

## Parent Support Group Action Pack



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### Group Development and information for local support groups in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales

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<b>Contents</b>	<b>page</b>
Introduction	3
The Checklist	4
• Networking	5
• State of Play	6
• Management and Planning	7
• Governance	8
A group quiz	9
Useful Contacts	13
Join our Local Group Network	16

This guide is for information purposes only and is not intended to be a source of legal advice and must not be relied upon as such. Other organisations are listed for information purposes only and inclusion does not constitute endorsement by Contact.

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## **Group Progress**

Support groups have lives of their own. Like individuals they progress from infancy through adolescence to maturity; they grow at different rates, and can go backwards as well as forwards. Attendance can fluctuate. Groups come and they go.

The stages in group development have been described as: forming; storming; norming; performing. You might find this a helpful way of looking at your group.

### **Forming**

At the beginning of a group's life, people can feel anxious or shy or unwilling to commit themselves. It is therefore very important to be friendly and welcoming to everyone; to be supportive and encourage people to contribute at the level that feels right for them.

### **Storming**

As people become more confident they may start to disagree about how the group should be run. This is a sign that people are beginning to care about the group. It is very important to listen to everyone's views and to share decision making as much as possible.

### **Norming**

Members will now begin to trust each other more and to feel a sense of belonging to the group. This is a good time to encourage members to develop new skills and perhaps to try a new venture.

### **Performing**

At this stage everyone feels responsible for the group and members are able to listen to each other, express their opinions freely and share responsibility for the group working well.

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## **What makes a healthy group?**

Planning on areas to address from the start ensures the success of your group; and getting into the habit of regularly taking stock and reviewing the health of your group will help you spot problem areas quickly.

To help you concentrate the planning of some of your key areas when setting up a new group, or to take stock and review the state of your groups' current activities, we have

produced a 'health checklist'. This checklist is a basic tool to help you ask some of the questions you need to and make a record of areas for development or improvement.

### **How to use the checklist**

The checklist can help give you an idea of development around areas of setting up and running your support group, whether you are a 'coffee and chat' group or running a short breaks scheme. The categories are:

- Networking
- State of Play
- Management and Planning
- Governance

Categories within our checklist are divided with statements to help you best reflect the position of your group. The columns listed in the tables enable you to identify the progress needed to meet your targets. The options for each column are:

- ✓ To do – target to be considered
- ✓ Making progress/ongoing – work on the target has started
- ✓ Fully met – you have achieved your aim and have the correct guidelines, activities and policies in place
- ✓ Not needed for now – self-explanatory!

In each column, tick the option that matches the accompanying statement. There is also room for you to make notes.

Networking	To do	Making Progress/ ongoing	Fully Met	Not needed for now
Members participate and know of local and regional networks to share ideas and to know what is going on within the community				
We publicise our group in a myriad of ways (examples): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• posters</li> <li>• newsletters</li> <li>• using the media effectively</li> </ul>				
We make links with professionals who can support our group through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• speaking out for our group</li> <li>• sharing of information</li> <li>• working in partnership for the common good of the service provision</li> </ul>				
We work with other organisations and support groups to develop new ideas and ensure needs are being addressed and to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• avoid duplication of services</li> <li>• reach new members</li> </ul>				
Notes				

State of Play		To do	Making progress/ ongoing	Fully Met	Not needed for now
1	The group has a constitution or mission statement that identifies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear aims</li> <li>• objectives</li> <li>• definition of membership</li> </ul>				
2	We have an elected committee who understand their responsibilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• chairperson</li> <li>• secretary</li> <li>• treasurer</li> </ul> other committee members (eg fundraising)				
2	We know which legal structure is right for our group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• and know we are acting for the public benefit</li> <li>• and we are seen as a charity in the eyes of the law</li> </ul>				
3	Our group is accessible to all members of our community				
4	If applicable, DBS checks are carried out on committee members				
5	We have good, strong and fair leadership				
6	A member of our group acts as 'buddy' to new parents				
7	We have a clear image of our group's purpose				
Notes					

Management and Planning		To do	Making Progress/ ongoing	Fully Met	Not needed for now
1	The constitution is reviewed regularly to identify changing needs				
2	We react to the needs of the community				
3	The group regularly seeks feedback on the quality the groups' services and activities from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• members/users</li> <li>• volunteers</li> </ul>				
4	We keep records of all our money and a statement is produced every year				
5	We monitor our strengths and weaknesses to effectively plan for our future aims				
6	We know where to identify grants locally and nationally				
7	We keep records to assist us in making grant applications				
8	We plan activities clearly and well in advance				
Notes					

Governance		Not Met	Making Progress/ ongoing	Fully Met	Not needed for now
1	Resources and policies are in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to meet health and safety standards</li> <li>to safeguard working with children and vulnerable adults</li> <li>for appropriate insurance cover i.e public liability;</li> <li>equal opportunities</li> <li>confidentiality</li> <li>volunteer policy</li> </ul>				
2	Training is offered to volunteers if appropriate to their role: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>induction</li> <li>clear role description</li> <li>child safety</li> <li>first aid</li> </ul>				
3	Training opportunities are sourced for parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>from local charities and the local authority for parent empowerment</li> <li>from condition specific charities</li> </ul>				
4	Resources are showcased to share at each meeting				
5	Volunteering opportunities are widely publicised				
Notes					

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## Reviewing Progress

From the outset you will be making an informal note of the group's progress: a meeting that went well; a fundraising event that was a bit of a disaster; those new group members you were able to help. By keeping a record of lessons learned, the group can become more successful in future planning. Setting goals and targets can give the group a sense of direction and achievement.

Measuring Up! <http://inspiringimpact.org/measuringup/> is an online tool that can help you to work out how you're doing against good impact practice.

## Where do you think your group is?

Use **the quiz** which follows to help you find out.

This quiz should be completed as a group exercise as this will aid discussion about the group's progress. Your group may like to distribute a copy to each member to complete, but it is best filled in and discussed in one session while ideas are fresh.

Read the three statements in each area and tick the one that you think best matches your group. Then simply add up your scores at the end. You must answer all the questions and then see how your answers compare! If individual members have different answers to some of the questions try to use this as an opportunity to open up a discussion about the group and a chance to resolve some differences. The responses could remain anonymous and you could also add your own questions or modify the ones suggested.

## Aims and objectives

- A We all agree on our aims
  - B Some of us agree on our aims
  - C We haven't a clue what our aims are
- 
- A We carry out our aims
  - B We sometimes get side-tracked from our aims
  - C We do whatever we feel like at the time
- 
- A Our publicity accurately reflects our aims
  - B We are not publicising our group well enough
  - C What publicity?

## Comfort and convenience

- A The room in which we meet is right for our needs
  - B Some people dislike things about the room
  - C Everyone dislikes the meeting room
- 
- A The time of day we meet suits most people
  - B We lose some members because of the time we meet
  - C Hardly anyone can come at the time we have chosen
- 
- A We are all pretty happy with the location
  - B Some people are put off by the location
  - C We know the location is not suitable

## Views on meetings

- A We all enjoy the meetings and learn something
  - B Some of us do not enjoy some of the meetings
  - C Most of us feel the meetings are a let down
- 
- A We can all grumble or laugh and not feel silly
  - B Some of us feel awkward sharing our real feelings
  - C Everyone feels awkward about sharing their feelings
- 
- A We all get on well and listen to each other
  - B Some people are rather annoying
  - C We are not close to each other and our emotional needs are not being met

## Sharing

- A We all decide what to do
  - B Some people decide what to do and tell the rest
  - C One person decides
- 
- A We list the jobs and share them out
  - B The same few people do all the work
  - C One person does all the work
- 
- A Everyone has a chance to use their skills
  - B A few people use their skills
  - C Hardly anyone uses their skills
- 
- A We have a great variety of skills and knowledge in our group
  - B Some of us would like to learn more skills
  - C We badly need help with fundraising, publicity, etc

- A We all welcome new members
- B Some make the effort to welcome new people
- C No one is responsible for looking after new members

- A We all seem to share the leadership around
- B Leadership is delegated to a few people
- C We have had the same leader since we started

- A We have a good selection of resources
- B We have the odd magazine
- C We have no resources whatsoever

### **Membership**

- A We have a comfortable flow of new members
- B We have a trickle of new members
- C We are desperate for new members

- A We are happy that people are hearing about our group
- B We wish we could get more publicity for our group
- C No one seems to know that we exist

### **Networking**

- A We engage with other support groups and organisations in our area
- B We are selective as to who we deal with
- C We doubt anyone really knows we are here

- A We are happy with our relationship with professional workers
- B We would like more/less contact with professionals
- C We want to change our relationship with professional workers

- A Professionals tell people about our group
- B Some professional workers sometimes advertise our group
- C Professionals are not involved

### **Scoring**

A = 3, B = 2, C = 1

**A score of 55–60:** You have a very happy group whose members feel a high level of satisfaction. This is a good time to take on new challenges if members all feel like doing so.

**A score of 35–54:** Your group is ticking along and satisfying some of its members but most would like it to improve in various areas. Have a look at your B and C answers and see if you can pinpoint any areas where you could focus your efforts as a group.

**A score of 26–34:** Your members seem to be quite dissatisfied about several aspects of the group. You might find it helpful to identify which areas are causing problems and then talk them through with a Contact development worker or with a worker from a local self-help support team.

**A score of 20–25:** If you are a very new group everyone may still need time to settle down and decide the group's direction and get to know each other. If you are an older group then such a high level of dissatisfaction calls for a thorough review of your aims and objectives. If you wish, a Contact development worker will be pleased to help you.

## Useful Contacts

### England and Wales

**Charity Commission** (England and Wales)

Tel: 0845 300 0218

Web: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission)

**Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)**

WCVA represents the interests of voluntary organisations, community groups and volunteers in Wales and is in contact with many more through national and regional networks. [www.wcva.org.uk](http://www.wcva.org.uk)

**Volunteering England**

Volunteering England offers a range of services and resources of publications giving practical advice on managing volunteers, as well as research findings and a good practice bank – a one stop shop to help you find and share good practice on over 30 different themes of working with volunteers.

Tel: 020 7520 8900

Email: [volunteering@volunteering.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@volunteering.org.uk)

Web: [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)

**Volunteering Wales**

Find tips and information on working with volunteers and signup with Volunteering Wales to advertise your opportunities.

[www.volunteering-wales.net/](http://www.volunteering-wales.net/)

**The Governance Hub**

The Governance Hub provides support for good governance in the voluntary and community sector in England. They produce a range of information and resources for trustees, chairs

and management committees.

Tel: 0800 652 4886

Email: [governance.hub@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:governance.hub@ncvo-vol.org.uk)

[www.governancehub.org.uk](http://www.governancehub.org.uk)

### **Resource Centre, Brighton**

Find a wealth of information to complement our group action pack guides with a strong emphasis on grass-roots organisations.

[www.resourcecentre.org.uk](http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk)

### **The Foundation for Social Improvement (FSI)**

Free training, mentoring, and strategic support for small charities. There are two types of membership:

- FSI Small Charity Member: this membership option (FREE) is for small charities with an annual turnover of less than £1.5M per annum
- FSI Associate Member: this membership option is for small to medium sized charities with an annual turnover between £1.5M and £5M.

[www.thefsi.org](http://www.thefsi.org)

## **Scotland**

### **Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator**

Tel: 01382 220 446

Email: [info@oscr.org.uk](mailto:info@oscr.org.uk)

Website: [www.oscr.org.uk](http://www.oscr.org.uk)

### **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)**

Umbrella body for voluntary organisations in Scotland, with offices in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness

[www.scvo.org.uk](http://www.scvo.org.uk)

### **Volunteer Scotland**

Volunteer Scotland is funded by the Scottish Government to support volunteering. You can advertise your volunteer vacancies and events on the website.

[www.volunteerscotland.net/](http://www.volunteerscotland.net/)

## **Northern Ireland**

### **The Charity Commission Northern Ireland (CCNI)**

Tel: 028 9051 5490

[www.charitycommissionni.org.uk](http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk)

### **The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)**

A membership and representative umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

[www.nicva.org](http://www.nicva.org)

## Volunteer Now

Volunteer Now works to support volunteering across Northern Ireland. It provides information and support to volunteer-involving organisations on volunteer management and safeguarding vulnerable groups

[www.volunteernow.co.uk/](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/)

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## Contact's Local Parent Support Group Affiliation Scheme

Contact has an affiliation scheme for local groups which offers both a free and paid membership. The scheme has the advantage of covering all disabilities and does not stop your group from joining other organisations as well.

If you join our affiliation scheme, we'll help to promote your group so you can reach new members, give you access to discounted training, and a dedicated enquiry service from our Local Groups Manager.

You can say your group is a member of the Contact Local Parent Support Group Affiliation Scheme, to give it some local credibility in the early days.

We'll also give you our Affiliation Scheme logo to use on your communications and publicity material. For more information about the scheme please visit

[www.contact.org.uk/supporting-groups](http://www.contact.org.uk/supporting-groups) or download our brochure at [www.contact.org.uk/affiliation-scheme](http://www.contact.org.uk/affiliation-scheme)



Our series of guides to help local parent support groups – our [Group Action Pack](#), is available on our website.



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