

as in an incest survivors group). In others it may be inappropriate (such as in an unemployment group).

Confidentiality is the practice of keeping private what occurs and is discussed during a meeting. Since members often interpret this idea in different ways, it is crucial that you define what your group wishes to keep private. For example, some groups ask members to say nothing about what was seen and heard in the meeting other than with someone who was present.

Other groups practice a less strict degree of confidentiality. They allow members to talk about the meeting with people outside the group as long as no identifying information is used. Still other groups have no need for confidentiality.

8 Consider whether or not your group really needs to collect money.

Many groups do not need to handle money. A friendly organization, such as a church or synagogue, is often willing to donate free meeting space and other resources.

You can also ask members to buy and bring specific needs (such as refreshments). Be sure to acknowledge their generosity.

For groups with a minimal need for cash, consider passing a basket for small donations to cover specific costs.

If your group will have expenses large enough to warrant a budget, applying for tax-exempt status may or may not be appropriate. Remember that many people give small amounts to organizations whether or not the gift is tax-deductible.

However, if you are going to be requesting large grants from corporations or foundations, tax-exempt status is required. Be sure to follow *all* government guidelines established for tax-exempt organizations prior to applying.

9 Decide how often to meet.

Every self-help group is different. Some groups meet weekly. Others (such as those that deal with addictions) meet more frequently. Still others (such as those that deal with rare illnesses) may meet only a few times a year.

Meet often enough to provide steady group support, but space the meetings far enough apart to leave people looking forward to the next session. Invite members to stay in contact by telephone.

10 Prepare a tentative list of activities.

List a few activities that you think your new general membership would enjoy doing together. Present this list for feedback at the first general meeting. Of course, sharing feelings and experiences is

the backbone of most self-help group gatherings. For some groups, little else is needed. However, other groups may wish to do additional things. Here are some suggestions:

- Have coordinated activities that have special appeal to the members of your group.** For example, a group of single parents held their first meeting at the new library. While the parents talked with a guest psychologist, their children were given a tour and instructions on how to use the library. Another group of women undergoing cancer chemotherapy invited a beauty consultant to speak on wigs, turbans, and other ways of dealing with hair loss.
- Do projects that benefit people outside the group.** For example, one group brings pets to visit at a senior citizens' center once a month. These visits enable each member of the group to feel better by giving to others.

11 Design your group to help every member feel important.

Give every member the opportunity to contribute to the group and feel appreciated from the beginning. Here are some ways to do this:

- Encourage newcomers to help out (if they wish) at the first meeting.** For example, ask them to arrange the chairs.