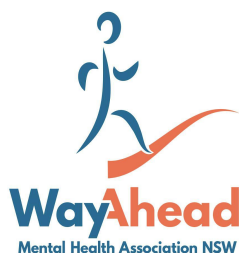




Support Group Leaders Training Day Manual



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Aim of Anxiety Support Groups

- ❖ To provide support for people with anxieties and their families
- ❖ To establish a setting in which people with anxieties can meet in comfort and safety
- ❖ To provide a setting for people with anxieties to communicate their feelings and needs to others, and to give and receive support
- ❖ To provide an opportunity for people with anxieties to have fun and enjoy each others company
- ❖ To ensure that group members are given a vision of what can happen in the future by the presence of "coping" members.
- ❖ To raise community awareness
- ❖ To organise guest speakers for the Support Group Meeting if requested by members.



A Creed for Support Group Meetings

We are a group of people with a common bond, sharing our troubles, experiences, understanding, strength and wisdom

We listen, explore options, and express our feelings. We do not prescribe, diagnose, or give advice ... we suggest

We are accepting and non-judgemental to group members.

We know what we share is confidential and that we have the right to remain anonymous if we choose.

We have the right to take part in any discussion or not.

We each have the right and opportunity to equal talking time and the right to remain silent.

It is important that we actively listen when someone is talking and avoid having side conversations.

We encourage "I" statements, so that everyone speaks in the first person.

We each share the responsibility for making the group work.

Having benefited from the help of others, we recognise the need for offering our help to others in the support group.



Statement of Confidentiality

For Support Group Meetings

This support group provides an opportunity for all group members to share their personal experiences with anxieties and to discuss related issues and ideas.

Everything that is shared by any group member during this meeting is confidential to the group.

All members are expected to honour the confidential nature of the discussion, and should not raise any of the issues, ideas or experiences which are shared in the meeting, with any person outside of the meeting in a way which identifies any group member.

To assist in this, only first names will be used during this meeting.



Helpful Hints for Group Facilitator

- ◆ At meetings, try to establish a caring, non-judgemental, supportive atmosphere.
- ◆ Remind every member that all information shared at the group is to remain **Confidential**.
- ◆ Name tags are very helpful for each member of the group. (first names only)
- ◆ Encourage everyone, but do not force anyone to contribute to the group's discussion.
- ◆ Encourage **a sense of humour**.
- ◆ When someone is talking, group members should **LISTEN**. Side conversations must be discouraged.
- ◆ Encourage everyone to offer helpful suggestions to any group member who **ASK** for it.



Leading a group is a responsibility and requires commitment to helping group members.

Leaders will develop good listening skills. Good listening skills include the following: be attentive to what the person is saying with both their verbal and non-verbal language; reflect back feelings to show that you understand; ask open questions which encourage the person to talk; maintain normal eye contact. Don't deviate to your own ideas and experiences unless these will help the person you are listening to. Good listening skills demonstrate your empathy to the listener. Empathy helps them feel accepted and encourages honesty and trust, which in turn helps them to seek the help and support they need.

Leaders are non-judgemental to group members, knowing that each person is at a different stage in their (illness/situation) and recovery. If a person is denying their (illness/situation) or seem to want to "hang on to it", demonstrate alternatives by sharing your own experiences or other group members experiences, but be respectful and understanding of their position and do not tell them that they are wrong.

A leader should seek to be sincere and honest with group members. The leader does not need to know all the answers and will openly state "I don't know" if necessary.

Be patient and kind to all members. Encourage humour, tolerance and hope.

Try to demonstrate and encourage good listening skills, patience, tolerance etc., among all the group members. Actively discourage any behaviour or conversations which are disrespectful to a group member. If this happens, gently remind them of the aims of the group. Keep the focus of the group upon mutual support and caring and problems such as this will soon dissipate.

Utilise all your good listening skills, and empathy, patience and humour when helping to resolve any conflicts in the group. Listen to all sides and try to facilitate the members in conflict to come to a resolution themselves. Use "I" statements, and encourage members in conflict to do the same.

Be fair to all - when leading a group you need to be attentive to how group members are responding to what is being discussed. Try to encourage all members to participate in the discussion if possible.

Keep the discussion on track and focused. If the discussion starts to go in many different directions, without sufficient time being spent on each member's feelings, experiences and ideas, members may begin to feel that they are not being taken seriously or feel confused about what the group is for.

To minimise "unruly behaviour" from group members - such as interruptions, side conversations, talking too much or dominating another member, make a statement at the beginning of the meeting about what the support meeting is for and the sort of behaviour you would like to expect from members. For example, read out the "Creed for Support Group Meeting" and lay out the group rules for discussion.

Maintain a friendly, co-operative attitude so that all members feel they can approach you. Be open to new ideas about running the group, and encourage members who indicate they would like to help with organising or leading the group.

Be reliable in turning up at the meetings. If you can not attend a particular meeting, organise another member to take over your role, or notify the office.

Help make new members feel welcome.

Get to know your local community health facilities or community groups, to which you may be able to refer members to.

A group leader should try to keep smiling and try to raise the hopes of others through the positive experiences shared by their group members and or their own.

Above all - look after yourself!



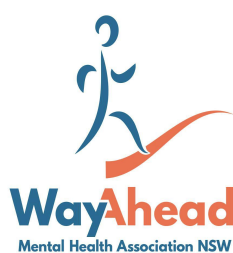
What Does Being a Group Facilitator Mean?

While facilitating a group may require time, commitment and hard work, it can also be very rewarding. Being part of a supportive environment and speaking to people with similar problems and concerns can be an extremely positive and empowering experience. Opportunities to make new friends, feel less isolated and learn different ways of coping with the challenges of an illness are benefits that being part of a support group offers.

The role of the group facilitator is to encourage people in the group to express their opinions, experiences and ideas so that members can learn from each other.

It is **not** the role of the group facilitator to be the expert and lead people to believe that you have all the answers for them. Nor is the group your group. Deciding to start a group so that you'll have a group of people to listen to your own problems is not what a support group is about.

Support Groups are based on the theory of mutual aid, whereby the facilitator helps people to help each other. It is essential that all group members feel that they are a significant part of the group.



Sharing the Role: Co-facilitating

When thinking about setting up a support group it's a good idea to see if there is anyone else interested in assisting you start up and help facilitate the group.

Advantages of Co-facilitation

- ❖ Facilitators can provide support for each other.
- ❖ If one facilitator cannot attend a meeting there is someone else to take his or her place.
- ❖ Having another facilitator there, can give you that bit of extra moral support.
- ❖ Two or more facilitators will bring different skills, experiences and ideas to the group.
- ❖ Facilitators can debrief with each other after the meeting.

Looking After Yourself

As the group facilitator it is important to look after yourself. It is important that you look after your own physical and mental well being. Feeling overwhelmed or stressed could jeopardise your own health.

Find someone who is available for you to talk to soon after each meeting so you can discuss your feelings about the experience.

Treat your self to something you like after each group such as a nice bath or chocolate. Consider it your reward for taking the risk and responsibility of facilitating the group.

Reflect on positive things that happen, not just the negative.

Ask group members for feedback - they will be less critical than you.

If you are feeling overwhelmed and there is no other designated facilitator please phone the office.



Code of Ethics for Group Facilitation

The code of ethics below is produced by the Institute of Group Leaders. The aim of such a code is to assist group facilitators maintain a professional and ethical standard of work.

The Code of Ethics is as follows:

Group Facilitators agree to:

- ◆ Keep and protect the confidentiality of group members by clearly defining:
 - What it means
 - Why it is important
 - The risk and difficulties involved in its enforcement
- ◆ Respect and encourage the voluntary participation of group members so as to promote and not delay their independence and development.
- ◆ Refrain from developing intimate personal relationships with group members throughout the duration of any group program.
- ◆ Refrain from imposing personal agendas, values, attitudes and morals on other group members.
- ◆ Not record or secretly observe group sessions without the permission of the group members.



Group Dynamics

A member who dominates the discussion

This member talks too much, too long, making it difficult for other members to participate.

Causes: Anxiety, attention seeking, feel they know it all.

Examples:

- ❖ "Mary, it is clear that you've got a lot of issues to discuss (summarise issues to indicate that you were listening) and we've given you some feedback. Let's give others some time to share now."
- ❖ "Thank you for your contribution and I'm quite mindful of the time so I am eager to hear everyone's experiences"
- ❖ "What do others think?"
- ❖ "Would you mind if we got another opinion on this one?"
- ❖ "Could we talk more about this in the break or after the meeting?"

Interrupts and Ignores Others

This person does not listen and persists in interrupting people. They cut others off, leap in at inappropriate times and often with inappropriate comments.

Causes: Bored, can't hear, can't understand, poor social skills, desire to be heard first.

What to do:

- ❖ Decide on the cause
- ❖ Refer to the group agreement to share time, respect others, etc.
- ❖ Ask other group members for their opinion.
- ❖ Go back to the original speaker and ask them to re-state their point.

Examples:

- ❖ "It might be better if we heard one point at a time"
- ❖ "I know this is worthwhile, but we haven't heard from John yet"
- ❖ "That's an interesting point you made but I don't think Jane had quite finished yet"
- ❖ "We do have to get back to our main issue"

Constantly Negative

This person always takes the negative approach to life. Nothing is OK and nothing will work. Their negative expressions may be either verbal or non-verbal.

Causes: Has had many disappointments in life, depressed, finds change difficult or threatening, lack of life / job / personal satisfaction, wants sympathy.

What to do:

- ❖ Acknowledge their point of view
- ❖ Ask if he/she can find anything good about the situation

Examples:

- ❖ Empathise and active listen; "It sounds like....."
- ❖ "I hear what you are saying....."
- ❖ Suggest that he/she may have a point but lets ask John what his opinion on the topic is"
- ❖ This is the situation. What can each of us suggest to help with some strategies for this difficult situation?

Expert on Everything

This person seems to have the answers for everything. They are the voice of experience and want to share their knowledge with everyone. They are not offensive but tedious and uninterested in other people's opinions.

Causes: Seeks recognition, needs to be heard, may be very well informed.

What to do:

- ❖ Useful at times but can stifle discussion and take up valuable time.
- ❖ After one or two relevant points, thank them and ask others for their opinion.
- ❖ Encourage the group not to feel inept.

Examples:

- ❖ "This is interesting and it sounds like you have a lot of experience in this area.... I'd be interested to hear what other's think?"
- ❖ "Does anyone have other different thoughts?"
- ❖ "Everyone has different experiences, what about others...."

Antagonistic and Critical

This person can be very tough to deal with. They look for opportunities to disagree, argue and to show up the facilitator or other participants.

Causes: Disagrees with information and concepts, insecure, feels values and opinions are under threat, wants attention.

What to do:

Don't be baited - other members expect patience and professionalism from the facilitator.

- ❖ Try to relieve tension
- ❖ Acknowledge their opinion
- ❖ Call for other points
- ❖ Quote sources of information

Examples:

- ❖ "Anyone care to respond to that...."
- ❖ I hear what you are saying. You believe Can we agree to disagree on this one?
- ❖ We've given this issue considerable attention. We really need to move on to something else.

Silent, Shy or Reluctant to Participate

This person keeps to themselves and never or rarely participates in group discussion.

Causes: Prefers to listen, naturally quiet, feels inadequate, not used to groups, feel they have nothing to contribute, trouble formulating ideas, shy, bored, cultural factors.

What to do:

Encourage participation by:

- ❖ Valuing their contributions (nodding and smiling etc.,)
- ❖ Asking easy and open questions.
- ❖ Building on their contribution.
- ❖ Talking to them privately at another time to find out the problem.
- ❖ Socialising with them at the break and introducing them to other members.

Talking off the Subject

This person often takes a thought and runs with it - right off the topic. The information may be interesting but usually has nothing to do with the subject being discussed.

Causes: Misses the point, distracted by problems or worries, not interested in the topic being discussed, poor social skills, attention seeking, bored, thinking ahead of the group.

Examples:

- ❖ "Interesting, but can we bring it closer to the topic under discussion at the moment?"
- ❖ "Can we keep that idea until a little later?"
- ❖ "We seem to have gotten off the track"

A Group Member Leaves the Room Upset

What to do:

If there are two facilitators, one of them can follow the person outside, discuss the issue and ask them back to the group.

If there's only one facilitator ask one of the other members, preferably someone who is a long standing member to take over the group while you go out of the room to check on the person who has left the room.

Make them feel as comfortable as possible when they return to the group. Sometimes they might feel embarrassed about returning to the group.

Two Members Become Angry and Heated with One Another

What to do: Remind people of the group guidelines

- ❖ Acknowledge that everyone has different opinions but that it's not OK to shout and put down other members in the group.
- ❖ As the facilitator speak calmly and quietly to diffuse the situation.

Example:

"Keith and Jane, you both obviously have very strong feelings about this topic, however, can we please discuss it more softly and calmly?"

Talk of Suicide

Probably the most difficult situation a group will encounter is trying to assist a member who is struggling with thoughts and feelings about suicide. If you are concerned that someone in the group is considering suicide or some other life threatening behaviour, the strategies below may help the individual and the group get through the crisis.

What to do:

- ❖ Don't ignore it.
- ❖ Acknowledge the person's feelings. Express concern.
- ❖ Rally the Support of the Group.
- ❖ Take the person aside. Ask someone else to continue the running of the group.
- ❖ Have a list of emergency or suicide contact numbers
- ❖ Ask the person whether they have a specific plan.
- ❖ Get help. Don't try to handle it alone. Try to identify trusted people (i.e., ask the person who they trust, perhaps a family member, friend or health professional). Offer to contact that person.
- ❖ Do not leave the person alone until you're sure that he/she is in the hands of another responsible person.

- ❖ If they don't want anyone, explain your concern and that you will have to contact the mental health crisis team or another professional or phone for an ambulance.

When dealing with emotional situations that happen in groups, particularly a crisis or talk of suicide, don't forget that this also impacts on other members in the group. Make sure that some time is set aside to talk about members feelings in relation to the incident and let them know what action was taken to handle a person's distress or crisis.

Crisis situations can be stressful and upsetting for the facilitator. Make sure you **"look after yourself"** and debrief with someone about the incident. (In debriefing remember to respect the right to confidentiality of the person involved, be careful not to mention names or any other identifying information when talking about the incident.)



Waning Group, Energy, Interest or Motivation

There are many reasons why a group might start to lose motivation, including; the content becoming less interesting or relevant for the whole group, the time of day, environmental conditions such as heating or background noise, or some of the difficult individuals in a group.

Lack of motivation or interest by group members will likely result in:

- ❖ Low attendance.
- ❖ Less feeling, passion or energy.
- ❖ Members starting to draw back physically, including lying back in seats, turning away, staring off, or focusing outside the group.

What to do:

- ❖ Ask the group what's going on.
- ❖ Does the group want anything changed?
- ❖ Do something different - e.g. organise a guest speaker.

OFFICE PAPERWORK

What happens at the end of each meeting?

1. Monthly Support Group Attendance Form

This form is to be completed each month by the leader and sent to the Anxiety Disorders Co-ordinator. The form can be scanned and emailed or sent in the post to the Support Group Co-ordinator. The total figure for group should reflect everyone who was present. Members, facilitators, friends, family and observer are all included in the total attendance.

2. Anxiety Support Group Evaluation Form

The attached evaluation forms are to be completed at the conclusion of each meeting by members. The facilitator will distribute the appropriate evaluation to members. At the conclusion of the meeting the evaluations are scanned and emailed or sent in the post to the Support Group Co-ordinator.

All members are encouraged to fill out the evaluation forms. It is important that members understand the evaluation forms are used to secure funding for the support groups. The evaluation forms also assist the Support Group Co-ordinator to receive feedback from the members. These forms are optional so members do not have to complete it if they do not want to.

3. Keeping a Record of Attendance

The Attendance spreadsheet is to be completed by the facilitator at the Support Group Meeting. The spreadsheet is to be forwarded to Support Group Co-ordinator at the end of June each year.

The record of attendance is used by WayAhead to record the number of people who return to the support group and the duration they attend the support group.

Anxiety Support Group Evaluation

Your feedback is greatly appreciated and is used to better plan WayAhead's future activities and to secure the funding that allows us to continue to operate these groups free of charge.

1 **What is your gender?** _____

2 **Which types of anxiety are you experiencing?** (eg. agoraphobia, obsessive compulsive disorder, etc)

3 **How did you hear about this support group?**
 WayAhead website Facebook Doctor / health worker
 Word of mouth Newspaper Other? _____

4 **What were your purposes for attending today's support group and were they achieved?**

	Yes	No	Partly
<input type="checkbox"/> To learn more about anxiety disorders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> To learn coping strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> To interact with people who understand what I am going through	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5 **How long have you been attending this support group?**
 First time 2 to 3 months 4 to 12 months More than 1 year

6 **How would you rate your anxiety levels prior to attending this group for the first time?**
 (please circle a number on the scale)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(Mild)		(Moderate)		(Severe)		(Very Severe)		(Incapacitating)	

7 **How would you rate your anxiety levels now?** (please circle a number on the scale)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(Mild)		(Moderate)		(Severe)		(Very Severe)		(Incapacitating)	

8 **Do you intend to return to this support group?** Yes No

9 **Do you have any comments regarding this support group or suggestions for improvements?**

10 **Please leave your name and contact details (phone number or email address) if you would be happy to be contacted to further assist with our evaluation processes.**

(WayAhead respects your privacy. No personal identifying information will be shared outside of the support group program.)

Anxiety Support Group Evaluation

Your feedback is greatly appreciated and is used to better plan WayAhead's future activities and to secure the funding that allows us to continue to operate these groups free of charge.

1 What is your gender? _____

2 What is your relation to the person experiencing anxiety? _____

3 Did this person attend today's support group? Yes No

4 Which types of anxiety is this person experiencing? (eg. agoraphobia, obsessive compulsive disorder, etc)

5 How did you hear about this support group?
 WayAhead website Facebook Doctor / health worker
 Word of mouth Newspaper Other? _____

6 What were your purposes for attending today's support group and were they achieved?

	Yes	No	Partly
<input type="checkbox"/> To learn more about anxiety disorders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> To get advice on how to respond to a person with anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> To interact with people who understand the impacts of anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> To enable someone with anxiety to attend the support group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7 How long have you been attending this support group?
 First time 2 to 3 months 4 to 12 months More than 1 year

8 Do you intend to return to this support group? Yes No

9 Do you have any comments regarding this support group or suggestions for improvements?

10 Please leave your name and contact details (phone number or email address) if you would be happy to be contacted to further assist with our evaluation processes.

(WayAhead respects your privacy. No personal identifying information will be shared outside of the support group program.)



WayAhead is an ACNC registered Australian Charity and is endorsed by the Quality Improvement Council.



Keeping Attendees Details

A notebook is handy for keeping attendees details. If attendees to the group give permission, their details can be kept, one person per page. Their name, phone number, email address and a contact name and phone number in case of an emergency.

The email address can be used to email members to remind them about the next meeting. This reminder may increase the attendance at groups.

Hopefully the reminder will make them feel like they are part of the group and will be more inclined to come back again.

Directory

Of

Services

Emergency Numbers

Ambulance / Police 000

Lifeline 13 11 14

24/7 Mental Health Line 1800 011 511

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

WayAhead Mental Health Association NSW Inc..
Level 5, 80 William Street,
East Sydney NSW 2011

Phone: 9339 6000
Email: info@wayahead.org.au
Web: www.wayahead.org.au

One Door Mental Health
Building 36, Digby Rd
Gladesville NSW 2111

Phone: 02 9879 2600
Email: admin@onedoor.org.au
Web: www.onedoor.org.au

Club SPERANZA (Australian Mental Health Suicide Consumer
Alliance Inc.) PO Box 96
Neutral Bay NSW 2089

Phone: 02 9908 1233
Email: speranza@bigpond.com

Alcohol & Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Phone: 9361 8000
Toll free: 1800 422 599
Web: www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au

Al-Anon Information Service

Phone: 1300 252 666

Disability Council of NSW
Locked Bag 4028,
Ashfield, NSW, 2131

Phone: 02 8879 9100

Email: DisabilityCouncil@facs.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.disabilitycouncil.nsw.gov.au

Law Access NSW

Phone: 1300 888 529

Law Society of NSW Community Referral Service

Phone: 02 9926 0300, 1800 422 713 (outside Sydney)

Mental Health Council of Australia
PO Box 164
Deakin West ACT 2600

Phone: 02 6285 3100

Being
Level 5 80 William Street,
East Sydney NSW 2011

Phone: 02 9332 0200

Email: info@being.org.au

Anxiety Disorders Support Groups

Level 5

80 William Street, East Sydney NSW 2011

Phone: 9339 6013

Fax: 9339 6066

Email: Rachel.Flint@wayahead.org.au

Small Steps

Anxiety Awareness Program in Schools

Level 5

80 William Street, East Sydney NSW 2011

Phone: 9339 6003

Fax: 9339 6066

Email: Julie.Leitch@wayahead.org.au

Website: www.understandinganxiety.org.au

Information in this manual has been adapted from the O C & Anxiety Disorders Foundation of Victoria Inc. and the Support Group Survival Kit; Mental Health Association of NSW Inc. by Julie Leitch for the use of Anxiety Disorders Support Groups.

