Support Group Screening Interviewer Guide

*Support Group Facilitator Training*

*To be used in conjunction with the Support Group Screening Form*

Screening interviews are generally done prior to an individual being accepted into and participating in an agency support group. This process is a part of our Quality Assurance Standards and is important in determining if an individual is appropriate for the group process, and if the group is the right fit for the individual at this time.

The person doing the screening interview should always be one of the co-facilitators. It is best practice for both facilitators to do the interview when possible. If only one facilitator can do the interview it is ideal for each group member to meet the other facilitator prior to the start of the group.

The questions on the support group screening form need to be asked in a sensitive way, and in as non-invasive a way as possible. The interviewer can let the client know that it is okay to not go into a lot of detail about their experiences of sexual violence and reassure clients they may take a break at any time. It is important to explain that these questions are being asked as part of the support group screening process and are asked of all individuals interested in joining a group. The role of the interviewer is to provide information and answer questions about the group, so that the client can decide if the group is the right fit for them. Also, the role of the interviewer and group facilitators is to make sure that the group is as safe as possible for everyone involved.

The screening should be more conversational than a formal interview style. Questions and information are provided in a conversational way, and not necessarily in the order they are written on the screening form. It is important for the interviewer to become familiar with the questions so they can have a more natural interaction with the client. If something is written down during the interview, let the client know what is being written, where the information will be kept, and who it will be shared with.

At some point in the screening process, the interviewer will need to provide an overview of the following:

Group format

* Is this a skill building focused group, experiential group, peer support group or a combination?
* Must stress this is not therapy or a clinical group (even if the facilitators have the credentials to do such a group).
* Be prepared to describe a little bit about what the group might be like week to week. Will any materials be used? Will there be guest speakers? If so, who will they be and how will they maintain confidentiality?

Group process

* Will there be a check-in each week at the beginning and a check-out at the end?
  + Because routine and knowing what to expect can sometimes be helpful and comforting, it is recommended that the group facilitators begin and end the group with check- in/out. This allows each person to share at least twice during the group, allows participants to establish some group norms and allows the facilitators to assess how a person is doing on a particular day. This process is also very helpful in informing the facilitators if each participant feels safe to leave the group and if they plan to come back for the next group session.
* What will happen during the group time?
  + Although it is not possible to describe exactly how the group will go, it may be helpful to provide a typical outline for day 1. This may help the client to have an idea of what to expect and may be particularly comforting if the person has never been in a support group before.

Facilitator roles and expectations

* Describe to the client what the facilitator’s responsibilities are in a group and what the facilitators will be doing. Some group facilitator roles and expectations are:
  + To provide as safe a space as possible for all group participants
  + To ensure, to the best of the facilitators ability, that confidentiality is maintained
  + To make sure that each group participant has an opportunity to talk, and is not being pressured to talk/share if they do not want to
  + To ensure that all group guidelines are being followed
  + To provide education and information, as requested and/or as appropriate
* Facilitators may participate in some of the group activities; however, it is not recommended that facilitators provide a lot of personal information in the group. This may be harmful to group members if they feel the facilitator’s roles are not clear, or if group members feel they need to take care of the facilitators. It may also create a personal and possibly unhealthy connection between the facilitators and the group members.
  + The interviewer will need to let the client know that the role of the group facilitators is not to share their personal experiences of sexual violence, but rather to support the group members in their sharing and connection with one another.
  + Be careful to not make this screening about you or your experiences. If the client asks about your personal experience, think through how you will best answer that question in accordance with your agencies boundaries and policies, and consult your direct supervisor for guidance or to process this further.
* Some centers may recommend that facilitators do not meet with group members individually outside of the group time, while the group is meeting. Other centers may not choose to set this boundary or may be unable to given the location of the group and the availability of staff. It is important to be aware that meeting with individual group members could create a situation where one facilitator knows things about a group member that the other facilitator does not, and may create an alliance (or perceived alliance) between the facilitator and the group member. If group members needs support between group meetings, facilitators may be able to assist them in accessing the helpline, or in connecting with a counselor or therapist.Group members may also be able to meet with other staff members who are not facilitating group.

Confidentiality

* It is important to discuss issues of confidentiality and how it applies to participants, facilitators and any guest presenters.
  + For example, all guest presenters should sign a confidentiality agreement prior to visiting the group.
* You may provide the agency support group confidentiality agreement at the screening interview, but will need to go over it again when the group is together. It is important that everyone hear the same information at the same time.

Participant roles and expectations

* Describe to the client what the expectations are of the group participants. Some group participant roles and expectations are:
  + A desire and willingness to participate in the group process
  + Maintain confidentiality during and after the group
  + To start and end on time
  + Additional guidelines will be reviewed during the first group
    - You may provide some general agency support group guidelines at the screening interview, but will need to go over them again when the group is together. It is important that everyone hear the same information at the same time. It is also important that group members be offered the opportunity to add any group rules or guidelines that may not be on the list.

At the end of the interview, particularly if you feel it has been a difficult meeting for the client, please be sure to assess safety before the person leaves. Answer any questions as thoroughly as possible. If you do not know the answer, let them know that you will find out and get back to them as soon as possible. Individuals are encouraged to think about all of the information provided during the screening, and to follow-up with any additional questions if needed.

The interviewer should follow-up with the client in 5-7 days to check in and see if they continue to be interested in a group and to ask if they have any additional questions. It may be helpful to offer one-to-one support prior to the start of the group, if there will be a waiting period. Always reiterate the Helpline and talk through how it works, if the client is not familiar with the process. Provide an agency brochure, business cards, and any other pertinent information. The confidentiality form, group guidelines, and other paperwork will be reviewed again at the first group session. Provide support and encouragement that it is a big step (potentially) to consider a support group and thank them for their time and for coming to the meeting.

If the client wants to know at the end of the screening if they can be in a group, it is best to let them know that decisions really can’t be made about the particular group until all interviews are completed. (Reinforce the concept that you are working to put together a group of people who will work well together in the group). If the interviewer feels that the person is generally appropriate for support groups, they can let the person know that without making a commitment that the person will be in the next group.

If it is determined that the client will not be able to join a group, the facilitator needs to let the client know as soon as it is appropriate. This may need to occur during the screening interview if, for example, the client discloses they have abused someone or the interviewer feels the client may be a danger to others in the group. It is important to be honest and up front about the process and about boundaries that may need to be set.

Not everyone is appropriate for a support group. Some examples are listed below based on actual screening interview experiences:

* + A disclosure of, ‘I lash out.’ The interviewer needs to assess what that means and ask the client if they are able to guarantee that they will not ‘lash out’ to other group members.
* Disclosure of being an abuser. The interviewer must explain why someone who has abused another person cannot be in the group.
  + If this happens, provide in-the-moment support, offer referrals and possibly a one-time additional meeting to provide those referrals.
* The client has a hard time hearing about other people’s experiences of abuse or discloses they don’t want to hear about childhood abuse.
  + Facilitators cannot break confidentiality of other potential members and cannot guarantee what may or may not come up during group conversations.

One week prior to the start of the group, one of the group facilitators will call each confirmed group member to verify they plan to attend, to discuss the location and time, to review what people can expect at the first group meeting, to discuss parking and to reiterate the scent policy, if one will be established.

*This guide has been written to provide a general overview of the support group screening process, and steps that need to be taken prior to beginning a support group. It is not a completely comprehensive guide, and may need to be slightly altered, depending on what type of support group is being offered. Staff or student interns conducting screening interviews are encouraged to reach out to the Client Services Coordinator, or their direct supervisor with questions.*