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| **Community Volunteer Peer Support Group Tool** |

**Definition:** the Community Volunteer Peer Support Group Tool outlines guidance for volunteers who want to start a group to support one another.

**Purpose of the Tool:** to guide volunteers to set up a Peer Support group and what is needed in order to keep groups going.

**When to use this Tool:** this tool can be used at any stage of programming. CP managers or supervisors can share this tool directly with experienced volunteers who want to start a group, or can guide volunteers through the process if additional support is requested.

In Training Session 8 “My Emotional Wellbeing as a Community Volunteer,” there is an opportunity to introduce the Peer Support Group Tool to volunteers.

**Guidance**: It is important that volunteers own peer support groups from the beginning. Thus, a CP manager or supervisor can provide external support or guidance, but volunteers should be encouraged to establish and manage the groups themselves. It is the responsibility of the CP organization to provide basic materials for the group to be successful, such as flip charts, markers, and possibly a small budget for refreshments.

**Community Volunteer Peer Support Group Tool**

***What is a peer support group?***

Being a community volunteer can be stressful; you might feel that you are always “on the job” and that there are high expectations from the organization, as well as your community that are impossible to meet. A way to manage these unique challenges is to establish a peer support group.

Peer Support groups are volunteer owned and run groups for volunteers to share challenges and support each other. Typically, peer support groups are made up of volunteers who live close to one another and meet on a monthly basis in a private space in order to maintain confidentiality.

***Why set up a volunteer peer support group?***

* To **share knowledge or learn something new.** By meeting regularly, new volunteers can learn from more experienced volunteers and the group can also organize guest speakers, such as a health service provider or work through a learning resource together.
* It helps to **problem-solve** in a group. By thinking through problems or difficulties together, the group can often think of solutions and approaches to challenges.
* To provide **support** to each other. Child protection cases can make volunteers feel sad or angry and having a group of people who understand is important. Sharing our feelings can help us cope with them better.
* To **advocate** within the community and with managers or supervisors. It is always easier to speak out about something that needs to be changed if we speak as a group rather than as individuals.

***How do we set-up a Volunteer Peer Support Group?***

There are many steps to get a group going. You can share these responsibilities with other volunteers:

1. Make a list of a group of volunteers who live close enough together to meet regularly. You do not want anyone to walk a long way, or pay for transport to the meeting.
2. Meet with the other volunteers and suggest the idea of a group.
3. Hold the first meeting and discuss why a group is useful. During the meeting, ask the group to suggest topics they may want to discuss in the group, they could be learning topics, challenges you face or even just sharing how you feel about being a volunteer.
4. Make some decisions about how the group will work together so members have the same expectations. Choose a date and place and topic for the next meeting. For example, some groups meet at different volunteers’ homes, others meet at the village meeting place. It is important that the location for meetings is easy to access for all members and allows the conversation to remain confidential. Some important decisions to think about include:

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| **Logistics** | **Suggestions** |
| How many members will be in our group? | 6-10 members (often, larger groups do not allow everyone to have a turn to speak) |
| How often will we meet? | Once a month |
| How long will our meetings be? | 1 hour |
| Where will meetings take place? | A confidential location, seated in a circle |
| Resources needed | Flip chart papers, markers, sticky notes, refreshments |
| **Working together** | **Suggestions** |
| What will our goal be? | To listen and support one another in our unique roles |
| Who will facilitate? | This can be one member, or rotating |
| How will we treat each other? (Ground rules and expectations) | It is important for group members to feel respected and treated as equals, agree on a policy for mobile phones, etc. |
| How will we maintain confidentiality? | It is important that all members commit to keeping everything spoken about in the meeting confidential. |
| How should we respond when we observe that members are not following these rules and expectations? | It is suggested to remind each other of the shared commitments and that the group belongs to all members. |
| How should we open and close a meeting? | Many groups like to have a ritual (such as a song or greeting) |
| When should we seek external support? | This should include issues such as child safeguarding, physical threats, and complex cases |

***How do we facilitate and participate in a Peer Support Group meeting?*[[1]](#footnote-1)**

* Discuss how the last month has gone, give everyone a chance to speak but let people choose not to speak.
* Spend some time discussing issues that have come up in the discussion of the last month and how they may be solved.
* Work through a learning tool or plan an activity
* End with a ritual, song or closing activity

***How do we keep the group going?***

* Asking the group to make a commitment to keep meeting is an important thing to do. You may ask everyone to sign an agreement as this can help people take the group seriously.
* If someone does not attend, ask a volunteer to find out if they are well, don’t get angry with them for not attending just let them know you missed them.
* Work together to make sure no one person takes over the group, that everyone gets a chance to speak and share ideas, this will motivate everyone to come.
* Encourage experienced and wise volunteers to gently explain to anyone who tries to take over the group or talks too much that the group belongs to everyone and everyone is equal and needs time to speak.

1. Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Implementing Promising Community Interventions, Chapter 21. Creating and Facilitating Peer Support Groups. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/enhancing-support/peer-support-groups/main> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)