

Facilitating

Living Room

a faith-based

mood disorders support group

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Two *Living Room* manuals are available for
your group's use:

1. Creating a *Living Room* Group
2. *Living Room* Facilitator's Manual

Sample devotionals are available on request.

Living Room

facilitator's guide

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:2-3)

Our Mission

Living Room is a network of Christian peer-facilitated support groups for people with mood disorders, creating places of safety, acceptance, understanding, healing and community. Support groups are sponsored by local churches and para-church agencies in partnership with mental health professionals, agencies and associations.

Our Vision

- To decrease stigmatization of mental illness
- To increase accessibility to Living Room support groups
- To provide resources to support group facilitators
- To promote networking to benefit from collaboration with others

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Brentwood Park Alliance Church, my friends there, and Pastor Don Dyck in particular, for sharing my vision to create *Living Room*. Pastor Don has been important to me as my shepherd in this work. His wisdom has been invaluable. I appreciate his presence at meetings and how he has shared with me in the excitement of creating this new ministry.

I also thank those in my own *Living Room* group at Brentwood Park who have come forward to become co-facilitators. You are a great support and are helping the group thrive.

I'm also grateful to the facilitators in other parts of Canada – and now the world. It's so good to see others taking up the work of giving faith-based support to people with mental health struggles.

A big thank you, too, to John Konrad, Lorraine Isaak, Di Hilstad, Laura Offenwanger, Pastor Don Dyck, Steve Thiessen, and Natasha MacArthur for your help in the important work of creating the Mission and Vision statements and for helping me search for direction.

The spread of the *Living Room* ministry has in large part been due to our excellent website, produced by Matchbox Creative. I am grateful for their generous contribution.

The *Living Room* groups in BC owe much to the Mood Disorders Association of BC. This organization helps prepare us for our work by training us and answering our many questions. It is good to be in partnership with them. In particular I thank Vicki Rogers, the Education Director of MDA, for always being there to give us support when we need it.

The MDA Facilitator's Manual was an invaluable source of help in the preparation of this manual; I borrowed heavily from it. I thank MDA for their permission to use it as a resource and guide.

INTRODUCTION

When I first thought of starting a *Living Room* group, I did not plan to facilitate it myself. I wanted to help organize it, but thought another person would have to facilitate. I could not imagine myself in that role.

As plans for the group began to gel, I could see that I needed – and felt called – to lead it. My courage gradually grew. When a few months had passed and the first meeting was ready to start, I was eager to begin.

As I write this today, three years later, I continue to feel eager. I enjoy the work and benefit greatly from it. When each meeting wraps up, I go home filled with a deep sense of peace, satisfaction and joy. It feels good to share God's love with others. Jesus' familiar statement holds true: "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" (Acts 20:35b)

I have found that I can be myself when I facilitate, even during times of depression. In fact, showing my vulnerabilities has been a good thing. It encourages others in the group to do the same; it encourages everyone to be real.

Leading *Living Room* has made me a stronger person. I'm more confident; I feel more complete; I no longer feel so much a victim of my disease. By helping others, I have become a conqueror. This is how I know God wants me to do this work.

I thank God for the privilege of letting me help him with his work – to be his feet, hands and voice. I thank him for helping me find strength in weakness.

If you are considering facilitating a group, I encourage you. Pray about it. If you feel moved to join God in the good work he has started, I am sure that responding to that call will bring you many blessings, as it has for me.

Marja Bergen, Founder

WHO CAN BE A *LIVING ROOM* FACILITATOR?

You can be a facilitator of a group if you meet these criteria:

- You have been there; you have a mood disorder but are functioning well.
- You are dedicated to helping others with the troubles they face.
- You want to help others accept the medical basis for their mood disorder.
- You want to help others find a measure of healing by providing a safe place to share and care for each other.
- You are a follower of Christ and want to share your faith with others and help them strengthen their faith.

PRINCIPLES OF SELF-HELP*

- We are equals; we're all in this together; no one has all the answers; we share information and experiences in an informal and non-judgmental way.
- You get help, you give help, and you help yourself.

* From Mood Disorders Association of BC Facilitation Manual.

ROLES OF A *LIVING ROOM* FACILITATOR

As a facilitator, you will do the following:

- Introduce participants.
- Prepare devotional and discussion topics or help the group decide on topics.
- Invite guest speakers, if you wish.
- Lead the meetings: prayer, devotional, discussion and sharing time.
- Impart basic knowledge.
- State rules and make sure they are adhered to.

As a facilitator, you should do the following:

- Try not to do the work by yourself. Have a co-facilitator – or even several – to share the work with you.
- Remember that you're not alone; God is with you and will lead you if you let him.
- Pray with your co-facilitator before the group arrives; ask God to be in your words and actions; ask God to help the members find a measure of healing.

ROLE OF THE CO-FACILITATOR

- Help prepare refreshments and greet people as they arrive.
- Lead a smaller group when the need to split into smaller groups arises.
- Take time with a person when they need extra time to talk one-on-one during meeting time.
- Be prepared to lead the meeting if the facilitator is absent.

SHARING THE WORK

Sharing the work will greatly reduce stress:

- The facilitator and co-facilitator take turns, sharing each other's roles.
- One presents the devotional and leads a discussion and the other facilitates the sharing time.
- You have more than one co-facilitator ready to step in when needed.

SPLITTING THE GROUP

When a group has more than eight participants, it is wise to split the group into smaller ones for the sharing portion of the meeting, each with no more than six or seven people. This is especially true if you have a devotional/discussion using part of the meeting time. Co-facilitators can lead the extra groups. If the men in your group are outnumbered by women – or vice versa – you might want to give them the option of being in the same group for the sharing time.

THE MEETING

The following are only guidelines. They describe the kind of *Living Room* that has proven successful. Do what is most suitable for you and your group.

FORMAT

- Lunch, if this is part of your program
- Business: introductions, discussion of what the meeting will consist of for the benefit of new people, affiliation with MDA or other organization, rules, etc.
- Prayer before devotional time
- Devotional and discussion (sample devotionals are available in manual #3)
- Short break
- Sharing by each participant of how their life is going – the good and the not-so-good
- Closing prayer for each person present

(Note: The first part of the meeting – the business, devotional and break – could occupy roughly one hour. The last hour should be enough time for sharing if the group is no larger than seven members.)

BEGINNING THE MEETING

- Welcome everyone and introduce yourself.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves, telling briefly why they came.
- State the purpose and goals of the group.
- Describe the group's affiliations with mental health organizations.
- Make brief announcements of a business nature, if necessary.
- State ground rules.

GROUND RULES

Before each session, make sure everyone is aware of these rules before they begin sharing. By stating them ahead of time, you can avoid problems later.

1. DO NOT INTERRUPT.

- Allow each person to fully finish talking before responding.
- If necessary, use a talking stick or stone. While a person is holding the stick or stone, the floor is theirs.

2. "SHARE THE AIR."

- Remember that others need ample time to share.
- Don't talk longer than you need to.

3. DON'T GIVE ADVICE.

- “No fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight.”*
- We share, not to be fixed or saved.
- We share to have our own truths acknowledged by people who understand and care. Between ourselves and God, we will find our way.
- Each person needs to be respected as an individual who wants to find their own way of coping.
- We learn from hearing each other’s stories.
- Don’t counsel about medical treatment.

4. KEEP EVERYTHING CONFIDENTIAL.

- Use first names only.
- In order to keep *Living Room* a safe place, don’t discuss anything that’s shared outside the group.
- Don’t discuss a group member’s problem unless the member has made a specific request.
- Don’t share phone numbers unless previously arranged with members.
- Keep names of participants in the group confidential; do not share names with church members.
- No one should contact another member outside the group without prior agreement.

*Parker J. Palmer: Ground rules for his Quaker “circle of trust” (from his book, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life*) This mirrors the rule of the Mood Disorders Association of BC self-help model, “don’t give advice.”

DEVOTIONALS/DISCUSSIONS

A good way to start meetings is with a devotional time, drawing from scripture or other Christian literature to help us discern spiritual ways of dealing with our mood disorder. A discussion could follow. Starting off in this way helps us remember that God is present with us. It encourages the strengthening of our faith. A selection of sample devotionals is available as the third part of this series of manuals.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

There are numerous topics you could discuss during your meeting time. For example, what helps you do the following?

- Find support? How helpful is the support you receive?
- Cope with stigma? When to tell or not to tell; who to tell or not to tell.
- Recognize early warning signs of illness?
- Cope with holidays?
- Cope with fear?
- Cope with depression?
- Keep stable?
- Cope with anxiety?
- Manage your work life or personal commitments?

SHARING TIME

During your time of open sharing:

- Give each person an opportunity to talk about how their lives are going.
- It's often helpful for the facilitator to begin sharing from his or her own experience. This will encourage others to be open.
- Make it clear that participants don't have to speak if they'd rather not.
- Repeat ground rules if you feel it's appropriate.
- Ask questions to draw a person out or when you don't understand.
- If a person talks too long, gently suggest one-on-one time with a co-facilitator during or after the meeting.

If no one wants to share or if there is extra time, you could ask these questions:

- What was the high point of the last week?
- What would you do if you won \$100,000?
- What is the most adventurous thing you've ever done?
- What is your dream holiday?
- Tell us three things you're grateful for and why.

CLOSING THE MEETING

- 10 or 15 minutes before the meeting ends, ask if anyone has any final things they'd like to say.
- Ask if anyone has specific prayer requests.
- Pray for each person present and invite the others to pray if they feel moved to do so.
- Thank everyone for coming.

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE *LIVING ROOM* FACILITATOR

As a facilitator, you should do the following:

1. Serve humbly.
2. Empathize with members of the group.
3. Accept each member unconditionally.
4. Encourage self-esteem.
5. Foster hope.

1. HUMILITY

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Ephesians 4:2

- Be yourself, open and genuine.
- Be honest about your feelings.
- Don’t be afraid to show your own vulnerability and weaknesses.
- Share your own struggles with mood disorder. This will encourage other members to share openly as well.
- Serve as Christ’s representative, with the servant attitude he modeled.

2. EMPATHY

“...so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” 2 Corinthians 1:4

- Try to see things through participants’ eyes.
- Try to feel with the person.
- Validate feelings expressed through sympathetic response in words or touch.
- Offer to pray, both in group time and at home.

3. UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

“...love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 19:19

- Help each member feel accepted as a valuable part of the group.
- Acknowledge each person’s individual strengths.
- Honor everyone’s right to make choices.
- Do not judge convictions or feelings you don’t agree with.

4. SELF-ESTEEM

"...encourage one another and build each other up..." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

- Let members feel that their sharing is important to the group and that they are valued.
- Recognize victories, such as a new job or other accomplishment.
- Draw attention to special contributions members might have made.
- Encourage the sharing of music, art, poetry or other creative work.

5. FOSTER HOPE

"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him." Job 13:15

- Highlight the range of functioning that can be achieved through modern medicine.
- Relay inspirational stories.
- Share God's promises from scripture.
- Encourage the sharing of testimonies.
- Pray for each participant.

DO'S AND DON'T OF EFFECTIVE FACILITATING

You facilitate by doing the following:

- Encouraging participation, making sure no one feels left out (unless they would rather listen)
- Listening more than talking, directing the discussion only when necessary
- Sharing ideas and information
- Modeling the kind of participation that is encouraged by briefly sharing your own personal experiences

You facilitate by avoiding the following:

- Dominating the conversation
- Judging
- Attempting to run a therapy group
- Fixing, saving, advising or setting members straight

You manage discussions in the following ways:

- Asking open questions such as Who? What? When? Where? How? to encourage people to talk
- Being patient when you ask a question, not afraid of silence
- Encouraging the group to explore different opinions or options
- Encouraging participation by all members of the group. Find ways to draw out those who tend to be quiet.

MANAGING THE GROUP

- Foster a supportive, friendly atmosphere.
- Advertise in community papers with your phone number.
- Keep a list of interested people as they call in.
- Contact members to remind them of meetings.
- Follow up with members who are having difficulties.
- Solicit volunteers to co-facilitate, help with refreshments or make phone contact.

COPING WITH DIFFICULTIES

INTERRUPTIONS

- Be a good role model by giving undivided attention to each person speaking.
- When side chats occur, remind individuals – without embarrassing them – of the rule that allows each person to finish speaking.
- Use a talking stick or stone if necessary. Only the person holding it is allowed to speak.

“SHARING THE AIR”

- When a person talks too long, gently remind them of the rule when there is a pause. Then ask another person to speak.
- If a person needs to talk more, suggest one-on-one time with the co-facilitator while the rest of the meeting continues (if it is urgent) or staying after to talk more with someone.
- When someone gets bogged down on a topic that no one shows interest in, gently try to change the topic.

PESSIMISM

If a member of the group has a consistently negative attitude, encourage them:

- Ask group members whether they have ever felt that way and how they've overcome it.
- Ask the person whether they would be open to suggestions.
- Ask the group for stories that might inspire the person.

GROUP CONFLICT

- Don't be afraid of conflict or avoid it; confront it, using it as an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Recognize that conflict is a natural and potentially constructive part of group dynamics.
- Create a safe environment where members are respected and individual differences are acknowledged.

TALK OF SUICIDE

If a person talks about recent suicidal feelings and thoughts, don't ignore them or pretend that things will be okay.

- Tell the person you care and that the group wants to help.
- Listen to the person, acknowledging their feelings.
- Don't give advice.
- If the person has a specific plan with intent, this needs professional attention. (See "CRISIS" below.)
- Provide the person with suicide hotline numbers.
- Arrange for an experienced person to talk with the person in a quiet place or secure family, friend or emergency care.

EMERGENCIES

Emergencies seldom arise during group meetings, but it is good to be prepared. If a person is suicidal or otherwise in trouble, do the following:

- Have a member who is most experienced with mood disorders talk to the person privately until they are back in control.
- Give your undivided attention, reassuring them that they will be helped, encouraging them to think of solutions and options.
- Keep your voice level and quiet.

CRISIS

Take action by using emergency resources if the person has any of the following:

- A plan in mind
- Some means with intent to harm himself
- Bizarre, out of character behavior, or out of touch
- No supports or options

EMERGENCY RESOURCES

- Keep a list of emergency resources for your area handy.
- If possible, have a family member or friend come and get the distressed member.
- Depending on the emergency, contact an emergency mental health service, hospital emergency room or the police.

NOTES