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Booklet produced by:  
Equay-wuk (Women's Group)  
May 2008

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# Starting a Support Group



Promoting

Healthy Families - Healthy Communities

This booklet is to assist you and the community members to successfully organize and facilitate a support group in your community.

A support group provides a means of relating strategies for recovering from negative experiences and understanding them, and learning how to move forward (learn new skills).

Any activity that promotes health and wellness is an activity that prevents family violence.

**SUPPORT GROUPS**

- are groups of people who support one another
- can be as small as a couple of people
- can grow into something larger (as more people attend)
- have the same vision or same goal
- offer a safe place to share information and receive guidance
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**Support Groups May Benefit:**

<b>Individuals</b>	<b>Families</b>	<b>Communities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve self (learn new skills)</li> <li>• personal commitment (to have a healthy family)</li> <li>• self-care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• healthy relationships</li> <li>• parental involvement</li> <li>• family oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community development</li> <li>• healthy communities</li> <li>• effective committees/ groups</li> <li>• understanding among members</li> </ul>

**Stages Of Change:**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Thought</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>pre-contemplation</b>	not really thinking about making any changes	no change
<b>contemplation</b>	beginning to think about making a change	seriously considering making changes
<b>preparation</b>	getting ready for change	intending to change in the near future
<b>action</b>	making necessary changes	changing behaviour changes
<b>maintenance</b>	keeping up with changes	free of negative behaviours, consistent with positive behaviours

**MOVING FORWARD IN MY COMMUNITY**

Make a list of activities that can be done in and around the community for the following groups of people.

**Elders**

**Youth**

**Parents**

**Community Workers**

## YOU CAN BEGIN TO ORGANIZE TO STOP ABUSE

- ▶ Encourage security teams in your community
- ▶ Volunteer to be a security volunteer
- ▶ Teach your children about safety and security
- ▶ Encourage attendance at women's night
- ▶ Offer to baby-sit so she can go to women's night
- ▶ Speak-Up! Phone someone. Tell the police
- ▶ Report what you hear and see. Get help
- ▶ Get involved. Take a risk to help someone
- ▶ Learn more about family violence and share the information
- ▶ Make home visits to women who need friendship and support
- ▶ If you are a parent, be involved with your son/daughter
- ▶ Listen to their stories
- ▶ Lobby your leadership. Talk to the Chief and Council. Tell them you need their support
- ▶ Provide transportation for women to attend workshops/meetings
- ▶ Donate money or fund raise for shelters and safe houses
- ▶ If there are no services - offer women and children a bed in your home until something else can be arranged

## REASONS TO HAVE A SUPPORT GROUP

- offers support to community members
- creates knowledge and awareness
- encourages healing and growth
- development of self and others
- creates a safe place to speak openly/vent
- safe place to address needs/concerns of a community
- safe place to problem solve/brainstorm solutions
- can include all members of a community (can have separate groups for women, men, youth, Elders, or all inclusive groups)

Aboriginal people speak about the children as being our future. With that thought in mind, it would be ideal to gather as a group to ensure that our children are being guided towards healthy living and that there is a healthy community for them to be a part of. We want to strive for healthy individuals, families, communities, and Nations.

When dealing with the issue of family violence, there is plenty of support required to those who wish to make healthier choices. We may not always have someone to confide in during difficult times. We may not always have someone to share with during happy times. We may require support of some kind.

We may already have an informal support system in our community. This support system may consist of family, friends, neighbours, or community service providers. It is important that we recognize our service providers and access their services should we feel the need. They are there to help.

## A SUPPORT GROUP CAN OFFER

- wisdom (family, community members)
- respect
- bravery/courage
- humility
- truth
- positive influence
- encouragement
- support
- love
- patience
- understanding
- acceptance
- honesty

A lot of times, just being able to attend support groups is sometimes difficult.

### Things to keep in mind:

- **transportation** (is it available?)
- **child care** (would it help to have child care available? how can we involve the children/youth?)
- **time** (during the day? after hours? what time would work best?)

### Starting Support Groups Requires:

respect	trust	understanding	patience
commitment	honesty	reliability	flexibility
equality	consistency	networking	cooperation
a shared vision	caring attitude	positive outlook	sincerity
variety	humour	healing	change
learning	listening	accommodating	sharing

## CONFIDENTIALITY

When we are sharing experiences, it is not meant to be passed around.

### Respect

It is important that we do not judge other peoples experiences. We all have different experiences and respond in a different way. Everyone's experiences are equally valid. We treat others how we would like to be treated.

### Support

It is important to give support to those who are reluctant to speak. When a person is speaking, listen and give your full attention and support.

### Sharing

Life experiences, both as children and later as adults, are purely personal. When there is sharing, it helps and increases understanding among one another.

We may use the following at the beginning of a support group. We are trying to establish trust among the group. The organizer can start the process.

### - Sample Oath Of Confidentiality-

I, (your name) understand confidentiality. What is said here today will stay here and I will listen with respect. Meegwetch.

# MOCK AGENDA

**Vision/Objective:** (facilitator will brainstorm with the group “**What the goal of the group is**”)

Our vision for this support group:

**Confidentiality:** (facilitator will go over what confidentiality is - use handout)

**House Rules:** (facilitator will brainstorm with the group to establish rules the group will follow)

Our house rules are:

**Topics To Discuss:** (facilitator will brainstorm topics for discussion in regards to healthy families healthy nations)

Today, we will talk about:

**Closing:** (facilitator will bring the meeting to a close, thanking everyone for sharing)

The next meeting will be held \_\_\_\_\_ .

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **respect** - respect for self and others
- **choice** - choice to share when ready
- **support** - understand that we are not alone
- **trust** - respect information shared in group, not judging anyone, trust yourself, take healthy risks
- **confidentiality** - keeping information shared within the group
- **understanding** - we each have our own understanding of the world around us
- **space/privacy** - choose own method of dealing with safety and personal issues
- **humour** - important to laugh and have fun as we learn
- **focus on the positive** - have hope for the future

When starting any type of support group, there are some guiding principles to keep in mind.

### Respect For One Another

- ▶ It is important that we do not judge other people's experiences. We all have different experiences and respond in different ways. Everyone's experiences are equally valid. We will treat others the way we would like to be treated.

### Support

- ▶ It is important to support one another and to give support to those who are reluctant to speak. When a person is speaking, we will listen and give full attention to them.

### Sharing

- ▶ Life experiences are purely personal. When there is sharing, it helps and increases understanding among one another and the healing starts. By having people listen to us and knowing how good that feels, we can then be a better support system for our families.

### Creating A Safe Place

- ▶ We want to create a safe place, where there is mutual trust and respect. Within this safe place, we can relax and be ourselves because we know that our well-being is secure. When we can talk honestly about our lives in a safe place, healing will begin to naturally occur.

## HOW TO START A SUPPORT GROUP

Support groups offer the opportunity for people to meet and share information about their experiences. It is a place where a person can speak freely about their feelings, knowing that others have had the same feelings at some point in their lives. Support groups provide a means of relating strategies for recovering from negative experiences and understanding them, and learning how to move forward (learn new skills).

### Basic Steps To Starting A Support Group:

- ▶ **Choose a location and participants** - support groups can be held in homes, meeting rooms, community halls, etc. Setting up the location prior to the group meeting is important to avoid last minute rushing around. Who should the participants be? Everyone, women, men, youth, Elders, workers, etc.
- ▶ **Advertise the group** - posters or signs can be put up around the community (stores, band office, nursing stations, schools, etc). Word of mouth is also helpful, or by signing c-boxes or visiting websites.
- ▶ **Choose topics to discuss** - at the first meeting, have an idea of what you would like to discuss at the first meeting. You can also brainstorm ideas of possible topics to further explore together.

- ▶ **Choose meeting frequency** - keep the first meeting short and simple, until there is a general idea of how often the group will meet and how long the meetings will be (try to get consensus from group on these matters).
- ▶ **Plan the meeting** - a meeting agenda can be drafted up to discuss the contents of the meeting. Handouts or visual aids should be prepared prior to the actual meeting. Guest speakers, Elders, community workers, or leaders can be invited to open up and support meetings.
- ▶ **Search for volunteers** - starting support groups can be a lot of work. It may be helpful to look for others to volunteer and help out with preparations and such. Volunteers can be anybody, from children, friends, Elders, leaders, community workers, teachers, neighbours, etc.
- ▶ **Consistency** - it is important to be consistent with meetings, even if there are only a few people who come out and attend. People may be hesitant at first to attend, but if they see that it is a continual activity in the community, they may choose to come 'check it out'. Some people will observe to see how much of a 'commitment to help' is there before seeking that help.

The whole point of a support group is to educate ourselves and others, find and explore ways of learning, healthy living, and to support one another (can be difficult or fun times).