



Adventist-Nurture

Church-Based Peer Support & Nurture Groups



Seventh-day Adventist Church
Southern Africa Union Conference

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Preface

The felt needs of church members and members of our communities are numerous and varied. Our attempts by the local church family ministries department to minister to all these felt needs usually fall flat. This is because we do not always have the requisite professional skills and we do not have the time to do so because ours is not the only ministry or department in the church. We have tried to minister to a few of these needs through education in the form of weeks of prayer, emphasis days, seminars, workshops, conferences and retreats. At the 2019 SAU Family Ministries Advisory the following action was voted that created Adventist-Nurture: Local Church-based Peer Support and Nurture Groups:

2019-04 Adventist-Nurture: Church-based Peer Support and Nurture Groups

Whereas, the felt needs of local church members are varied and cannot all be addressed on the days set aside for family ministries in the church calendar.

Whereas, the family ministries department seeks to minister to all felt needs.

Whereas, support groups offer an opportunity for people who are experiencing the same challenge to minister to and encourage one another.

VOTED to adopt 'Adventist-Nurture: Church-based Peer Support and Nurture Groups' as the Southern Africa Union (SAU) Family Ministries Department strategy for meeting felt needs.

FURTHER VOTED that the SAU will develop a resource for Adventist-Nurture that will be used to roll out the support groups in 2020.

Support and nurture groups are not new, both to the world and to the church. They have been tremendously helpful to people who have experienced hardships. This handbook is not an exhaustive resource of support groups, but a resource that helps you set up and run support groups in the local church through the Family Ministries department.

Adventist-Nurture groups are to be formed by and for people who are or have gone through a certain experience. In rare occasions an interested person or group could initiate an Adventist-Nurture group. We have intentionally decided not to list the Adventist-Nurture groups that can be formed but left that to each local church as the need arises.

In this handbook you will find information on how to start and facilitate an Adventist-Nurture group. We have included examples of how the process can unfold. The examples are not meant to be exhaustive but merely give an idea of what that section is talking about. It is meant to be an easy to understand and easy to use handbook for the local church family ministries leaders. It will be revised over time by the SAU Family Ministries Advisory to make it better than what it is now. We hope that this will be helpful to you as you minister to God's people.

Thank you

Mandla Luyondwana

SAU Family Ministries Director

Theology of Support and Nurture Groups

Introduction

"God is Love." (1 John 4:8, 16) Even as we experience pain and suffering and observe helplessly as our loved ones go through pain and suffering, we hold on to the knowledge that God is love. The ministry of support and nurture groups is a ministry of presence and solidarity. When the Word of God became flesh (John 1:14) in the person of Jesus Christ and dwelt among us, God joined us in our experience of temptation, pain and suffering (Hebrews 4:15; Isaiah 53:3) - presence. He knows and understands our tears because He has had His heart broken and wept (John 11:35). God sees our sorrows (Gen 16:13), draws us close in our broken heartedness (Psalm 35:18) and lets us know we are not alone - solidarity. Having been loved into God's family (1 John 3:1), we are invited to join God in His ministry to the world. Providing support to one another in our moments of need through support and nurture groups is one way of joining God in ministering to one another.

Created for Ministry

In the book of Ephesians 2:10, Paul states that we were created in Jesus Christ for good works. The capacity to do these good works was built into our design. The creation account details the intention behind the design of human beings. We were created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-28). While we do not yet know the full extent of that image and likeness we do believe that "when Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker" (White, 1903:15). What we have come to know about God through scripture and experience is that He is also a loving, burden bearing, prayer answering God. We have seen God use us and other human beings to love, bear burdens and answer prayers, both in our lives and in the lives of others. We are not to despise the capacity of our presence, listening ear and story to be used by God to minister.

Even though that image of God in humanity has been marred, "every human being created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the creator- individuality, power to think and to do" (White, 1903:17). God has placed in each one of us through creation, redemption and the experiences we have gone through the unique ability to comfort, strengthen and encourage others. Through the telling of our stories we minister to one another.

Redeemed for Ministry

While we were yet sinners God loved us so much that Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). The Holy Spirit works daily to restore the fallen image in us. Now as redeemed children of the Most High we are called to bear one another's burdens because by so doing we fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). In the immediate context Paul is writing about those who have fallen into trespass. In this case the burden might be getting out of the sin or even dealing with the consequence of the sin. Beyond the immediate context, the burdens might include:

- consequences of our bad choices,
- consequences of other people's bad choices that are affecting us,
- tragedies that were beyond our control and not really of anyone's doing.

The law of Christ which is the law of love, is fulfilled when we carry one another's burdens. It may not be food, clothing, water or a visit but your presence, a listening ear, sharing your story or a word of encouragement and hope. This is how they will know that we are His disciples if we love one another (John 13:35).

In ministering to one another, Peter prays that we might have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind (1 Peter 3:8). This ministry might include rejoicing with those who are rejoicing, and mourning with those who are mourning.

What the Ministry of Support Is Not

1. Entitlement that others should carry your burdens. Whenever we read the bible God hardly tells us what we should get from others but rather what you should give. Husbands, wives, children, masters, believers are told what to do for other and never really what they should expect from others. We are only told what we are to expect from God. When we read passages where God is telling our fellow believers, spouses, children, employees and employers how to treat us, we eavesdrop on God's conversation with them. Ours is to focus on what we are called to do.

2. License to trespass or be reckless because the brethren will bear your burden. (Jude 1:4)

3. License to operate beyond your abilities. It is important that we carry what we can. If we do not have the technical skills to provide counseling and therapy, we are to refer people to the professionals who do. The scriptures liken the church to

the body that has different parts with different functions. The support we are able to provide as people who are going through something or have experience in a particular area is different from the support technical professionals will provide in the same area. Ours is to offer what we can and let others do what they can. We would not want to do more harm than good when our intentions were to help.

4. Opportunities to be seen and praised by the world. If so, then the praise is your reward. (Mt 6:1)

The Nature of the Support and Nurture Group Ministry

1. Presence: All that this requires is for you to be there. You do not need something to say or something to do, your presence is what you offer. When someone is going through an ordeal, your presence alone can comfort. Your presence in an Adventist-Nurture meeting is ministry in itself, whether you say something or not.

2. Listening without condemnation: All this requires is that you listen and be seen to be listening. It affords the other person an opportunity to share their story in a safe environment which in itself is healing. Paying attention to the other person as they speak communicates that they matter and their story matters. All this we are able to communicate without saying a word.

3. Pray with and for: In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus needed people to pray with Him and Paul asked believers to pray for him. What this illustrates is that we are not above being prayed for and prayed with. At the appropriate time and place, praying for someone can be a very effective ministry. Praying for them in your personal devotion (not public prayer) can also be an effective form of ministry. Doing so in your private devotion allows you to maintain confidentiality.

4. Sharing your own story: The value and power of your own story lies in the fact that it is authentic. It does not need to be decorated with exaggeration or untruths because as it is, it has the capacity to minister to someone. It says to the other person, "you are not alone." It gives hope that there is life beyond what I am going through, I too can make it. This is the value of testimonies. People sharing with other people what God has done for them. God has designed us in such a way that we are encouraged, strengthened and motivated by other people's stories. Let your story be part of your ministry.

What is a Support Group?

A support group is a group of people who gather to share common problems and life experiences associated with a problem, condition or personal circumstance.¹ For example, this could be parents of children who are using substances forming a group to talk about the challenges they face and their feelings; widows or divorced individuals or HIV-positive people forming respective groups to discuss their feelings and challenges; or caregivers who have children who have downs' syndrome form a support group to discuss the challenges and insights of raising their children.

The support group affords the affected individuals an opportunity to speak to people who are going through a similar experience as themselves², who would truly understand what they are going through and will be able to share practical insights that come from first-hand experience.

"Support groups enable members to learn that other people struggle with the same problems, feel similar emotions, and think similar thoughts."

(Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:14)

The primary objectives of a support group is to share experiences and insights into a commonly shared stressful life event, and offer guidance to one another that will enable members to revive their capability to cope, in order for them to manage and adapt to the current life event and be able to cope with stressful life events that may arise in the future.³

The church is a great source of support for people who need it. The formation and organization of support groups can minister to its members, and the wider community of the church in a practical way.

¹ Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:14

² Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:15

³ Toseland & Rivas, 2012:20

1. Characteristics of Support Groups

Typical characteristics of a support group include:

- The group is made up of individuals who are all directly affected by an issue or life event¹.
- There is a professional(s) or volunteer(s) who are the discussion leaders or facilitator².
- The group is often fairly small in size, to allow everyone an opportunity to talk and share their experience. "The group should be small enough to allow it to accomplish its purpose, yet large enough to permit members to have a satisfying experience" (Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p. 176).

Therefore, we recommend a maximum of 12 group members. When the number exceeds 12, split the group.

- Importantly, attendance of the support group is voluntary and should not be coerced³.

2. Benefits of Support Groups

- Support groups are known to assist people with a problem to feel less alone and more understood⁴.
- Groups also aim to, and often empower people to work to solve their own problems⁵.
- Members of the support group can act as role models for each other. Seeing an individual who is going through the same adversity and making progress is encouraging and inspiring to another person who is experiencing a similar problem⁶.
- Support groups are SAFE places for people who need to talk about intense personal issues, experiences, struggles, and thoughts. The safety of the group is upheld through confidentiality and other group elements being upheld⁷.
- In support groups, the members are equals, which can make them feel more comfortable opening up about their problems.
- Support groups generally reduce anxiety, improves self-esteem and assists members' sense of well-being⁸.

1 Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:14

2 Toseland & Rivas, 2012:23

3 Corey, et al., 2010:73.

4 Toseland & Rivas, 2012:23

5 Toseland & Rivas, 2012:23

6 Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:14

7 Toseland & Rivas, 2012:117

8 Toseland & Rivas, 2012:23

3. Who are support groups for?

Almost anyone! Support groups are used to address a variety of concerns, such as:

- Eating disorders
- Sexual Identity questions
- Physical disabilities
- Emotional problems i.e. anger
- Addictions
- Bereavement
- Parenting

Support groups can be for the individual that is directly affected by the particular challenge. Support groups can also be for family members or friends that are affected by someone close to them being affected by a particular challenge¹.

¹ Toseland & Rivas, 2012:20

Preparing to start an Adventist-Nurture Group

1. Do you need a support group?

Support groups to be facilitated by a local church can be identified in three ways:

- The Family Ministries Department of a local church can identify the need for support group(s) through the use of a needs assessment tool(s)¹.
- Another department of the church can identify the need in the church and collaborate with the Family Ministries Department for the development and implementation of the support group(s).
- Individuals of the church could identify the need and seek for the implementation of support groups.

The abovementioned departments or individuals could use tools to identify an issue or challenge within the church and/or the surrounding community that a support group can cater to.

This can be by survey in the church/community; discussion amongst the departmental leaders in the church, etc.

Think of the following question: "What needs do you see in your congregation and community that lead you to believe a support group is necessary?"

Target the planned support group or groups to meet a specific need.

Example 1: In Local Church One, after a need's assessment conducted in the church by the Family Ministries Department, the need for a support group that will offer support for people who are divorced is identified.

Example 2: In Local Church Two, the Women's Ministries Department approaches the Family Ministries Department to discuss the possibility of starting a support group for women in the church, as well as the community, who are currently being abused or have been victims/survivors of abuse.

¹ See Addendum 3 for example of needs assessment tool.

Example 3: A member of Local Church Three believes that a support group is needed that will service the church and the community, for family members and friends of people that are suffering from cancer.

Think about what you want to accomplish

Having a purpose for the group is imperative and the underlying motivation for the group. It's important to establish the group's purpose and who you want the group to reach¹.

2. Who should coordinate the support group?

The support group can be coordinated by:

- The Family Ministries Department
- A collaboration of departments within the local church i.e. Women's Ministries and Family Ministries Departments.
- Individuals that are affected by a particular challenge or have a vested interest in a particular challenge.

Identify a few people that will be interested in running the support group. It's a huge responsibility that cannot be done by just one person.

Example 1: In Local Church One, it was decided that the support group should be facilitated by two Social Workers that are members of the church. One of two is a divorcee as well.

Example 2: In Local Church Two, it was decided that group be facilitated by a nurse and a lay counsellor. Both showed a great interest when the idea of the support group was brought about.

Example 3: In Local Church Three it was decided that the group will be facilitated by one of the church members who has had a few people close to them diagnosed with cancer. The member volunteered to facilitate the group.

¹ Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p. 13

3. Selecting a Group Facilitator

Selecting the right person/people to facilitate the group is vital. You may decide if the group should be run by one person or if it should have co-facilitators. It is not advised for a group to have more than 2 facilitators to assist with cohesion and continuity for the group sessions.

The basic tasks of the facilitator(s):

- Open and close the group meetings.
- Set the tone for the discussion. This has to do with how to approach the sessions/meetings. As a facilitator, do you make the group an area where people can talk and express themselves freely, with no 'shame' being brought upon the person? Or, do you as the facilitator present the group as a space that people cannot speak, and you are the only one speaking?]
- Learn to listen and pay full attention to members when they speak and assist group members learn how to listen and offer support to each other. This includes telling members that they should not speak when others are speaking. Also, when an individual speaks you listen to what they are saying and address their feelings².
- Deal with any problems or conflicts that may arise during the meeting(s). The facilitator may need to use skills such as mediating and negotiating to resolve conflicts that arise³.
- The facilitator would also need to be able to refer members of the group for further assistance, where they deem necessary. Most facilitators would need to understand that they are not qualified counsellors, they are facilitating a group. Therefore, their knowledge and skills would be limited. It would be advised that the facilitator have a list of referrals⁴ that they can use when they deem necessary⁵.

Guidelines for selecting a facilitator(s)

- *Flexible schedule* – they need to have enough time to perform the tasks that will be required of them and commit to every meeting.
- *Lots of energy* – They should have a positive attitude and be able to work afterhours (as the groups will most likely be after work or over weekends).
- *Ability and Experience* – Ideally, the person should have experience in facilitating support groups. However, if no one who fits this description is available, anyone who is willing to learn can do it. They should be responsible, articulate, fair, organized, and able to work well with others.

1 Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:89

2 Corey, et al., 2010:39

3 Toseland & Rivas, 2012:123

4 See example of referrals as Addendum One.

5 Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:241

- *Desire to do the job* – Ideally the facilitator should have an interest in the topic, in other words they are infected by the issue. Or the facilitator has a commitment or desire to help others, in other words they are affected by the issue.

Setting up an Adventist-Nurture group

1. Decide who the support group is for

- Identify the target audience – will the support group only be for people in the church or will you welcome the community members as well? Support groups that are open to the community members are a good way for outreach.
- Make sure you decide with the team exactly who the group will be for. This is important to be decided beforehand, in order to be clear when explaining the group to people and when answering queries.

2. Make the support group official

- The Family Ministries department takes the concept of support groups to the church board and business meeting to have a principle agreement of having support groups in the church.
- The Family Ministries department then sets up support groups as the need arises in consultation with the pastor and elder, based on the different methods of identification named in number 1 of section 2.
- Reporting is done periodically to the church board on the progress of the support groups.

3. Duration of the Adventist-Nurture Group

Groups can be long-standing, where they are continuously running, and members are able to join whenever they have a need. A benefit of this type of group is that it will allow individuals to receive assistance whenever they need it. A disadvantage is that it may become ineffective to people who always attend. It may also be a strain on the facilitator if they have to run the group indefinitely. This type of group may also create an element of dependency for the group members¹.

Groups can also be restricted to a specific period i.e. 12 weeks. This type of group is often run with a specific programme, and it is often more focused, as

¹ Corey, et al., 2010:120

the programme will have a suggested period for the group to operate. This type of group also allows for there to be a break in-between support groups, to allow for a break especially for the facilitator(s).

A disadvantage of this group is that it will often have a cut-off session when people are able to join the group (often people would not be able to join after the second session). This is because the group will have a structured programme, and a person who joins too late would have missed out on the earlier sessions and would not be able to catch up. As a result, an individual who wanted to join a support group after the appointed cut-off time would need to wait for the next group to start in order to join. The duration of the nurture group depends on the purpose of the group, as well if the group will be open or closed - to be discussed in the next section¹.

4. Will it be a Closed or Open group?

Open support groups are groups where new members are welcome to join the group at any stage in the lifespan of the group. An advantage of an open group is that members will interact with a great number of people, as people exit and enter the group periodically. Open support groups also afford people the comfort and knowledge that they can get help whenever they need it and not have to wait for a new group to form. The disadvantage of open groups includes the difficulty of having cohesion and continuity among the group members changing periodically; the difficulty of introducing and orientating new members to a group that is already established; also the group does not evolve through different group stages as the group members are at different stages.

Closed groups often meet for a pre-determined number of sessions. Closed support groups are groups where members are only allowed to join the group at certain times or under particular circumstances. For example, in a closed group, members may not be permitted to join after the second group session. Closed groups will start and end with the same members. Closed groups are more goal-orientated and there is more cohesiveness amongst its members. With the group having the same members throughout its lifespan, it is easier for trust and comfort to be developed. A disadvantage of a closed group is that the group may not end as successfully as envisioned, if group members leave without goals being met².

¹ Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006:82

² Toseland & Rivas, 2012:178; Corey, et al., 2010:120; Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:281

5. Logistics – Time and Place

The time and day the group meets needs to be determined. It is often helpful for this to be decided before the group's first meeting, recognising that it will not be possible to accommodate each person's individual needs if it's left to be determined by the group. Thus, the time for the group to meet can be pre-determined. On the other side, the time for group meeting can be decided by the group in the first meeting of the support group¹.

The place of meeting is also vital². The purpose of the group will assist in this regard. Don't assume that church is the most effective and convenient place for the group to meet. Depending on the nature of the group, meeting at the church premises may deter people who may not want to be known that they are part of the group.

The location should bear the following characteristics, among others:

- Easily accessible to group members
- Somewhere group members will feel comfortable enough to talk about their challenges, without being overheard by people that are not part of the group i.e. support groups should not meet in a restaurant.
- Fit the type of group – often preferred that chairs can be arranged in a circle.
- Availability of amenities – toilets and refreshments.

(Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006:83)

Once the location has been determined, necessary arrangements for its utilisation NEED to be made.

6. Other elements to be decided include?

- How often should the group meet? Weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly?

Weekly and Biweekly are often more effective, as people may forget if it is once a month³.

- How long should the meetings be?

Most groups meet for between one and two hours. The day the group meets may also have a bearing on this .

- Should refreshments be served?

Refreshments help everyone feel at home and encourage members to socialize.

¹ Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006:80

² Corey, et al., 2010:120

³ Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006:80

⁴ Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:280

It's important to consider if you have a budget to sustain the refreshments for the duration of the group, or you can have a method of rotation for group members to bring refreshments.

Facilitating a Support Group

- Tips to the Facilitator

1. Prepare yourself (if applicable)

As a facilitator, it is important to remember that you are guiding the proceedings and discussions of each of the meetings. Also, you are managing the personalities and characteristics of the group members. Therefore, you are helping the group members to be able to communicate positively with each other and to be able to learn from each other. Thus, adequate preparation for each meeting is important to be able to manage time and the content of the discussion¹.

Preparation for the facilitator also includes having an awareness and preparation of their feelings related to a specific topic that will be discussed. For example, if the topic of a particular day is discussing grief, and the facilitator has their own grief they have/are experiencing, the facilitator needs to work through their emotions in order for them not to disrupt them in the process of the group session. This is not to say that a group facilitator should not share experiences from what they have gone through, but the sharing should be prepared as part of the group session and with the purpose of assisting the group members with a particular aspect of the group session².

2. Prepare the room for the meeting

Ensure that you arrive early to arrange the room. It is more effective for group discussions if the chairs are arranged in a circle. This allows everyone to see each other and the facilitator.

Make accommodation if you may have people with special needs in the group i.e. people in wheelchairs.

Make sure session aids, for example handouts, materials for activities, etc. are placed where they will be easily accessible to the facilitator before the session begins. Set up the refreshments, if you will be having any.

¹ Toseland & Rivas, 2012:23

² Nichols & Jenkinson, 2006:60

You, as the facilitator(s), should be there to welcome group members as they arrive. This will lessen the group members anxiety of joining a new group with strangers if there is someone to welcome them with a smile on their face.

(Toseland & Rivas, 2012:183)

3. Encourage group members to listen to each other

This means that you, as the facilitator, should be a good listener, and that you should do what you would like the group members to do. This includes not interrupting people when they are talking; not arguing with people when they share; as well as not cross-talking with people. There are signs that can be given to show the other person that you are listening to them:

- Having an open body language and watching your facial expressions - this could include gestures like not crossing your arms.
- Having eye contact with people when they are talking. That being said, it is also important to be culturally sensitive. For example, in some cultures it may be considered disrespectful to look a person in the eye when you talk to them
- Brief encouraging statements or non-verbal cues ('uh-huh' or 'Mmm-hmm')
- Nodding periodically when a person speaks, to show you are listening.
- Repeating or rephrasing what the person said. This also reflects that you were listening to the other person, and that you received the correct understanding from what they said.

(Toseland & Rivas, 2012:112-113)

4. Encourage group members to speak about themselves

There is a benefit to the individual when they are able to verbalise and speak about issues or challenges that they face. For one, it makes it slightly more real. It also allows the facilitator and the group to respond directly to what an individual may be experiencing. The 'weight' of the challenge is also lessened slightly when an individual is able to verbally express it. Disclosure by the group members affords the opportunity for others to offer support, ideas and assistance.

5. Building Trust

Trust is one of the most important factors in a group and it is important to establish it at the beginning of the group, to build a strong foundation for the duration of the group. Trust needs to be built with the facilitator(s), as well as with the group members¹.

Group members will only be able to share about themselves where the environment has been created that the group is a safe space for people to be able to share their personal experiences.

The facilitator(s) have a huge role to play in the building of trust within the group, as the group members will most likely be taking their cues from the facilitators(s), especially in the initial stages of the group. The facilitator needs to be aware when personal information is shared, so that group members may not feel their experiences are undermined or belittled. Facilitators must guide the discussion when group members share personal information, to encourage safe and respectful discussion in the group. Also, to ensure that a person is not judged based on what they shared².

6. What breaks down trust?

One of the main things that breaks down trust in groups is when confidentiality is broken (confidentiality will be discussed in a later section). When group members share information that was shared in the group, especially if it was personal information, with people that are not part of the group, trust among the group members breaks down and greatly decreases the functionality of the group³.

To try and avoid trust being broken in the group, it will be necessary to remind group members at each session to remember that what is shared in the group should not be discussed with people that are not in the group.

7. Relationships among group members

It is advised that the participants in the same support group do not date, as it has the potential of messing up the dynamics of the group and potentially decrease the trust that group members have in each other. People that are in a support group are often quite vulnerable, thus it would not be advised to start a relationship while in that vulnerable state.

¹ *Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:72-74*

² *Corey, et al., 2010:140-147*

³ *Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:282*

Below are a few advantages and disadvantages of people in the same support group being in a relationship:

An advantage is that the person you are with will most likely not judge you for your past. Thus, it will be easier to share parts of your past and not hide them, as there should not be fear of being judged unfairly. Another advantage includes that your partner will have a greater understanding of the struggles and issues that you have been through.

A disadvantage, though, is that you and/or your partner may not be truly ready to be in a relationship, as either or both partners will still be vulnerable. The feelings experienced may be difficult to differentiate from being real compared to the pleasure of receiving attention from someone else. Even after being in a support group it does not mean that an individual does not have issues to deal with and being in a relationship may complicate the feelings involved, especially if the other partner also has issues to work through.

Another disadvantage includes the awkwardness that would likely result if the relationship does not work out. The benefits that an individual would get from the group would be diminished due to the dynamics between you and the person with whom the relationship failed.

(Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:240) and (Toseland & Rivas, 2012:207)

8. Offer Support

Support is one of the simplest things that can be given in the running of a support group, and one of the main reasons that a group exists. Providing support can give members hope, or just letting them know there is someone that empathizes with what they are going through.

Support can be offered through offering statements that show sympathy and understanding, as well as through body language. It's important to listen to a person's feelings, and to ensure that you address those feelings.

Support can also be identifying if group members need to be referred to certain professionals for further assistance. For example, if a group member may need to receive medical assistance, being able to refer them.

(Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p. 117)

9. Handling Difficult group members

Facilitators of support groups need to learn a delicate combination of control mixed with kindness. This sort of assertive caring addresses problems directly with the group, without insulting or offending members. This assertive caring can be used to get a session back on track. Below are a few interventions that can be done by group facilitators in dealing with difficult behaviours of group members¹:

- Express the difficulty you are having with the group member without belittling the character of the person.
- Do not respond with sarcasm to group members.
- Be honest with group members.
- Avoid labelling a group member and try rather to speak about their behaviour.
- Do not use your leadership role to intimidate the group members.
- Do not withdraw from conflict – conflict management and resolution are important skills to have, as conflict is inevitable.

Example: There may be a group member who always has something to say or comment on what is being discussed, at the expense of other group members. Thus, the member always dominates the discussions and the other group members don't feel like they are able to give contributions.

The facilitator will need to ensure that they take control of the discussions. This could be by requesting contributions from people by name in discussions. Alternatively, the facilitator could also solicit contributions from different groups of people, for example, women, men, youth, someone of an older generation. Another way, which would need to be handled delicately, could be to discuss the problem with the individual concerned privately, in a way that is sensitive and positive and does not dampen their spirits and future contributions altogether.

¹ Corey, et al., 2010:197

Important Ethical Considerations

1. Informed decision

This involves presenting the basic information pertaining to the nature of the group, in order to enable the individuals to make a rational and informed decision about whether to participate in the group or not. Elements that may need to be conveyed include the purpose and goals of the group; risks and benefits of the group; an overview of the topics; as well as the nature and limitations of confidentiality.

When informed consent is done effectively, it assists to promote individuals making decisions for themselves based on the information they have been given, engages the members in a collaborative process, and reduces the likelihood of them being exploited or harmed. It's important also to outline the role and responsibility of the group members and leaders.

The potential facilitators of the support group will need to be the one to inform the potential group members about the group. This information should be given before the group sessions start and the group members should sign a consent form agreeing to be part of the group¹. The signing of the consent form should only be done once they have received the necessary information and they have been able to ask any questions they may have pertaining to the group. (Corey, et al., 2010:72-73) and (Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:219-223)

2. Confidentiality

What is said in the group, stays in the group. Confidentiality is an important condition to effective group work and it's important to address it at the onset of the group. The facilitator(s) and members of the group have the responsibility of keeping the confidences of everyone in the group. Facilitators have the added responsibility of impressing on the members the necessity of maintaining the confidential nature of whatever is revealed in the group. Confidentiality is an important principle to be upheld in the group, as it will make

¹ See example of a consent form as Addendum 2

members comfortable to be in the group, as well as the assurance to disclose in the group without the possibility of it being shared with people outside of the group. Trust within a group is important for its cohesion and functioning. The assurance that members can discuss personal and emotional aspects within the group in confidence, deepens the trust within the group. The breach of confidentiality will have harmful and destructive effects.

The breaching of confidentiality is not always in an intentional manner. There are subtle manners that people will often speak, that inadvertently reveal information that should not be revealed. Thus, it's important to discuss and educate the group members about these potential ways as well. For example, there may be group members that work together. One group member may say that they will see the other at the next group session, in front of colleagues or other peers. Though this was a causal unintended breach of confidentiality, the other group member may not have wanted to be known that they are attending a support group. Thus, group members need to be aware of these subtle manners of breaching confidentiality as well.

Confidentiality is not a matter that is spoken of once in the beginning of the group and never again, group members need to be continually reminded about it. Members tend to reveal information that they should not outside of the group, thus it is necessary to keep reminding group member of the importance of confidentiality. At the beginning of each group session go through the group norms/rules and re-emphasize the need for confidentiality in the group.

Members who share confidential information outside of the group disqualify themselves from continuing to be in the group.

(Toseland & Rivas, 2012:206) and (Corey, et al., 2010:79 - 84)

3. Limitations to Confidentiality

There are some instances when the facilitator will need to break confidentiality. It is important for the facilitator to discuss when confidentiality will need to be breached when discussing confidentiality with the group at its onset. It is the facilitator's responsibility to familiarise themselves with the local laws, especially when it pertains to when it'll require them to breach confidentiality. The things that the law requires to be reported need to be reported. Examples of things that will need to be reported include:

- When a person manifests behaviour that is harmful to themselves (suicidal

behaviour) or those around them.

- Abuse to a minor or elderly.
- Crimes that have been committed.

(Corey, et al., 2010:81) and (Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2009:221)

It is imperative for facilitators to be empowered to assist individuals as best as possible. This will include having an understanding of the following:

- Crimes need to be reported. When it is believed that a person will cause or has caused harm to someone else, especially minors, those need to be reported.
- Support groups are not platforms to gather information that can be used against members in the church – for discipline purposes. Counsel can be given to group members for reporting on their own, but it is important to note that where circumstances are not of a criminal or harmful nature, confidences of group members are to be upheld.
- Referral of group members to more competent and qualified people that will be able to assist will oftentimes be needed.

4. Group Norms/Rules

Group norms are a set of principles or code of behaviour, that is formulated and shared by the group, aimed at assisting the group to function effectively. The establishment of the group norms/rules should be an activity done by all the group members, as it helps them take ownership of the groups when they are involved.

Examples of Group Norms/Rules

- Confidentiality – what is shared in the group, stays in the group
- Regular and timeous attendance of group sessions.
- Cell phones on silent or off if possible – to avoid distractions
- Participation – Participation assist the group to be beneficial for all
- Respect – It's important for members to respect each other's thoughts and feelings.
- Listening to each other – not interrupting when someone is speaking and not listening in a manner to give a quick response.
- Giving feedback and contributions – in a positive and helpful manner to each other.
- No use of profane language – not swearing at each other

There is not a limit to the number of group norms that a group can have. It's important as the facilitator to identify what is important for the group's functionality

and mention them if no one in the group brings them up.

Multicultural Support Groups

Having diverse societies is a reality that is to be recognized, respected and encouraged. A group that is multicultural will involve having attitudes that cultivate understanding and an appreciation of the diversity that is there. Each person that comes into a group has a unique cultural identity. As members of the group, a common identity is shared, that includes working together towards the goals of the group.

Some guidelines for multicultural groups include:

- Adequately prepare for the group meetings
- Know about your own cultural background and identity, and how it affects your thinking and behaviour. In other words, how Xhosa people are in Port Elizabeth, may not be the same as those in Johannesburg. This is over and above the difference there will be between the way Xhosa people and Afrikaans people think and behave. There is no right and wrong, there is just a difference in their thoughts and behaviours. It would be helpful for people to try and learn about other cultures, especially if you have a person from that different culture in their support group.
- Identify basic assumptions and think how they can affect you as a facilitator – be prepared to be shocked.
- Take into account the environmental and systematic factors that affect a person's way of thinking and way of behaving. This includes things like the community people were raised in, the school and university individuals attended that shaped their thinking, etc.
- Respect individual differences and recognize that diversity enhances a group.
- Recognize and encourage others to recognize and appreciate the common ground that exists among people.
- Language used in the group should be taken into account – a common language should be used. Also, there should be rules that there is no swearing and no threatening is allowed in the groups.

(Corey, et al., 2010:17-20) and (Toseland & Rivas, 2012:138-142)

Conclusion

Family ministries is a ministry to families in the church and in the community. We do so primarily through family education and where we have the clinical expertise, through counselling. Adventist-Nurture is an opportunity for us to minister to one another through local church sponsored support groups. Since Adventist-Nurture is a response to a need, these support groups do not exist perpetually. Once the need that necessitated the Adventist-Nurture is met, we can close shop. Please do not make Adventist-Nurture a burden by insisting on continuing to meet for fellowship or another project after the need is met. Some people already belong to many groups and adding Adventist-Nurture to that list can undo the good work that was done supporting one another.

This handbook is designed to get you started, but we hope you will make your support group nurture you in your time of need. Adapt it to your situation and minister to one another in love. Our prayer is that God will use everyone who participates in Adventist-Nurture to minister to others as we await the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

References

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Nichols, K. & Jenkinson, J., 2006. Leading a Support Group: A practical Guide. England: Open University Press.

Toseland, R. W. & Rivas, R. F., 2012. An Introduction to Group Work Practice. 7th ed. Boston: Pearson Education.

White, E. G., 1903. Education. California: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Addendum 1 - Example of Referral List

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST	
LifeLine (National Line)	0861 322 322
South African Depression and Anxiety Group Suicide Crisis Line	0800 567 567
Gender-based Violence Command Centre	0800 428 428
TEARS Foundation – Rape and Sexual abuse	*134*7355# (24/7 free call)
SAPS (South African Police Service)	10111
Childline	08000 55555
Child Welfare (National Line)	087 822 1516
FAMSA (National)	011 975 7106/7
Alcoholics Anonymous (National Line)	0861 435 722
SANCA (National)	011 892 3829 076 535 1701 (WhatsApp)
Narcotics Anonymous (National Line)	0861 00 6962
Department of Social Development Substance Abuse Helpline	0800 12 13 14

Above is an example of a referral list for the facilitators of a support group. It's important to add regional contact details, that are more accessible for the facilitators and the members.

Addendum 2 – Example of Consent Form

[Name of Support Group]

A support group is a group of people who gather to share common problems and experiences associated with a problem, condition or personal circumstance. It is a unique relationship where advice and support can be shared amongst individuals experiencing or have experienced a similar problem or circumstance.

[Description of the nature and purpose of this specific support group]

The support group aims to create an environment where honest, interpersonal exploration and discussion will happen that will be of benefit to all the group members. In order to have this environment created, there are guidelines that will need to be agreed upon by each member. Please agree to abide to the following:

Attendance:

I understand that participation in the group is completely voluntary. I will try and be on time for the group meetings that are agreed upon in the group. I will try my best to attend all the group sessions. When I am unable to attend a session, I will inform the facilitator timeously.

Confidentiality:

I understand that in group counselling, group members will be expected to uphold one another's confidentiality. I understand that all information disclosed within session is confidential and I may not be revealed by me about other members. I understand that I will not speak about who is part of the group to other people not part of the group. The group leader cannot reveal information about me without my written permission except where disclosure is required by law:

- If I present an imminent threat to myself or others.
- When there is an indication of abuse of a child, elder or dependent adult.
- By court subpoena

(add guidelines that you believe are important)

Signing below means that you agree with the guidelines and will do all in your power to uphold them. The breach of certain guidelines i.e. confidentiality may be resultant in the facilitator(s) and/or other group members requesting you to terminate your membership to the support group.

Signature _____ Date _____

Addendum 3 - Example of Needs Assessment

Your local _____ Ministries committee would appreciate you answering the following questions. Please complete the survey and return it to the _____ Ministries Director.

Name (Optional): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Age ____ Under 30 ____ 31-40 ____ 41-50 ____ 51-60 ____ 61-70 ____ Over 70

Marital status:

- ☐ single ☐ single with dependent children
☐ married ☐ married with dependent children
☐ divorced ☐ divorced dependent children
☐ widowed ☐ widowed with dependent children
☐ prefer not to say

Do you believe the church needs to have support groups for its members and community?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, which support groups do you think should be there for: (you can choose more than one)

- ☐ Divorce recovery
☐ Alcoholism
☐ Parents of children with disabilities
☐ Stop smoking
☐ Eating disorders
☐ Drug addiction (including prescription drugs)
☐ Widows
☐ Other (Please specify) _____

Thank you for sharing your opinion!

Addendum 4 – Example of Group Session

Loss Support Group

This is a 12-week support, closed support group for older adults that have sustained one or more losses, that are creating reactions of grief.

Group objectives:

- Address the meaning of loss
- Identification and expression of feelings attached to loss.
- Understand the danger that is there for maladaptive coping.
- Learning appropriate ways for coping.
- Exploring the importance of support systems

Session 3

Beginning phase

- Welcome: Welcome members back to group
- Recap: Recap what was discussed in the previous session.
- Group norms: Review the group norms and see if there are any changes from the group members.
Remember to emphasise the need to uphold confidentiality.
- Purpose of session: Introduce what is aimed to be discussed in this session.
- Optional: Have an introductory exercise/icebreaker

Middle phase

- Identify and discuss the different types of loss. These include:
Death of a significant through:
Accident
Illness
Violence
Suicide
- Activity: Through the identifications and discussion, ask group members to share their experience with the types of loss they relate with. Make sure they mention the coping skills that were used the past in dealing with the loss.
- Process and facilitate discussion as each person share their experience.

Ending phase

- Summarise what was done in the session.
- Evaluate the session and get to know how group members are feeling. Explore what they may have learnt from the session.
- Remind the group members of when the next session will be.



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