

## Tips for a Successful First Group Meeting



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*A first group meeting is similar to a first date; everyone is unsure and nervous, including you!*

—Jennifer Poole

*Here are some tips for organizing your first group meeting...*

### Before the meeting:

1. *Meet with a planning group of several people* to discuss the **possible** purpose and goals to begin the discussion at the first public meeting.
2. *Establish the roles and tasks* of each planning group member in preparation for the first group meeting.
3. *Prepare a Preliminary Agenda.* What will you aim to discuss and establish in the first public group meeting?
4. Prepare a **tentative Confidentiality Agreement**, either written or verbal.
5. *Publicize* through word of mouth, post flyers in the areas that are frequented by those who share your concerns (i.e. chat rooms, doctors' offices, etc.).

### During the Meeting:

1. *Welcome People!* Have someone greet new members to create a friendly environment.
2. *Ice Breakers.* Do a quick introductory activity—name, where from, etc.
3. *Introduce yourself* (Core group members) Share your experience and explain what led you to start this group.
4. *Get to know new attendees.* Give them an opportunity to introduce themselves and briefly tell their story (if they wish).
5. *Present the possible purpose and goals* of the group and get feedback from those attending.
6. If possible, have *refreshments* available at the break to create a warm atmosphere in which people can get to know each informally.



*“During the meeting” continued...*

7. *Follow the Agenda.* Ensure that the meeting starts and ends at the agreed upon time. However, allow for some flexibility to encourage members to talk freely.

### **Ending the Meeting:**

1. Decide the time and place for the next meeting.
2. Have a sign-up sheet for tasks that need accomplishing in preparation for the next group meeting.
3. Thank everyone for coming!

### ***What about the organization and structure of the group?***

*There is no need to talk about organization and structure at the first meeting; that can be saved for future meetings. Dealing with these issues can be burdensome and overwhelming as people come together for the first time. Use this initial meeting to get to know one another, establish connections and begin building relationships.*

### **Things you may need for your first meeting:**

- ✓ Name Tags
- ✓ Attendance List
- ✓ Flip Charts
- ✓ Pens, Markers
- ✓ An Agenda
- ✓ A Group Task Sign-up Sheet

#### References:

Self-Help Network of Kansas. (n.d.). *You can do it! Building and strengthening your self-help group: Handbook.* WichitaState, KS.

Lupus Canada. (2008). *Lupus Canada: Peer support group tool kit.* Markham, ON.

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Ontario Self-Help Network. (2006). Making self-help/mutual aid work: The resource kit.

Picture:

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