

STARTING AN ONCOLOGY SUPPORT GROUP

Support groups are a great way to connect those impacted by cancer with others who truly understand the experience, but first an oncology social worker needs to develop the group.



ASSESS THE NEED

First, you need to assess the needs of the patients you are working with to determine what type of support group may be needed. There are many different types of support groups for people impacted by cancer and you need to evaluate what type of group may help the most people.

In a smaller cancer center or if you are the only social worker, it may be best to start with one general cancer support group to address the needs of the most people and expand on the group options the more experiences and comfortable you get.

CONSIDER THE DETAILS

You need to consider the logistics of the support group. Will it be virtual or in-person? Will it be a closed group or open to people outside of your treatment center? Will the group have an end date (i.e. run for 6 weeks) or be open-ended and on-going?

RECRUIT MEMBERS

Once you have decided on the type of group and logistics, you will need to recruit members to participate in the group. You can advertise it throughout your treatment center with flyers, especially at the registration or check-in area. Make sure you tell the other staff in the cancer center the group will be starting so they can spread the word to patients. You also could also reach out to specific patients who fit the group topic and invite them to attend.

COMMON CHALLENGES WITH STARTING A SUPPORT GROUP

People sometimes are **hesitant** to join a group because they don't know what to expect, or sometimes it feels very **vulnerable** to join a group. Assure the possible participants the group is a welcoming place to discuss both struggles and successes and encourage the person to try at least one group - they probably will enjoy it and want to return!

Sometimes groups can be **slow-growing**, meaning the first few groups may have a smaller number of attendees until hopefully the group grows and more people start to attend. Don't be discouraged if it takes some time for word to get out about the group and for more people to attend.

You may find it is difficult to find the **space** to run the support group depending on availability in your treatment center. Alternatively, if you opt to run a virtual group, attendees may have a difficult time **navigating the technology** to attend the group.