

Support Group Tips



A support group can be defined as a group of individuals with similar experiences and concerns who provide each other with emotional support, encouragement, and advice.

Support groups can be as formal or casual as desired. The first step in forming one is to determine specific goals of the group.

Benefits of a support group

- A valuable venue for disseminating information to groups of members
- Helps members to develop new coping skills
- Provides a way to share emotional support and can help reduce loneliness
- Provides a safe haven for sharing common concerns

Possible challenges when planning a support group

- Determining the best time to meet
- Advertising the group to prospective members
- Motivating individuals to attend
- Finding an ideal space (if holding a face-to-face group meeting)
- Finding appropriate online communication tools that are user friendly and easily accessible (if holding an online meeting)

Tips for establishing a new support group

- Realize that finding the best meeting time might take some time. Most patients will not want to return to the facility or join online following treatment.
- Consider holding groups during the day or on weekends.
- Try alternating days to accommodate patients on M/W/F and T/T/S treatment schedules.
- **In-Person Meeting:** Find an open space, either in the facility or close by (hospital, church, library, etc.). Once you have found a place that works for your group, establish a schedule for that same space, moving forward.
- **Virtual Group:** Be consistent with the website or conference line numbers you use to host meetings (i.e., Facebook, Zoom, Skype, FreeConferenceCall).
- Create clear, reasonable rules for the group (e.g., confidentiality, respect).
- Be prepared. Have a specific topic and structure planned ahead for each meeting.
- Advertise your meeting. Start talking to patients about the meetings in advance to get the word out. This will provide the opportunity to get valuable feedback on preferred location, times, topics, etc.
- Invite individuals outside of your facility. Contact other social workers and project leads from nearby facilities, who can potentially add valuable insights.
- Invite speakers. If you are presenting specific topics such as transplant, consider asking a transplant coordinator or a transplant recipient to join a meeting.
- To make the meeting more enjoyable, feel free to be creative. For example, consider coming up with a specific group name, or providing attractive name tags—anything that helps to motivate members to attend and remain engaged.
- Create flyers and consider posting them in the clinic, as well as handing them out to prospective attendees.
- Add meeting reminders to calendars posted in the lobby.

Renal Community Virtual Support Groups

- **IPRO ESRD Network Program** esrd.ipro.org
- **Renal Support Network (RSN)** <https://www.rsnhope.org/events/rsn-zoom-room-meetings>
- **National Kidney Foundation (NKF)** <https://www.kidney.org/content/nkf-peers-talk-someone-who%E2%80%99s-been-there>
- **American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP)** <https://aakp.org/center-for-patient-engagement-and-advocacy/support-groups>
- **Dialysis Patient Citizens (DPC)** <https://www.dialysispatients.org/get-involved/patient-ambassadors/upcoming-calls>



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IPRO End-Stage Renal Disease Network Program

Corporate Office: 1979 Marcus Avenue, Lake Success, NY 11042-1072 • Patient Services: (516) 231-9767
Toll-Free: (800) 238-3773 • Email: esrdnetworkprogram@ipro.org

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