

Support Group Policy



Purpose:

Share support groups are intended to provide a safe place for grieving parents to receive resources and support from their peers and from a trained facilitator. Creating a safe group environment for families to share their thoughts and emotions while promoting healthy and healing approaches, is the responsibility of the group facilitator. Share group meetings are not counseling sessions, but rather peer support groups. Share group facilitators are not counselors; many are those who share the personal experience of the loss of their baby and the integration of the loss into their lives. All facilitators have received Share training to equip them in the skills and understanding of the compassionate care needed in bereavement support.

Share support groups are established and maintained on evidenced based research and practice. See the *Share Chapter Manual* for more information.

Process:

It is the recommendation of Share that each group should have two facilitators. This allows for different approaches, styles, debriefing and can enhance problem solving and the overall safety of the group. Prior to the meeting, it is determined who will “lead” and who will co-facilitate. Timeframes are provided as benchmarks with the understanding that this can serve as a guide to the group. However, the overall timeframe and flow of the meeting needs to be managed by the facilitators. Each segment of the meeting flow is flexible and can be adjusted in accordance with the needs of the participants and the course of the discussion. Being conscientious of the timeframe will help to maximize the outcomes for attendees. At least 30 minutes is allotted at the end of each meeting as a time to decompress, engage in casual conversations with facilitators and participants, and enjoy refreshments.

- Facilitator and Co-facilitator arrive approximately 30 minutes prior to meeting start time.
 - Discuss and affirm roles of facilitation
 - Assure the room is clean and set up with adequate seating
 - Name tags, Kleenex, pens and paper are available
- Paperwork is present, such as: Sign in sheets, New Parent Information intake forms, and Ground Rules
- Any handouts should be made in advance and ready for the start of the meeting
- Refreshments are prepared in advance to ease in the convenience of the meeting
- Facilitators welcome and greet all arriving attendees

- Facilitators confirm that all attendees have signed in and all new attendees complete a New Parent Information form
- At the start of the meeting the group facilitator thanks everyone for coming and reads the meeting ground rules
 - Ground rules lay the foundation for a safe environment
 - Ground rules should be read at each meeting or addressed as new group members join
 - The facilitators assure compliance of the ground rules throughout the meeting
- The facilitators briefly introduce themselves and welcome others to briefly introduce themselves
 - Sharing of individual stories is encouraged but it is made clear that you do not have to share your story if you are not ready to do so
 - Verbalizing the need for a brief introduction is important as with larger groups or dominating personalities this small portion of the meeting can become very time consuming
- The practice of passing a stone or other object can be utilized to aid in communication and sharing
 - This practice can be effective for: introductions, sharing of personal stories, commenting on current topics, or reflection
 - Holding the item shows an individual's readiness to talk or to 'pass' on the item showing they wish to defer from talking at that time
- After introductions the facilitators will thank those present for attending and gives an overview of the meetings topic/focus or presentation
 - Identifying the topic can help attendees tune-in and focus
 - Topics are not required, a 'pop up' style of sharing can be utilized
 - Attendees obtain a sense of safety in knowing the routine of the meeting
- The facilitators may need to consider any additional topics that may need to be discussed as any concerns are brought up during introductions
 - Reflection following introductions can be a good manner in which to relax the group and bring the focus back to the group as a whole
- Discussion is open and guided/moderated by the facilitators according to the described ground rules
- After 90 minutes of discussion (or meeting close) the facilitator reflects back and summarizes on the topic and discussions
 - The facilitator thanks everyone for their discussion and sharing and encourages everyone to continue with conversations over refreshments
 - Facilitators continue to assure a safe environment by mingling among participants, prompting introductions and monitoring conversations as much as possible

- Attendees should be encouraged to ‘take the helpful comments, information, and connections’ but to ‘leave the stress and what they don’t need’
- At the scheduled end of the meeting, the facilitators thank everyone for attending, sharing their time and their stories with one another
 - A closing ritual can be used but should occur before refreshments
- Facilitators confirm with attendees the best manner in which to follow up in between meetings
 - Ongoing support and aftercare is made in both an intentional and compassionate manner
 - Refer to the *Aftercare Support Policy* for recommended practice and guidelines
- A policy or practice is required in the event of an emergency or need for referral
 - A list of local professional counselors and therapists, Suicide Hotlines, Behavioral Health hotlines are available
 - If a participant indicates they are at risk to harm themselves refer to the *Referral Policy*
- After all participants are gone the facilitators can discuss any concerns, determine who will follow up with each attendee, and distribute all paperwork to the appropriate places
 - Sign in sheets and parent intake forms all kept for monthly statistics
- Evaluation of the group needs to be ongoing
 - Monitoring and tracking attendance: number of attendees and how often individuals attend
 - Surveying of group participants

These facilitation methodologies are not mandates, but options for managing the allotted timeframe effectively. Share support groups have followed an open style; no planned ending sessions or timeframe is dictated. Registration is not required but first time attendees are required to fill out a New Parent Intake form. If the facilitator is aware that someone will be attending for the first time he/she can offer to arrive early to meet with them.

Facilitators are encouraged to debrief with each other following the meeting. Just as the attendees can be overwhelmed, so can the facilitators. The goal of our support groups is not for parents to fully resolve their grief, but to help them learn how to live with their loss while maintaining the memories and their love of their babies.

Refer to the *Share Chapter Manual* for additional information on: types of support groups, facilitation, promotion, challenging situations, and sustainability.