Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR

Facilitate: to make easy, promote, help forward, smooth the way, expedite

vs.

Lead: to direct, conduct, guide actions or opinions of, go in front, have the principle role

People who share the common experience of living with dementia can provide each other with a great deal of mutual aid simply by talking things over and exchanging their wisdom and practical knowledge. It is the primary role of support group facilitators to help this happen. The following is a list of the roles and responsibilities of Alzheimer Society of B.C. support group facilitators.

1. Encourage a group environment of warmth, acceptance and security in order to promote effective mutual support by:

- Ensuring that new members feel welcome
- Making sure that everyone understands the purpose of the group
- Instructing all members to respect privacy and confidentiality
- Promoting conversation and the sharing of ideas among members through questioning and seeking the opinions of the group
- Keeping the group focused and on track
- Interrupting side conversations and re-directing the group discussion
- Making sure all members have an opportunity to participate
- Inviting and encouraging participation and feedback
- Acknowledging contributions
- Respecting the feelings and opinions of others, and being nonjudgmental
- Encouraging and modelling the giving of options and examples instead of advice

- Clarifying and summarizing what members have said
- Using and modelling good communication skills

We listen to people so they can tell their story,
and we listen for a need for information.
We do not listen to people to fix their problems.

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2. Assist members in acquiring information and skills that will help them cope with the challenges of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias by:

- Encouraging the sharing of knowledge and practical experience among all group members
- Becoming knowledgeable about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and about the issues faced by people with dementia and their families
- Not playing the role of the expert; being willing to admit that you do not have all the answers
- Becoming familiar with the services provided by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. and other services in your community
- Knowing when to refer group members to other sources of support or assistance
- Being familiar with the Discussion Segments, print resources, and other educational materials from the Alzheimer Society of B.C., and sharing these with the group when appropriate
- Making sure that all material presented at the support group has been approved by the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

3. Ensure that practical matters are taken care of, such as:

- Arranging and confirming meeting space in collaboration with your Support and Education Coordinator
- Informing members of the time, date and location of meetings
- Arranging refreshments, photocopying, etc.

- Distributing designated handouts from the Alzheimer Society of B.C.
- Ensuring support group attendance forms and volunteer hours forms are completed and sent to local staff member by the deadline

Working with a co-facilitator

Sharing the tasks and responsibilities of the support group can lessen the chance of burnout and offer the enjoyment that comes from working with others as opposed to working alone. For these reasons, the Alzheimer Society of B.C. prefers two facilitators, or co-facilitation, of its support groups.

Another advantage to co-facilitation is that there will be much less disruption if one facilitator is absent or has to leave the group suddenly.

Good communication between co-facilitators is key to success. This includes communication before the meeting (preparation), during the meeting (facilitation) and after the meeting (debriefing).

Co-facilitators' review of meeting

As soon as possible after the meeting, it is helpful for co-facilitators to review or debrief the meeting with each other. By analyzing what went well, what didn't, and what you would do differently next time, you will be able to prepare for future meetings.

Some questions to consider are:

- What issues seemed to concern people the most?
- What parts of the meeting seemed to work really well? Which parts felt awkward? What changes would you make for next time?
- Did people participate? If not, could anything have been done to make the meeting more comfortable?

- Did one or two people dominate the meeting? If so, what can be done to ensure that this does not happen next time?
- Did everyone get a chance to talk or did you run out of time? If the group is too large, could it be broken up into smaller groups?
- Was the meeting space comfortable?
- Was attendance poor? If so, were people reminded of the meeting? Is the group meeting people's needs? Was there adequate publicity? Is there a better time or place to hold the meeting? Make sure to consult with your Support and Education Coordinator on these matters.

Sharing responsibility with group members

- Even when there are two facilitators, every opportunity should be taken to invite all group members to take part in, and be responsible for, the functioning of the group.
- Support group members can help with coffee, welcome new members to the group, and make suggestions to improve meetings.
- All group members support the healthy functioning of the group by listening well to others.