and the group, the facilitator pays careful attention to group members' body language, behaviors, and words. The facilitator also gives verbal cues to the audience that they are listening and focused on the group through eye contact, body language, and body positioning. Attending helps all participants feel included and like their needs are being met.

**Paraphrasing:** The facilitator repeats back what they heard to be the main idea of what a group member said and asks for clarification ("I heard you say..., is that right?"). This tool helps group members feel heard and understood, gives them the opportunity to clarify what they meant if they were misunderstood, and can help the conversation keep moving.

**Clarifying/Questioning:** When further information is needed from a speaker in the group, the facilitator may question the individual for clarification and to gain insights on feelings. This technique helps maintain clarity for the facilitator as well as the group members.

**Summarizing:** This tool can be thought of as paraphrasing numerous thoughts of an individual or a group. Summarizing allows the facilitator to highlight important aspects of a discussion in order to make a decision or come to a conclusion. It can also be used to identify tasks and action steps for the next meeting or review previous meetings. Finally, summarizing can make connections between different people's ideas or help provide focus when someone speaks for a long time.

**Tip:** Continual paraphrasing, questioning, and summarizing during an open discussion can become tiresome and frustrating for the group. It slows down the pace and can eliminate spontaneity. These tools are usually used to help speakers who are having difficulty expressing themselves. (Kaner et al., 1996, p.60)

**Tip:** Be yourself with your gestures and tone of voice; don't be wooden or phony. Remember a key purpose of building open communication is trust.

**Section IV: Facilitation**

**Encouraging Participation**

*Some people are careful thinkers and prefer to process things internally before sharing new ideas or opinions with the group. Some of these are the same folks who, on the way home from the meeting, think to themselves “I wish I would have said what I am thinking right now during the meeting.” They may need a little more time to think or encouragement to share their thoughts than others. Below are some facilitation tools that Kaner et al. (1996, p.64) suggest using with less talkative members. On the next page are activities that may be helpful for increasing participation.*

opinions in the group?” or “Does anyone have a reaction to what Erin just said?”

**Drawing-out:** The facilitator asks the speaker to say more. The purpose of this tool is to invite the speaker to continue talking and verbally develop a line of thought.

**Rewarding:** The facilitator uses verbal and nonverbal positive reinforcement to encourage quiet members when they speak. This can also be used to signal to the group when they are sticking to the agenda or meeting their goals.

**Tip:** The facilitator should be careful not to always draw-out, focus on, and reward the people with the most promising ideas. Group members may begin to feel underappreciated or suspect that the facilitator has a hidden agenda.

**Tip:** If you and your group can tolerate silence between responses, there is a greater chance that more introverted, shy people will join the conversation. Try to remind the group to slow things down a little and give everyone a chance to join the discussion

**Encouraging:** Asking “Who else wants to say something?” or “Can we hear from someone who hasn’t spoken?” can provide enough encouragement to bring new voices into the conversation. It can also serve as a reminder to more talkative members that they can also take a turn listening.

**Balancing/Calling for Responses:** This technique is similar to encouraging, but is aimed at making sure all viewpoints are expressed. The facilitator might say “Does everyone see it that way or are there other



**Section IV: Facilitation**



**High Participation Exercises**

In addition to facilitation skills that encourage participation, there are many activities that are designed to ensure the participation of all group members. Most people will enjoy these activities because they add variety to meetings, give them a chance to share their ideas, and help them get to know other group members.

**Exercise 9 - Discussion Dyads/Triads**

Pose a question to the entire group and ask everyone to find a partner or two with whom they can discuss the topic for a few minutes. The small groups can report back to the whole at the end.

**Exercise 10 - Tossed Salad**

Place a bowl (or other container) in the middle of the room. Give each person a slip of paper to write down one good idea they have. When everyone is done writing, place the slips in the bowl and “toss the salad.” Then each person removes one slip of paper from the bowl and reads it aloud to the group. Now discuss the most promising ideas as a group.

**Section IV: Facilitation**



**High Participation Exercises**  
**Exercise 11 - Issues and Answers**

This activity is great if the group has a number of issues to discuss or problems to solve (that would take a long time to get through all together). Follow these steps:

- 1) Write each issue or problem on the top of a piece of chart paper and hang them around the room.
- 2) Have the participants each choose one sheet to begin with and discuss that issue with whoever else is there. Give them five minutes to talk and then make sure they summarize their thoughts on the top half of the paper.
- 3) Now have everyone switch groups and continue switching until they have discussed each issue.
- 4) Then have everyone return to the issue they began with and come up with a number of solutions to write on the bottom half of the sheet.
- 5) Again, people circulate to all the groups, this time adding their solution ideas to each sheet.
- 6) Now, everyone walks past each sheet and checks off the solution they think is best.
- 7) Finally, the small groups that began at each sheet are responsible for creating action plans to address the issue on that sheet (using the most popular solutions).

(These activities were adapted from *Facilitating with Ease* by Ingrid Bens, 2000, pp.76-77)

## Section IV: Facilitation

### Dealing with Conflict

***Conflict naturally occurs in all groups. However, many people are uncomfortable with conflict and it has the potential to ruin a group if the facilitator is unable to manage it. Therefore, it is critical that facilitators understand and can help a group move through conflict.***

Bens (2000) explains that there are two steps in facilitating conflict: venting and resolving. *Venting provides everyone with the opportunity to express their emotions and feel heard. Until this step is taken, usually people are not prepared to resolve the issue. Resolving involves choosing and implementing an approach that will lead to a solution.*

#### **Venting**

During venting you want to allow people to express their thoughts and feelings, but not at the expense of others. Many negative dynamics can occur while people are venting their emotions during a conflict, including: not listening to others' perspectives, sarcasm, disrespect, shutting down, finger pointing, and criticism. In order to avoid and work through these dynamics, Bens suggests the following techniques:

- Slow things down
- Stay neutral and calm, but assertive
- Revisit the group's ground rules
- Emphasize listening and paraphrasing

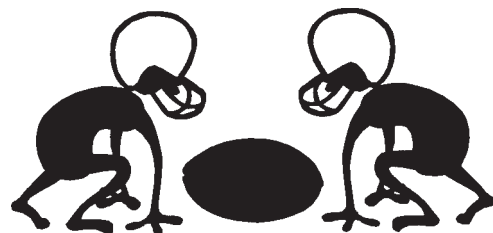
- Do not allow for disrespect or fighting
- Call time out if the group needs to cool down or re-focus
- Record ideas to keep track of the group's progress
- Help the group transition to resolving the problem

On page 80 is a model that can be helpful for facilitators and participants to work through the venting stage successfully. If necessary, you can pass this model out and ask participants to follow the steps carefully

#### **Resolving**

Once people have shared their thoughts and feelings concerning the conflict it is time to work toward a resolution. Bens offers three resolution approaches that may be helpful in facilitating:

- **Accommodate:** Ask people to try to be more tolerant of each other's views and to get along. Sometimes this involves one person giving in to another person.
- **Compromise:** Look for the middle ground between differing views. Each person gives up less important things to reach a more important goal.
- **Collaborate:** Examine the conflict and work together to find solutions acceptable to all.



**Section IV: Facilitation**

**A Method for Talking Through Conflict Respectfully**

**Step 1—Listen:** Listen fully and carefully as the other person speaks. Really try to understand his or her perspective rather than arguing as soon as you hear something you disagree with. Show the person you are listening actively by making eye contact and encouraging him or her to continue.

*“Uh-huh, keep going.”*

*“I’m not sure I understand. Could you repeat that last part please?”*

**Step 2—Empathize:** Accept the views of the other person even if you don’t agree with them. Try to understand the other person’s feelings and express this understanding.

*“I see what you mean. I understand how that would make you feel angry.”*

*“I bet I’d feel the same way if...”*

**Step 3—Clarify:** Make sure you understand what the other person really means. Paraphrase what you think the person is saying and ask for clarification.

*“Let me see if I understand ... are you saying ...?”*

*“Are you proposing ...?”*

**Step 4—Seek Permission:** Ask the other person if she or he feels understood and is ready to hear your perspective.

*“Now that you’ve shared your views, can I explain mine?”*

*“Could I now bring up some points you haven’t mentioned?”*

**Step 5—Resolve the Issue:** You are ready to resolve the issue once both people feel heard and understood. Choose a resolution method from below that will be best in this situation. Remember to continue using the L-E-C-S (Listen-Empathize-Clarify-Seek Permission) skills you practiced above as you come to a resolution.

**Accommodate:** Ask people to try to be more tolerant of each other’s views and to get along. Sometimes this involves one person giving in to another person.

**Compromise:** Look for the middle ground between differing views. Each person gives up less important things to reach a more important goal.

**Collaborate:** Examine the conflict and work together to find solutions acceptable to all.

**Section IV: Facilitation**



**Exercise 12**

**Be Each Other:  
Understanding Different Perspectives**

**Objective:** To help two participants who are having a hard time communicating, understanding each other, and seeing each other's point of view.

**Equipment:** None

**Directions:**

- Ask the two people who are having difficulty to move their chairs into the middle of the circle facing each other. Tell them to continue their original conversation, but this time to be each other. They should respond in the conversation as if they are the other person. Tell the participants in the outer circle to say "stop" any time they feel the people are not staying in their roles. Let the conversation continue until the two people have come to agreement or have talked for about 10 minutes.
- Now ask the following questions and allow for discussion:

Questions for the pair

*Can you now see the other person's point of view? Why?*

*Did you have trouble being the other person? Why?*

*Did you feel the other person did a good job being you? Why or why not?*

Questions for the outer circle

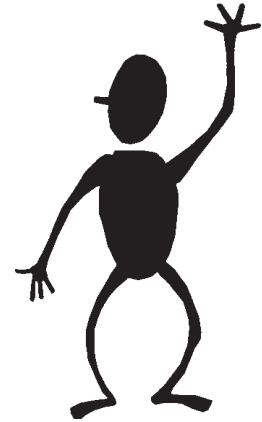
*Did the pair do an accurate job of playing each other? How did they not?*

*What feedback can you offer to the pair?*

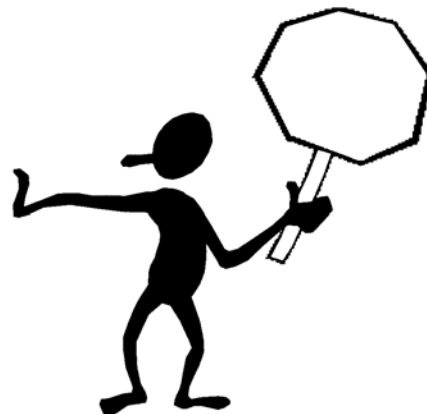
**Section IV: Facilitation**

**Improving Group Communication**

- When someone is being repetitive, a facilitator can use paraphrasing to help them summarize their thinking
- Facilitators can help speakers who are difficult to understand by slowing them down and drawing them out
- Facilitators can validate an important point of an exaggeration without debating its accuracy
- Facilitators can treat interruptions firmly and respectfully by assuring the speaker that when the current discussion ends the group will come back to their point
- When a group member expresses intense feelings, the facilitator can acknowledge the emotion and makes sure the speaker's point does not get lost



These points emphasize how important it is for a facilitator to listen skillfully and respectfully to everyone.



**Section IV: Facilitation**



**Icebreakers**

**Exercise 13**

**Birth Order Fun:** Have the group divide up by birth order: oldest, youngest, middle, or only. Members should find a partner who shares the same family position and share common experiences, characteristics, etc.

**Exercise 14**

**Name Tag Mixer:** As each person comes into the room give them someone else's name tag. Tell them to circulate around the room introducing themselves to people and trying to find the person whose name tag they have. When they find this person, tell them to find out three things about them so that they can introduce them to the entire group.

**Exercise 15**

**Childhood Experiences:** Tell participants to get in small groups (3-4 people) and have each person share a childhood experience that had a positive or negative impact on them. If there is time, they should talk about how these early experiences affect their approaches as foster parents.

**Exercise 16**

**Ball Toss Activity:** Have 6-10 balls or objects to toss. Tell the members to stand in a circle and explain that they will throw the balls in a pattern so that each person receives a ball only once ("I will throw to Jeff, who will throw to Marcia, until it comes back to me"). Practice the pattern a few times. You can tell the group that the ball is a message and it is important to send messages clearly so that they can be received. Now start the ball again and this time add in more balls as you go. Stop the game in the middle to talk about how the process is going and whether messages are being received.

**Section IV: Facilitation**



**Icebreakers (continued)**

**Exercise 17**

**Distraction Banishment:** As participants enter the room, ask them to write down at least three things that are on their mind from their home, personal, or work life that may distract them during the meeting. Make sure they realize this list should not include stresses related to foster parenting—after all, that’s what you’re here to talk about! Then ask them to place this list in an envelope, seal it, write their name on it, and place it in a box outside the room (to be picked up at the end of the meeting). Remind them that you want this time to be useful for everyone and outside distractions will take away from their participation and enjoyment.

(The exercises above were adapted from Facilitation Resources Volume 4: Managing Group Interaction by the University of Minnesota, 1999)

Daily Inspirations for Foster & Adoptive Parents: This book by Susan Stone is an excellent resource for a facilitator to use as an opening or discussion starter for a support group meeting.

**Section IV: Facilitation**



**Exercise 18**

**Identifying the Group's Needs**

**Objective:** To find out what the participants need from your foster parent support group by learning about their experiences, hopes, and fears.

**Equipment:** Basket, bucket, post-it notes, and pens or pencils

**Directions:**

- Put a basket and a bucket out with post-its. Have each participant write down a fear and put it in the bucket. Then have them write down a wish and put it in the basket. They can be fears or wishes pertaining to their child/ren, birth families, or foster parenting.
- First take the fears out of the bucket and hang them up. Lead a discussion about these fears and how the support group may be able to help with these concerns.
- Then remove the wishes from the basket, post them, and lead a similar discussion.

**Facilitator's Tip:** You may want to keep the lists of fears and wishes to revisit over time to see how well the group is helping your participants address their fears and realize their wishes. This shows the group that you remember their needs and want to make sure the group is helping them meet those needs.

**Section IV: Facilitation**



**Exercise 19**

**The Capacity of Our Group**

**Objective:** Demonstrate the wealth of experience and knowledge within the group.

**Equipment:** Flip chart, pens, colored strips of paper, and tape

- Draw a line down the center of the flip chart sheet. Label the left column “The Best Part of Being a Foster/Adoptive Parent,” and the right side, “The Worst Part of Being a Foster/Adoptive Parent.”
- Ask the members of the group to write down their ideas about the best and worst parts of being a foster/adoptive parent on the colored strips of paper and tape them under the appropriate heading.
- Then make a scale on one piece of the flip chart paper as follows:

**0            5            10            15            20            25            30**

- Ask all the parents to write down or say aloud how many years they have been foster/adoptive parents, how many kids they have cared for, and how old they are. Tally these numbers up and share with the group how many years the group has parented children, how many children they’ve cared for, and how many years of lived experience they share as a group.
- Conclude by saying “given the wealth of knowledge and experience within the group, we will be able to share many great ideas and strategies for addressing the difficult parts of foster and adoptive parenting—and that is what our group is for!”

**Section IV: Facilitation**



**Exercise 20**

**Problem Solving Challenging Behaviors**

**Objective:** Demonstrate a framework for problem solving and generate suggestions for addressing challenging behaviors.

**Equipment:** Index cards, chart paper, and markers

**Directions:**

Give each participant an index card and ask them to write down a challenging behavior they have encountered with a foster/birth/adopted youth within the last month. Let the participants know that cards may be read aloud and that they should not use real names. After 5-10 minutes collect all the cards and choose one at random. Read the problem described aloud and then guide the group through the following problem solving process:

- Define the problem
- Describe the adult's thoughts and feelings about the situation
- Are others helping to solve the problem? If so, how?
- Brainstorm solutions. List as many solutions as possible, without judging or discussing
- Explore the pros and cons of each possible solution
- The person who owns the problem selects one solution
- Give each participant the opportunity to share one new idea or strategy learned during the exercise

**Section IV: Facilitation**



**Exercise 21**

**The Effect of Foster Care on the Family**

**Objective:** Discuss the impact foster care can have on the entire family and brainstorm ways of supporting the foster parents and their biological children throughout the process.

**Equipment:** Flip chart (or large visible board) and markers

**Directions:**

Read the following case study and lead the group through a discussion using the discussion questions below.

Case Study

Janie came into care at the age of 5 due to allegations of sexual abuse and deprivation. She had been neglected, deprived, and singled out as the bad child in the family. She had two younger half sisters.

She wouldn't give any eye contact and repeatedly stated that she was ugly. She also told her foster parents' biological daughters that they were ugly and sometimes tried to bite them.

She was labeled ADHD, exhibited low social skills, and had a very difficult time at school. Janie's teacher called almost every other day to report on her bad behavior and ask the foster parents to do something.

Janie was very angry and would masturbate openly while in the presence of family members and company. She demanded attention from the foster mother but would not interact with the foster dad.

**Section IV: Facilitation**



**Exercise 21 (continued)**

**The Effect of Foster Care on the Family**

Discussion Questions

1. What are the behaviors that she exhibits? Which ones would be difficult and exhausting for a foster family to handle?
2. What are strategies to deal with these behaviors?
3. How could you go about getting help for Janie in these areas?
4. How can the foster parents find support for them and their other children?

**Section IV: Facilitation**

**Section II: Starting a Support Group**

**SECTION - V: Group Dynamics**

**What is a Group?**

**Who Will Be in Our Group?**

**Group Stages**

**Group Roles**

**Group Decision Making**

**Culture and Group Dynamics**

**Facilitator Responses for Difficult Dynamics**



*Getting along and getting support ...*

## Section V: Group Dynamics

### What is a Group?

***According to Bens (2000, p.51), a group is “a collection of people who come together to communicate, tackle a problem or coordinate an event.” Members of groups often have varying jobs and lives outside of the group and only come together for the purpose of the group. In your support group there are probably many differences between the members of your group, but you all come together to support one another and share your experiences as foster/adoptive parents. It is also important to remember that although members of a group come together for some common reasons, each person still has his or her own ideas and goals. Therefore people may focus mainly on what they want to get out of the group as individuals, which can sometimes lead to conflict.***

nication and helps members identify with each others' concerns and problems. Having things in common helps members build relationships. For instance, in a foster/adoptive parent group all of the participants have some common issues centered on the care of children.

However, it is also true that every group is naturally diverse and that it is important to create an atmosphere that respects and encourages diversity. Diverse groups that learn how to work together are more productive than groups lacking in diversity (Shaw, 1983). This diversity will come in the form of members' coping skills, length of involvement in the foster care/adoption system, levels of expertise, and life experiences. Group diversity will also appear in terms of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, relationship status, economic status, and varying abilities. Finally, parents will have experiences caring for a range of children of different ages and backgrounds possessing varied strengths and challenges. The individual uniqueness that each person brings to the group makes it possible for members to learn from one another and share their strengths.

One of the most challenging aspects of support groups is addressing the similarities and differences represented by the members. A key guideline is to always listen to and validate each person's experience. As the facilitator, encourage people to learn from each other's experiences without questioning them. Also remember the importance of cooperation. Members must be committed to working with one another or a group cannot function. You can set the tone of your group by including respect for other's experiences and working cooperatively in your ground rules.

#### **Who will be in our group?**

It is a given that members should have a similar purpose for being in the group and have some personal characteristics in common. This provides a foundation for commu-

**Section V: Group Dynamics**

**Group Stages**

*Groups move through various stages as they work together. Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing are the stages commonly identified (Hunter, Bailey & Taylor, 1995, Bens, 2000, University of Minnesota Vol. 4, 1999). The ultimate goal is to reach the performing stage, however, many groups get stuck on their way. Hopefully, the startup, planning, facilitation, and group dynamics skills in this workbook will help you guide your group to the performing stage. It is also helpful to know that groups can return to earlier stages, go through stages multiple times, and show behaviors from more than one stage at a given time. Despite these variations, it is good for group leaders and facilitators to understand the basic stages through which most groups progress.*

tions are high. During this stage members tend to be polite, not share their feelings, and not engage in conflict. Basic information is shared but few group tasks are accomplished. The group is often very dependent on the facilitator.

**Stage 2: Storming**

At this point members begin to see differences between their original expectations for the group and how it has formed. They may have trouble getting along with other members, realize the goals are too difficult to accomplish, or the facilitator may be taking too little or too much control. Conflict, competition, and frustration are common as people negotiate for power and control concerning these issues.

**Stage 3: Norming**

The norming stage is necessary in order to move eventually to performing. While norming, group members address the conflicts that have surfaced and find ways to resolve them. Through this resolution process the group is able to create new norms for the team and focus again on the similarities between individuals. During stage 3 people listen more actively, include more members, and can stay focused on the task at hand.

**Stage 4: Performing**

Having completed the norming stage, groups have addressed their conflicts and now can work more cooperatively and productively. Typical behaviors include respectful interactions, openness to new ideas, successful decision making, creative conflict resolution, and power sharing. Groups in the performing stage generally feel committed to the group and experience increased morale.

**Stage 1: Forming**

In this first stage the group is being formed, ground rules are set, group members are getting to know one another, and expecta-

**Section V: Group Dynamics**

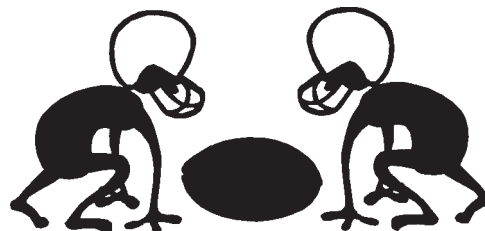
**Group Roles**



***Groups develop norms for behavior that govern and guide how people interact within the group. As groups are forming, people pay attention to how others react to their behaviors. Group approval or disapproval then helps create the norms and roles that will exist within the group. Within the first 3 to 4 hours that groups are together roles begin to emerge.***

Explaining different roles to the group can raise awareness and assist the group in recognizing patterns of behavior and habits of interaction, which members could otherwise adopt unknowingly. Group members can then be more purposeful in the formation of their own group roles and dynamics. Below is a list of some of the roles that are commonly present in groups (Brown & Wiedemeier, 1995):

- **Task Roles –**  
Roles related to task completion:
  - √ Initiator
  - √ Opinion giver
  - √ Elaborator
  - √ Clarifier
  - √ Information provider
- **Group-oriented roles –**  
Roles related to group cohesion, morale, and unity:
  - √ Tension reliever
  - √ Compromiser
  - √ Harmonizer
  - √ Encourager
  - √ Communicator
  - √ Active listener
- **Self-oriented roles –**  
Roles focused on the individual:
  - √ Aggressor
  - √ Obstructor
  - √ Recognition seeker
  - √ Negator
  - √ Topic jumper
  - √ Devil's advocate



## Section V: Group Dynamics

### Group Decision Making

*Helping groups make decisions is one of the most important jobs of the facilitator. Groups often are unsure of how to make decisions, get overwhelmed by conflict, or end up making poor decisions. Facilitators should help identify decision making methods that will be helpful in a given situation and guide the group through the process. Five effective methods identified by Bens (2000) are described below.*

It is also important to note that during the process of making a decision a group can progress through the four group stages described earlier in this section. In other words, in order to make a decision a group often will form, storm, norm, and then perform.

#### Decision Making Methods

- **One person decides:** Although most groups think that decisions need to be made by the entire group, having one person make a decision can be much simpler. Making sure that everyone has the chance to share their ideas with the decision maker can help people feel included and can result in a higher quality decision.
- **Compromise:** When group members have strongly opposed positions, compromise can be helpful. Each side is asked to give up some of what they

wanted in order to find a solution in the middle. It can be challenging to find a solution that does not require one member to give up too much. When compromise works a decision is reached and both sides end up feeling that they both won and lost.



- **Multi-voting:** This method works best when there are a number of options to choose between. Each person is given a certain number of points or stickers that they can assign to the options for which they want to vote. One common guideline is that you cannot give more than half your points to any one item. Once everyone disperses their points, all the points are added up in order to identify the most popular options. One drawback to this approach is that there is often not much discussion of the options.

**Example:** A foster/adoptive parent support group is trying to choose 3 out of 10 activities to include in a foster family celebration. Each person is given 10 points to disperse as they wish (not giving

## Section V: Group Dynamics

more than 5 to any one activity). One member really wants to have a barbeque and is also somewhat interested in both a soccer game and a fishing trip. She might put 5 points on the barbeque, 3 on the soccer game, and 2 on the fishing trip. Finally, everyone's points are added up for each of the 10 activities and the 3 most popular activities are chosen.

- **Majority Voting:** This is the traditional method of voting where the majority wins. People can either raise their hands or write down their answers depending on if you want the group to know everyone's opinions. This is a fast method and can be a good method if enough discussion happens before voting. Otherwise people may make decisions without having enough information. Another drawback is that it creates winners and losers.
- **Consensus:** Consensus requires that everyone learn about the situation or problem, listen carefully to others, and work to find a solution that everyone can "live with." The steps are as follows:
  - Present the problem
  - Brainstorm all possible solutions
  - Discard solutions that people refuse to consider
  - Discuss pros and cons of remaining solutions
  - Modify solutions if better ideas arise
  - Select the best, most workable solution/s

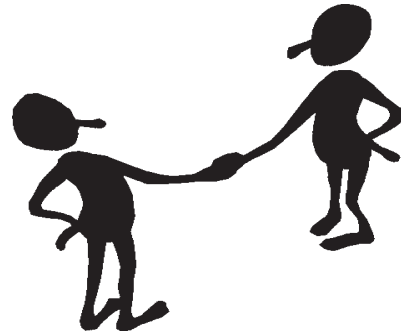
It is best to use consensus for important

decisions because it takes everyone's views into account and therefore often means that people will stand behind and work for the decision that is made in the end. You may not want to use consensus for more minor decisions because it can be a lengthy process.

### Four Tips for Reaching Consensus

- 1) Avoid arguing for your view. Explain your opinion clearly and then listen to other ideas.
- 2) Don't give up and make a win/lose decision. Really try to make a decision acceptable to all involved.
- 3) Don't change your mind just to avoid conflict. Change your mind if someone convinces you that they have a better idea.
- 4) Don't avoid conflict by voting or making deals. Consensus is not the same as compromise.

(University of Minnesota Vol 5, 1999)



On the following pages you will find a chart summarizing the decision making methods described above, a diagram illustrating the decision making process, and a few additional strategies that can be used for decision making.

**Section V: Group Dynamics**

**Table 5.1**

<b>Decision Making Options Chart</b>			
<b>OPTION</b>	<b>CONS</b>	<b>PROS</b>	<b>USES</b>
<b><i>One Person</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be fast</li> <li>• Clear accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of input</li> <li>• Low buy-in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When one person is an expert</li> <li>• Individual willing to take responsibility</li> </ul>
<b><i>Compromise</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Creates a solution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adversarial</li> <li>• Win/lose</li> <li>• Divides the group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When positions are opposite or consensus is unlikely</li> </ul>
<b><i>Multi-Voting</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic</li> <li>• Objective</li> <li>• Everyone participates</li> <li>• Feels like a win</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits dialogue</li> <li>• May not end with choosing real priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To sort or prioritize a long list of options</li> </ul>
<b><i>Majority Voting</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fast</li> <li>• High quality with dialogue</li> <li>• Clear outcome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be too fast</li> <li>• Winners and losers</li> <li>• Can be decided without dialogue or sufficient information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less important decisions</li> <li>• When there are clear options</li> <li>• If division within the group is okay</li> </ul>
<b><i>Consensus</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Systematic</li> <li>• Everyone participates</li> <li>• Encourages commitment</li> <li>• Discussion oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes time</li> <li>• Requires that people share information and have good communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important issues</li> <li>• When total buy-in matters</li> </ul>

(Chart taken from *Facilitating with Ease* by Ingrid Bens, 2000, p.117)

**Section V: Group Dynamics**

**Diagram 5.2**

**Dynamics of Group Decision Making**



Diagram 5.2 (Kaner, et al., 1996) illustrates the process that groups go through in making decisions. Facilitators should educate their groups about this process and in particular, the existence of the conflict stage. It is important for people to understand that the best decisions usually come after a period of conflict. It is the job of the facilitator to help groups negotiate through conflict and reach a decision by using their conflict management skills and providing groups with decision making processes appropriate for the situation.

**Section V: Group Dynamics**



**Exercise 22**

**What's the Best/Worst that Could Happen?**

**Objective:** If the group is having trouble making a decision, it is sometimes because of people's fears regarding that decision. This activity gives people the opportunity to think about the best and worst things that could happen so that the group can move on and make a decision.

**Equipment:** Flip chart (or large visible board) and markers

**Directions:**

- Write each option the group is considering at the top of a piece of flip chart paper (note: make sure you do not have more than three options—it becomes overwhelming).
- Begin with the first option and ask the group, "What is the worst thing that could happen if we chose this option?" Record their responses.
- Then ask them, "What is the best thing that could happen?" and write their comments.
- Now ask, "What's most likely to happen?" and record their thoughts.
- Go through the last three steps for each option. Give enough time that people are able to share their fears and also have a discussion about what realistically will happen.
- Now return to the decision making process and see if the group is ready to choose an option.

**Section V: Group Dynamics**

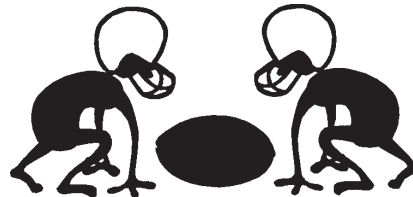
**Culture and Group Dynamics**



***Facilitators will find themselves working with group members who differ in the areas of race, sex, culture, ethnicity, culture, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, and social class. In foster/adoptive parent support groups, diversity is also represented by the children in care. Effective facilitators are able to work effectively with diverse group members because they have engaged in a process of self-exploration. They are aware of their own cultural limitations and biases and work to make sure they do not impede the group process.***

Just as diversity exists at the individual level, issues of diversity also are important to consider at the group level. Facilitators need to be aware of how members from different backgrounds experience and participate in the group process. It is important to understand that members bring their own behaviors, values, and language to the group, all of which affect group dynamics. Patterns of behavior, values, and language often exist within cultures; however, it is critical to remember that not all people from any one culture will share any trait. There are always individual differences. What is most important is that you remember the types of differences that affect groups and work to make your group as inclusive of these differences as possible.

Here are some differences, often related to culture, that affect group dynamics (Cox, 1993, Haslett & Ruebush, 1999):

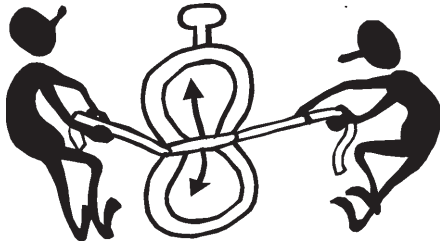


**Space Orientation**

Different cultures and people have different ideas about what is a normal amount of space between people when they are interacting in public places. If people with different norms about space are interacting there can be misunderstandings. For instance, if someone backs away from a person who is used to standing close together while talking, the second person may perceive the behavior as rude. Give group members the time to talk about space and create group norms.

## Section V: Group Dynamics

### Time Orientation



Cross-cultural research has identified three common time orientations: linear-separable, circular, and procedural. Linear-separable orientation sees time as divided into the past, present, and future, with the most focus on the future. It is also separated into units (months, days, minutes), allowing for clear beginnings and endings of events. Circular orientation views time as repeated cycles and focuses on the past and present rather than the future. Procedural time orientation, in contrast, treats time as irrelevant. Individuals and cultures holding this orientation take as much time as is necessary to complete whatever task or activity is at hand. A group consisting of people with different time orientations will need to negotiate about things such as punctuality, use of time, planning for the future, and deadlines.

### Leadership Styles

Task-oriented leaders focus mainly on completing required work, while relationship-oriented leaders believe that relationships are necessary in order to accomplish work, and therefore put energy into building relationships. It is easy to imagine that a relationship oriented leader could be insulted by a task oriented leader who does not seem to care about relationships. In contrast, the task oriented leader could view the relationship oriented leader as wasting time talking to people instead of “getting work done.” In reality, a group with both kinds of leaders will probably be most effective, so talking about

what people’s goals are and how they try to accomplish them can help create understanding.

It is also important to note that individuals from dominant groups (men, European-Americans, people from the upper-middle class) tend to assume leadership positions more often than people from non-dominant groups and end up having more influence on group outcomes. This does not mean that they are better leaders or have more to contribute to the group. Facilitators should work to ensure a balance of power and ideas.

### Individualism vs. Collectivism



Individualists place more emphasis on individuals’ needs and goals, competition, and personal rewards. Collectivists focus more on the group needs and goals, cooperation, and group rewards. Group dynamics, including setting goals and the ability to work as a group, will certainly be affected by the number of collectivist and individualist members in the group.

### Competitive vs. Cooperative Behavior

Individuals and cultures value competition and cooperation differently, both in personal interactions and performing tasks. Cooperative individuals are more inclined to help others in their group than competitive individuals. Cooperation often leads to the entire group reaching its goals while competition generally results in only some group mem-

## Section V: Group Dynamics

bers accomplishing their goals. For your support group cooperation is essential, however you should find a way to emphasize cooperation without excluding more competitive group members.

### Locus of Control

People with an external locus of control tend to believe that things outside themselves (often things outside of their control) cause events to happen in their lives. In contrast, people with an internal locus of control tend to believe that they cause the events that occur in their lives. These differences may exist in individuals or cultures because of things such as belief in God or fate, or experiences with discrimination. Differences in locus of control may affect how group members understand difficulties, approach challenges, and think about power.

### Communication Styles

There are a tremendous number of variations in communication that appear across and within cultures. Here are some of the ways in which communication styles differ:

- listening before talking vs. “thinking aloud”
- forthrightness vs. reservation of thoughts/feelings
- communication for connection and collaboration vs. competition
- expression vs. containment of emotion
- responsive vs. reserved listening
- clear advice for solving problems vs. discussion of issues and feelings
- tendency to express agreement vs. disagreement
- direct eye contact as a sign of respect vs. disrespect
- quick vs. slow pace of conversation

These differences can quickly lead to misunderstandings, mistrust, hurt feelings, anger, and ineffective group processes if they are not discussed and addressed. Do not assume that everyone is communicating in the same way or that you will be able to quickly understand other methods of communicating. The two exercises on the following pages are designed to help participants become more aware of the differences in nonverbal communication and behavior.

### Conflict Management Styles

There are five commonly identified conflict management styles. They differ in terms of how much assertiveness (concern for self) and cooperativeness (concern for others) are present in each style. Different cultures and people may tend to use a particular style, however, they may use alternate styles depending on the situation.

- Avoiding (low on assertiveness and cooperation)
- Competing (assertive but not cooperative)
- Accommodating (unassertive but cooperative)
- Collaborating (assertive and cooperative)
- Compromising (moderate assertiveness and cooperativeness)

As the facilitator it is your job to help the group find ways to handle conflict. Within your group there are probably multiple conflict management styles and you need to pay attention to these differences and help everyone in your group work through conflicts. It can be helpful to talk about conflict management styles so that group members begin to understand their own behavior, others' behaviors, and how to solve conflicts together.

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**Exercise 23**

**Eavesdropping:  
Observing Nonverbal Behaviors**

**Objective:** To develop participants' awareness and understanding of nonverbal behaviors.

**Equipment:** Paper and pens or pencils

**Directions:**

- Ask two volunteers to go across the room from the rest of the group and have a conversation for 3-5 minutes. Tell them to talk about something that is meaningful to them, but to make sure the group will not be able to hear them. If anyone can hear them, instruct them to clap so the pair can lower their voices.
- Explain to the rest of the group that they will be “eavesdropping” on their conversation without being able to hear them. Therefore, they will be observing their nonverbal behaviors and body language in order to try to guess what the pair is talking about.
- After the 3-5 minutes are complete, ask the large group to write down what they think the conversation was about.
- When they are done ask each person to read their description aloud.
- Then have the two participants in the conversation explain what they discussed.

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**Exercise 23 (continued)**

**Eavesdropping:  
Observing Nonverbal Behaviors**

- Now lead a discussion using the following questions:

What nonverbal behaviors and body language did the observers notice and use to help them guess the topic of conversation?

What helped some people to guess correctly?

Why did other people guess incorrectly?

How did the participants choose the topic of conversation?

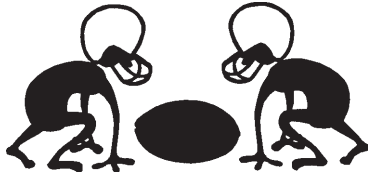
How did it feel to be eavesdropped on?

What did everyone learn about nonverbal behavior, body language, and communication?

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**Facilitator Responses for Difficult Dynamics**

***What is a response I can use for a group member that is extremely dominating and wants to “out-talk” everyone?***

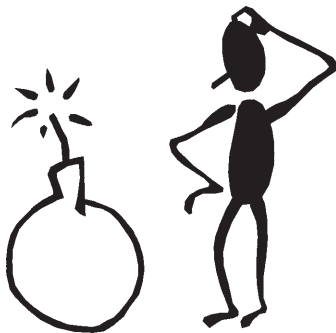


When a person is over-participating, everyone else is under-participating. The facilitator should focus their efforts on the passive majority. Encourage them to participate more. Trying to change the dominant person only gives them more attention.

*“Could someone who hasn’t spoken take a turn?”*

*“What do you all think of Susan’s idea?”*

***How do I handle two group members who are in a heated argument?***

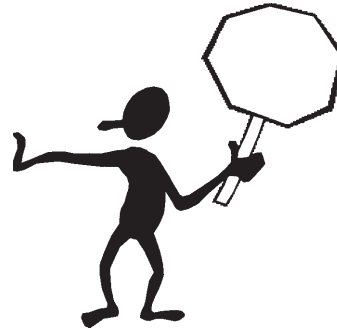


Don’t waste time trying to resolve a conflict between two people who have no intention of reaching a consensus. Reach out to others in the group and ask their opinion.

*“What are some other ways of seeing this?”*

*“Who would like to share their opinion of this topic?”*

***What do I do about group members who sit in the corner and whisper and tell jokes while the meeting is convening?***



Don’t ignore this behavior; it probably will not go away. First you can try standing close to these group members while you continue facilitating. If the problem persists assume there is a reason. For instance, has the topic become stale? Do people need a break? Would participants like to move into a small group discussion? If you cannot quickly solve the problem by adjusting some aspect of the meeting, do not hesitate to address the disruptive members and remind them of the ground rules. Respect is a key part of a successful support group.

***What do I do when some members don’t appear invested in the topic?***

A typical mistake would be to ignore them and be happy they aren’t making trouble. However, a better response would be to look for an opportunity to have a discussion on “What’s important to me about this topic?” Have people break into small groups to have this discussion. This gives everyone in the group a chance to explore their own stake in the outcome.

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***How do I deal with a group member who is driving everyone crazy because he says the same thing over and over and over and over again?***

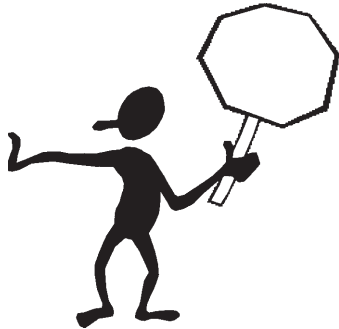


Sometimes people repeat themselves because they feel like they aren't being heard. Summarize the person's point of view until they feel understood. Give others an opportunity to respond.

*"I hear you saying. Am I right?"*

*"Can someone assist me in responding to this point?"*

***How do I change a group norm of always starting and ending meetings late?***



Don't wait for everyone to show up and then go overtime without asking. Waiting encourages lateness. Instead, start when you say you are going to start and ask for the group's permission if you need to go overtime. If you find yourself always going over you may need

to improve your agenda planning. You might also try offering "on time" drawings. Those who are on time have the opportunity to enter the drawing for a small gift.

***What happens when I am confronted with a situation that I am unfamiliar with and it is not covered in this or any other resource?***



Facilitation is an improvisary art. It is like jazz rather than classical music. Don't get stuck doing things a certain way. Remember, there is no one way or technique. Be flexible, ask the group for suggestions, and stay positive. A good response could be, "I don't know the answer to that, however, I will do a little research and report back next meeting."

On the next page is an exercise that will let facilitators brainstorm different strategies to use in challenging situations like the ones described above.

**Section V: Group Dynamics**



**Exercise 24**

**Handling Common Problems**

In the chart below are many common problems that occur in groups. As the facilitator you will need to come up with some strategies to address these problems. In small groups talk about what you might do in these situations and write down the best ideas your group comes up with so you can refer to them later.

<b>COMMON GROUP PROBLEM</b>	<b>WHAT CAN I DO?</b>
Group is losing interest, attention, or energy	
Group keeps getting off the agenda	
Only some members are participating	
The group is unresponsive to an activity/topic	
Some members are getting highly emotional	

(This exercise was adapted from Facilitation Resources Volume 6: Dealing with Conflict, p.6.24 by the University of Minnesota, 1999)

**Section V: Group Dynamics**

**Conclusion**

While there is a great deal of tried and true information offered in this curriculum, it is not the be-all and end-all answer for support groups. Feel free to be creative when facilitating groups. Give your audience a glimpse of your uniqueness and gifts. Assisting foster/adoptive parents in creating support groups is a very important challenge. Ultimately your efforts are making it possible for more children in the child welfare system to have access to emotionally strong and resilient foster/adoptive parents.

Taking on a leadership role may initially be scary. However, the information shared in this workbook is an excellent way to pave your path to success. If you need further assistance with starting or facilitating a support group contact the National Foster Parent Association (800) 557-5238.

## **Review**

**Review**

**Material Review**

Below are questions to help review the information in this book. The answers to the questions are listed on page 115.

Trainer's Tip: The questions below can be copied as handouts or presented on an overhead. Either way, encourage the group to work together and answer the questions out loud. Use this as an opportunity to discuss the topic areas and answer questions participants might have. The answers to the questions are listed at the bottom of page 115. You may wish to add more questions.

**1) Support groups help foster/adoptive parents**

- a) Cope with stressful life events
- b) Feel Feeling less isolated
- c) Get a degree
- d) A and B
- e) All of the above

**2) When developing a support group all leaders should have which of the following?**

- a) A plan
- b) Experience leading groups
- c) Passion and commitment
- d) A and B
- e) A and C

**5) Effective leaders are**

- a) Open to new ideas
- b) Focused on solutions
- c) Accountable and honest
- d) Learners and teachers
- e) All of the above

**4) Why is consensus important when you create a plan for your group?**

- a) People cannot make decisions alone
- b) Consensus is the only good decision making method
- c) Members will feel that their opinions matter
- d) All of the above!
- e) None of the above

**Review**

- 5) What are 3 critical ingredients for foster/adoptive parent support group plan?**
- a) Purpose, group type, and food
  - b) Recruitment, number of members, and purpose
  - c) Recruitment, purpose, and group type
  - d) Purpose, business plan, and travel plan
- 6) Recruitment is important**
- a) When you first start a group
  - b) Throughout the life of the group
  - c) Both of the above
- 7) Why are purpose statements important?**
- a) To establish consensus among group members
  - b) To determine the group's goals
  - c) To tell others about your group
  - d) All of the above
- 8) Groups that do not have consensus on their purpose are**
- a) Strong groups
  - b) Groups geared towards frustration and a short life
  - c) Groups geared towards a successful and long life
  - d) Groups foster/adoptive parents enjoy
  - e) All of the above
- 9) What are 2 types of foster/adoptive parent support groups identified in the training?**
- a) Community-based and regional support groups
  - b) Foreign and international
  - c) Professional and non-professional foster/adoptive parent groups
  - d) Licensed and unlicensed foster/adoptive parent groups
  - e) Treatment foster care and kin care groups
- 10) All groups should**
- a) Look alike
  - b) Develop their own unique identity
  - c) Have a large membership
  - d) Have a small membership
  - e) All of the above

**Review**

- 11) What are some of the items included in a formal business plan?**
- a) Bank account and incorporation
  - b) Budget and location
  - c) Articles of Incorporation and fundraising
  - d) Marketing and lease
  - d) A budget
  - e) All of the above
- 12) The incorporation process includes**
- a) Creating By-laws
  - b) Applying for nonprofit status
  - c) Writing Articles of Incorporation
  - d) All of the above
- 13) Which of the following can be considered sources for fundraising?**
- a) Family members
  - b) Local businesses
  - c) Social workers
  - d) Foundations
  - e) All of the above
- 14) When planning for a meeting a leader should**
- a) Make notes so s/he can lecture to the group
  - b) Be responsible for every task
  - c) Choose a convenient time and location and make an agenda
  - d) Choose a topic that interests her/him
  - e) All of the above
- 15) A good meeting place should**
- a) Ensure privacy
  - b) Be accessible
  - c) Have friendly lighting
  - d) Have comfortable seating
  - e) All of the above

**Review**

- 16) Which of the following is an excellent icebreaker and creates a friendly warm environment?**
- a) Food
  - b) A sunny day
  - c) A large membership
  - d) A lot of interesting case studies
  - e) Statistical information
- 17) Appropriate ground rules include**
- a) Dress code
  - b) Use “I” statements
  - c) Confidentiality
  - d) Everyone talks 3 times a meeting
  - e) B and C
  - f) B and D
- 18) Barriers to support group participation are:**
- a) Unclear group purpose
  - b) Poor location
  - c) Lack of childcare
  - d) Poor facilitation
  - e) All of the above
- 19) Facilitation is a form of group leadership that:**
- a) Is impartial and ensures a safe environment for the group
  - b) Is the same as being a group member
  - c) Is involved in deciding issues with the group
  - d) Is responsible for making sure that dominant and smart people run the group
  - e) Is not important to the group process
- 20) What are basic skills facilitators should use?**
- a) Attending, arguing, and paraphrasing
  - b) Shutting down, clarifying, and summarizing
  - c) Attending, paraphrasing, and summarizing
  - d) Congratulating, clarifying, and pestering

**Review**

**21) What stages do most groups go through?**

- a) Introduction, Activity, Conclusion
- b) Incorporation, Facilitation, Group Dynamics
- c) Talking, Fighting, Resolving
- d) Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing

**22) Why is it important for groups to learn about conflict?**

- a) Because conflict is a natural part of all groups
- b) Because most important decisions are made after a period of conflict
- c) To help members not to give up when things get hard
- d) All of the above

**23) What are examples of some of the roles that emerge within a group?**

- a) Task oriented, group oriented, and self oriented
- b) Task oriented, childcare provider, and self oriented
- c) Childcare, boss, and volunteer
- d) Group oriented, self oriented, and world oriented
- e) All of the above

**24) Which of the following can be used to make decisions?**

- a) One person decides
- b) Compromise
- c) Multi-voting
- d) Majority voting
- e) Consensus
- f) All of the above

**25) When is it good to use consensus to make a decision?**

- a) For minor decisions
- b) When it is important for everyone to stand behind the decision
- c) If voting does not work
- d) If you have to make a decision quickly
- e) All of the above

**Review**

**26) Culture affects group dynamics because**

- a) Some cultures do not have groups
- b) Every person and culture interacts differently in groups
- c) Some people cannot be leaders
- d) Some cultures do not experience conflict
- e) Every culture is cooperative

**27) As the facilitator, you should**

- a) Be aware of your own culture and biases
- b) Recognize that members bring their own behaviors, values and language to the group
- c) Find a way to be inclusive of differences
- d) Remember that people within a culture are different from each other and think of them as individuals
- e) All of the above

**Answers**

1d, 2e, 3e, 4c, 5c, 6c, 7d, 8b, 9a, 10b, 11c, 12d, 13e, 14c, 15e, 16a, 17e, 18e, 19a, 20c, 21d, 22d, 23a, 24f, 25b, 26b, 27e

Leading Foster and Adoptive Parent Support Groups: A Guide for Parents  
**Review**

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## **Exhibits**

**Creation of Nonprofit Chart**

**Form 1023 Application for Recognition of Exemption**

**Form 872-C Assessment Tax Form**

**SS-4 Application for Employer Identification Number**

**Form 8718 User Fee for Exempt Organization**

**Articles of Incorporation (Sample)**

**Sample Support Group Newsletter**

**Sample Agenda**