

# Support groups

.....  
A guide for parents and carers  
.....



# WHAT IS A support group?

**A support group generally, is a group of people who come together to support one another through shared experience.**

Support groups give their members a chance to meet people with common experiences or concerns, to exchange advice and information, offer emotional and moral support, and even participate in social activities together.

When caring for a family member with a disability or a health impairment most of the attention

is focused on helping them but as parents and caregivers, we also need support to cope with our own feelings and frustrations and remind ourselves that we are not alone. One way to do this is to talk with others who understand because they are in a similar position.





# Research

## WHAT HAS RESEARCH shown about support groups?

**R**esearch has shown that support groups help parents feel understood, provide emotional support, a sense of belonging and affirms that they have valuable information to exchange about parenting.

Parents involved in support groups report increased self-esteem and appraise themselves and their family situations more positively.

Networking with other parents offers the opportunity to gain practical information on how to navigate institutional barriers and access external resources.

Support groups can also become a platform for advocacy and empowerment. Being part of a support group provides opportunities not only to gain support, but also to help others.



**Are you a parent or caregiver interested in joining a Parent to Parent support group? Fantastic!**

**Here are our recommendations for deciding if a group suits you:**

## **AIMS OF THE GROUP**

It is helpful to start with a clear picture of the type of support group you would like to join.

- What do you want to accomplish within the group?
- Would you prefer a group that is formal, informal, activity based or that requires professional input?
- Smaller groups of 10 members or less per meeting and closed groups (which accept new members periodically) tend to foster closer relationships than open groups (where people come and go).

Consider, whether you want a group that focuses on a specific demographic.

For example, parents/ care givers of children:

- With specific disabilities
- In a specific age range

From a specific cultural background  
(e.g., Māori and Pasifika, immigrant families, etc.)

## **WHEN AND WHERE**

Does the support group have consistent meeting times and at a location that you are able to attend. If not is there another local group that would suit you better, or an online group?

## **WHAT MAKES A POSITIVE SUPPORT GROUP**

The most effective support groups are those that uplift members by providing long-term fulfilment of their social and emotional needs. A good support group should provide a space for mutual support as opposed to frustration venting. While a space for venting frustration can be valuable for many parents and caregivers, these groups tend to have high turnover and be shorter-lived.

- The group has a set of guidelines or rules that the group members agree upon and follow to ensure that group safety is a priority
- All members should be valued and respected
- Equal opportunity for participation is given to all group members
- Less engaged members are encouraged to participate
- Group members are encouraged to contact each other outside the group meetings – parents may like to form subgroups based on similar circumstances
- Clear facilitation/leadership or a group leader
- Members are encouraged to give feedback regularly

**We recommend attending a support group several times before deciding if it is the right one for you.**

**It also helps to remind yourself that every group can have 'off' days every now and then.**

# HOW CAN MEMBERS AND HOSTS ensure that support groups remain UPLIFTING AND SUPPORTIVE

**DON'T** prevent people from venting but DO ask support group members to empathise with their peers and provide constructive suggestions based in their own experience.

**DO** be as inclusive and non-judgmental as possible. Allow parents to share their point of view even if you disagree.

**DO** consider providing parents with information and advocacy services in an accessible way. For example, invite specialists to give guest lectures or share workshops and information services.

**DO** make space for a sense of humour, fun, and light-heartedness!





## MAKING THAT FIRST STEP

Often one of the hardest parts of the process of finding a support group can be making that step to attend the support group for the first time. It might help to remind yourself that everyone finds attending a group for the first time difficult. Even if we enjoy the group and have been attending for a while it can be easy to find excuses to keep us from going, especially when we are feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. However, a support group can become a valuable part of your support network so it is worth trying to figure out how you can get there!

**I LOOK FORWARD TO CATCHING UP WITH THE REGULARS AND HEAR ABOUT THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE MONTH, LAUGH AND CRY TOGETHER IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT AND THEN PLAN ON WHERE TO NEXT. THANK YOU FOR HOLDING SPACE FOR US.**

**IT'S NICE TO KNOW THE SUPPORT GROUPS ALWAYS HERE FOR A 'PICK ME UP' WITH PARENTS EXPERIENCING SIMILAR TRIALS.**

## BEING PART OF A SUPPORT GROUP CAN BE A VERY REWARDING EXPERIENCE, WITH WIDE RANGING BENEFITS FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED.

Feel free to get in touch with your local Parent to Parent office for information on joining one of our Parent to Parent run support groups throughout New Zealand.

**0508 236 236 | [www.parent2parent.org.nz](http://www.parent2parent.org.nz)**



# Support groups

.....  
A guide for parents and carers  
.....



Published by Parent to Parent NZ Inc in association with Care Matters.

[www.parent2parent.org.nz](http://www.parent2parent.org.nz)    [www.carematters.org.nz](http://www.carematters.org.nz)

© Parent to Parent NZ Inc 2021