

A GUIDE TO FACILITATING AN ONCOLOGY SUPPORT GROUP



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THE FIRST GROUP

The first support group is a great way to set the tone for future groups. You can use the discussions to create ideas to incorporate the hopes and requests of the attendees into future groups.

You can start the group by introducing yourself and a bit about your background. You also may want to set some **“group rules”** including things like everything shared in the group is **confidential**, especially because medical information will be shared, members will speak to each other with **respect**, and **one person** speaks at a time. Ask the members to add any rules that would make them feel more comfortable.

Next, request the group members **introduce themselves** to one another, including name, diagnosis, their reasons for joining the group, and maybe a fun icebreaker. Make sure you stress that the **members can share as little or as much** as they want in the group and sharing is optional.

Ask members what they are hoping to get out of the group, if they may be interested in **guest speakers or psycho-educational components** of future groups, what topics and areas of discussion would they like to receive advice about. Knowing this information will help you create topics for future groups.

Let the topics members discuss guide the discussion. Remember to **validate** feelings, guide conversation with **open-ended questions**, and **open the discussion** up to other members.

ON-GOING GROUPS

You can use the information gathered in the first group to create questions to discuss, common areas of anxiety voiced by members, or arrange for guest speaker or fun events, such as guided meditations or music therapies.

It is good practice to have a topic of discussion in mind and open-ended questions ready to ask the group. Otherwise, members often will bring up things they would like to discuss in group.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Common challenges in oncology support groups include members sharing a lot of about their **negative experiences** with their diagnosis and treatment process, which can sometimes be scary for other members. While the groups are a welcoming place for members to share their experiences and get support, be mindful of the other members and how anything said may be affecting them, and then explore further.

Some members may be **very emotional** during group due to the sensitive nature of information being discussed. Make sure to validate and explore their feelings while opening the discussion to other members to share their support and experiences.

Other members may have a lot to share during group and **dominate** the group discussion. Make sure to **gently intervene** and **open the discussion** to other group members to participate.