Outline for Starting a Caregiver Support Group

Starting a Caregiver Support Group

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Tab 1: Possible Form/Format for Support Groups

6-8 week group

- Meets weekly for the designated number of weeks
- Uses a particular curriculum (i.e caregiver-support-training-manual.pdf (slu.edu)) **OR**
- Facilitator(s) create your own (link to "topics")
  Note: Each group is unique, so feel free to do a combination of established curricula and individual topic choices
- Utilizes a closing ritual at the end of the 6-8 weeks (sample attached)

Ongoing support Group

- Meets weekly or every other week. (Once a month is a bit too far apart for cohesiveness and trust to build.)
- Less structured planning – After initial meeting, choose the topics as the group needs come to light
- Good to still get guest speakers to come based on the group's need at a certain time.

Suggested General Guidelines

- Set up group "rules" at the first session. Group can decide on them together but should definitely include confidentiality, not giving advice in the form of "you should," not assuming you know someone else's situation or way of handling things.
- Start each group with something inspirational such as a prayer, poem, meditation, etc. (link)
- Use speakers for some of the topics who are experts in that area
- Always allow time for caregivers to share any urgent situations/needs
- Groups should be 60-90 minutes. Beyond that is too taxing.
- Limit group to around 8 people. If more start coming, consider breaking out into a 2nd group.

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Tab 2: Suggested Topics for Caregiver Support Groups

- What is Dementia?
    - Short Definition
    - Dementia Facts
    - Dementia Vs. Normal Aging
    - Dementia Vs. Alzheimer's Disease
    - What is happening?

- Compassionate Communication
    - Define Compassionate Communication
    - Forms of Communication
    - Truth vs. Therapeutic Stories
    - Effective Approaches

- Care Giving Strategies
    - Validation
    - Redirection
    - Self-Care
        - Support Systems
    - Activities
    - Medications
    - Spiritual Needs

- Legal Considerations
    - DNR-Advance Directives
        - Power of Attorney
            - Health
            - Financial
            -

- Medicaid/ Medicaid

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Housing and Health Support Options

- Home Health
- Hospice
- Adult Day Care
- Independent Living
- Assisted Living
- Memory Care
- Skilled Nursing Care

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Tab 3: Facilitator Suggestions

You do not have to be an expert to facilitate a support group. There are resources below, but here are a couple things that are good to remember:

- You do not have to have all the answers!
- Having 2 facilitators can be helpful, but not necessary.
- You DO need to be a patient listener because…
- You are the one who assesses the needs of those in the group and brings in subject matter experts on the topics that are either in the curriculum you choose or needed at a particular time.
- You will choose the format of the group OR you can have the first meeting and let the group decide the type of format.
- You will help the group set rules at the beginning to include confidentiality and avoiding giving advice. (No “you should”s.)
- You will lead the group discussion, beginning each session (perhaps with something spiritual in nature) and ending each session by wrapping up the conversation (perhaps with prayer) ON TIME. People can have a tendency to talk beyond the time limit of the group. Sixty to 90 minutes is about all we can emotionally handle at one time. You could offer your group members to continue the conversation after the official close of the group or at the next group session.
- You will be tuned in to what the group members are saying and not saying.
- You will need to redirect a caregiver (gracefully or not) who is dominating the conversation. Saying things such as, “That’s important John. Let’s see what someone else thinks about that.”

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Tab 4: Additional Resources/Links

Other Resources for Starting a Caregiver Support Group

Dementia Support Group Facilitators Toolkit Project|National Institute on Aging (nih.gov)

Starting and Running A Caregiver Support Group - Caregiver.com

Family Caregiver Support Group Toolkit (gwaar.org)

Video Resources for Facilitators to Show and Share with Caregivers (Daily, practical hacks/help)

Be Light Care Consulting - YouTube and on Instagram

Dementia Careblazers - YouTube and on Instagram

The Best Friends Approach To Alzheimer's and Dementia Care By Virginia Bell and David Troxel

These books are also an excellent resource for congregations offering support to members who are caring for people with Alzheimer's and dementia. Their website is www.bestfriendsapproach.com They have books, activity guides, resources, virtual training sessions.

Alzheimer's Association **www.alz.org**

The Alzheimer's Association has excellent resources and videos on their website. When you enter your zip code they will send you to the local Alzheimer's chapter office and support groups.

www.ElderCare.gov This website will help you find the local Area Agency on Aging in your state.

Understanding Your Grief Series by Alan Wolfelt

This series has a support group guide for the leader. Each participant receives the Understanding Your Grief book and Journal. There are 10 Touchstones for healing which are also the themes for each meeting.

The Group Guide explains how to get a group started and how to keep it running smoothly once it's underway. It includes the group leader's role and responsibilities in detail, including communication skills, trust building, handling problems and more.

The Guide includes twelve meeting plans that interface with Understanding Your Grief and The Understanding Your Grief Journal. Each week group members read a chapter

in the main text, complete a chapter in the journal, and come to group ready to be lead through the exploration of the content.

The Bereavement Support Group Start-Up Package contains 2 copies of The Understanding Your Grief Support Group Guide and 10 copies of Understanding Your Grief and The Understanding Your Grief Journal for $270 ordering from www.centerforloss.com

Other support group sets offered by The Center for Loss are:

Suicide Grief Support Group

Divorce Support Group

Dementia Support Group