

## Family Tip Sheet:

# Finding or Starting a Support Group

*Starting or joining a support group will provide opportunities for both growth and change for you and your group members (Thank you to Marci Wheeler & Jane Ross of the Indiana Resource Center for Autism for these great ideas!)*

- **Finding an Existing Group.** Research what might currently be available to you by calling the Oregon Family to Family Health Information Center at 1-855-323-6744.
- **There are so Many Groups – What’s the Difference?** Once you find a group that you are considering joining, find out the group’s *format, focus, and purpose*. If a group isn’t available in your area, or if you want a group with a different focus, format, or purpose, you may consider beginning a group of your own!
- **Starting a Support Group - Preparing Yourself.** This role can be demanding and time-consuming. Some questions to answer before starting a group are, “Am I ready to be a support group leader?” and “Do I have the time to be a support group leader?”
- **The Practical Aspect.** A meeting place is the first essential. Churches and public libraries are common places to hold meetings and are usually available at no cost to the group. *The ideal meeting place should be easy for people to find, centrally located, and offer free parking.*
- **Finding Others.** What audience have you decided on for your group? If you are targeting parents of preschoolers, contacting daycares and elementary schools will be best. Parents and families of adult children with disabilities might be more difficult to find.
- **Ready to go Public?**
  - Fliers should include: the group’s focus, format, and purpose, identify who might be interested in the group (example: parents of children with autism), meeting place and time, specify if children are welcome or if child care will be available, provide a phone number or e-mail address for people to obtain further information. Most laundromats have message boards as do other local businesses and agencies for you to post fliers in.
  - The newspaper may be more ideal if you want more publicity but can be expensive. However, local newspapers may have columns dedicated to public announcements that are free.
  - Advertising on Facebook or starting a web page, listserv, or blog can also be very helpful.
- **The First Meeting**
  - Create a sign-in sheet with space for contact information and have people sign in as they arrive so you can contact them.
  - Refreshments are a good way to get people mingling.
  - Having an agenda gives people an idea of what is going to happen during the meeting.
- **You are on Your Way!**
  - Congratulations! You have started a new community resource. At this point, it is normal to feel anxious about the creation of your group.
  - Always try to stay organized; if you begin to feel stressed, remember to delegate tasks to others.

***This experience will provide opportunities for both growth and change for you and your group members.***



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