

Support groups

There are many different ways to run a support group. One of the problems is getting people to come. Just as we teach our children to accept help we need to accept help also. Some of the most successful groups that I have been part of have been ones which provide food (which can be potluck) and childcare.

One of my favorite models for a support group is when the parents get together:

- introductions–if necessary
- each time you meet mention about confidentiality and the importance of it
- asking if anyone has any crisis or particular issues they would like to talk about
- ask if anyone has needs, the group can brainstorm about services available and ideas
- have a short teaching available (if there is time–there normally is)
- you can invite guests speakers (such as: service providers, judges/lawyers, social workers, specialists, etc.)

I've been asked why would anyone want to be part of a support group

- it is an opportunity to meet with “people who understand”
- there are often ideas thrown out which will either help you now or in the future
- it is a chance to help others
- for parents with older children, it is often an opportunity to draw upon their past experiences to help families with younger children
- for parents with younger children, sometimes it is a glimpse into their own future as parents with older children talk
- just being with other adults
- at support groups I have seen deep friendships formed, families reaching out to other families, the children of families becoming friends, and families using one another for respite

Different types of groups

- parents
- young adults or adults who have fetal alcohol
- service providers who work with persons who have fetal alcohol (I have never heard of this but it sounds great)

Leaders need to be aware

- sometimes the neediness of a particular parent will dominate a meeting. At times that's okay, but you need to make sure others needs are met also
- you can offer to meet one-on-one with people either after the meeting or at another time
- try to start on time (eating at the beginning is one way to allow people extra time to get there)

- if things are going well and it's time for the meeting to end remind people of the time, invite them to stay a little later if they want to, but make sure people know what time it is for those who need to leave
- tell people about available trainings—it can be good if people can go to a training together
- invite people to not only laugh together but to also cry together
- make follow-up phone calls when people are struggling
- encourage the group to talk about services that they have either used or are still using
- try to keep the group from becoming too negative—sometimes this can be a battle
- remember an important role of the support group may be helping families get services and telling them about resources

Some possible teachings to use

- HaysKids has many on our website—you can use a short teaching or even a chapter or section from a longer teaching
- be sure to use teachings on relationship parenting
- use teachings from other sources also. It will make your group more well rounded.

If we can be of help please contact us.

John