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How to Solve Problems in Your Group

Sometimes your group might have problems that need fixing.

We have given you a list of common problems that groups might face.

There are also some ideas about how to fix those problems.

- **Burnout**

Burnout is a word that is used when one person is doing all the work of the group.

The person who starts a group often wants to make sure all the work is done.

Although there might be a need for a group, it is important that you do not do everything yourself.

If you lose interest because you have been working too hard, the group may lose someone who is very valuable to the group.

- **Boundaries**

It is important to have clear boundaries in the group.

A boundary is a dividing line which marks limits.

Here is a case study that shows a case where a boundary has been crossed and how the group fixed it.



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Case Study –

Max runs a peer support group for people with a spinal cord injury.

One of the members has told Max that she goes to the support group instead of going to counselling – she has major depression.

Max has noticed that the member has had a lot of problems since discontinuing her counselling.

Max talks to one of the other group leaders about how to resolve this issue.

Max tells the member that the group is a peer support group, where members can provide advice and support, and that it is not there to provide therapy.

He shows her a list of good counsellors that the members have put together and the member agrees to try a new counsellor.

Max has given the group member a referral, told her about the boundaries of the group and is there to provide support to her.



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- **Share the load**

There will be members who want to be given a role in the group. It is important that you show those members that they are important.

It will make them know that they are valued and help share the work.

Every person has different skills and abilities.

Find out what people are good at so that that they can all be part of the group and all play a role.

Making sure everyone does an equal part of the work can also make sure nobody burns out.

- **Conflict**

If you think about conflict (problems between people) before it happens, you will be more ready to fix it if it happens.

Don't forget to have fun in your group.

If you go slowly and have fun, you can work together to make sure conflict doesn't happen.

Here are some common reasons that conflict happens.



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- Lack of communication

If you do not talk to and communicate with each other, misunderstandings can happen.

To make sure this doesn't happen, the group needs to know what they want and how they want to achieve it (aims and goals).

It is important that you talk regularly to make sure that your aims and goals are still up to date and that new members understand them.

Having social activities can give group members time to know each other on a more informal basis.

Eating together or having a cup of coffee might make conversation easier.

Groups might also make a 'policy book' which is a rule book created by all members on 'how to do things'.

- Power struggles

When a group is going well, lots of members are involved and doing things together.

Those members all share the work load.



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Sometimes the original group members might find it hard to 'let go' of those responsibilities.

The person who does a lot of the work can also carry a lot of the power in the group.

To stop this happening, it is important to acknowledge the work of the original group members.

You should also talk about how the work will be divided up.

It is important to make sure that this happens regularly throughout the group's life.

Make sure your group has time to talk about it and divide up the harder work equally.

Conflict is sometimes hard to avoid.

If it is handled well, it can be used for group members to learn and grow.

It can help group members trust each other more, understand and respect each other.



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It can also give your group a chance to talk more and think about creative ways to solve problems.

How to work through conflict

Be honest about the fact that there is conflict, and understand why it is happening.

The first step to fixing conflict is to recognise that it is there. You can go around the table to ask the members of the group why they think there is conflict in the group, and what they think is causing it.

Brainstorm ideas for solutions

A brainstorm is when you write down everyone's ideas about how you will fix this problem.

You can write them on a whiteboard or a large sheet of butcher's paper.

It should take you about ten minutes and one of your group members should write down the ideas as they are worded – don't change them.

Sometimes brainstorming ideas seem silly, but just saying them can help you come up with creative ideas to fix a problem.



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Refine the solutions

When you refine something, it means you cut out the things you don't need.

When you have finished brainstorming, cut out what you don't need.

Talk about the ideas and cross out any of the ideas that the whole group doesn't agree with.

Make sure the people who are most strongly affected by the conflict have their voices heard.

Choose the best solution

The best solution is the one that meets the needs of your group.

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