



Toolkit for Parents' Groups Supporting Deaf Children

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Volume II: COMING TOGETHER


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Volume II: COMING TOGETHER



INTRODUCTION



This is the second volume of the *Toolkit for Parents' Group Supporting Deaf Children*. In the first volume, we saw how parents and other caregivers can come to know each other. Through discussions, they can begin to consider the idea of a group. In this volume, further information on group formation is provided. It highlights how members can gradually arrive at an understanding of the importance and utility of a parents' group. They may also begin to work on specific aspects that are integral for the functioning of the group. Also, any new group faces a lot of ups and downs as it begins the process of giving itself a distinct identity. These aspects are also outlined.

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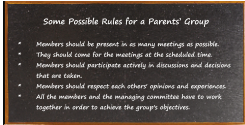
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A NAME FOR OURSELVES

How do we move forward after the first formal meeting?

Often, the first meeting helps in generating a lot of enthusiasm. It is important to build on this momentum in the next few meetings. In the subsequent meetings, we should track whether:

- Members are showing interest and coming to the meetings
- Members are accepting each other
- When differences of opinions surface – how these are being handled (such aspects may need to be discussed after the meetings separately)
- All members are getting opportunities for participation

04

We have to explain the importance and benefits of being in a group through discussions. Once there is agreement on this, we can move towards forming a group where members meet regularly.

Should the group have a name?

The name of a group helps in giving it an identity. There is a sense of ownership and belonging as the name holds a special meaning for the members. Members can suggest names and then one can be chosen based on voting or consensus. The



group name can be chosen in the first meeting itself or later once group members become more familiar with each other.

05

When and how should we decide on our group's objectives?

Once we all agree to come together as a group, then we have to create an open and conducive environment for discussing the group's objectives. For instance, we can decide that we will identify issues and concerns affecting our deaf children and work collectively on finding solutions. We can always break this broad objective down into more specific points in subsequent meetings.

SHOWING THE WAY

When should we choose our leaders?

Every group needs leaders who can guide the functioning of the group. Typically, we need a President, Secretary and Treasurer. Besides them, Vice President, Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer can also be considered. Some general members (i.e. not holding any specific posts) should also be a part of this managing committee of the group. The committee can have about seven to eight members.

06

There is no standard rule about when the leaders should be chosen. It is more important that a group arrives at a stage where they know each other well enough to do this.

We, as a group, may be ready to choose our leaders when:

- We have held some meetings (and agreed that these will continue)
- Some members are attending regularly
- The people who come often have each other's phone numbers and contact details and have begun to stay in touch
- The people who come for the meetings share with each other and are interested in being a part of the group
- There is interest in doing some activities together

What qualities should we look for in our leaders?

PRESIDENT

Role

- To provide overall guidance and direction to the group
- To identify opportunities and actions for group members that can benefit our children and families
- To motivate and hold the group together and help it grow
- To sign records and other key documents of the group

Qualities

- Does not get discouraged easily
- Level headed, can handle crisis situations
- Can think of solutions or able to work collectively with people and find ways to address any problem
- Can represent the group before others in a convincing manner





SECRETARY

Role

- To ensure effective functioning of the group
- To work with all the group members for undertaking actions as planned
- To ensure that all records and other requirements are being written and maintained as needed
- To ensure rules of the group are being followed

Qualities

- Systematic and organised
- Can manage the group
- Can represent the group before others in a convincing manner
- Can handle difficult situations with patience and work collectively on solutions

TREASURER

Role

- To handle all financial matters related to the group
- To maintain records related to the financial dealings
- To present financial records at the annual general meeting of the group
- To maintain linkages with the bank where the group has an account
- To maintain the receipt book and other records related to membership contribution/fee
- To work for enhancing the group's financial resources

Qualities

- Honest
- Should not be afraid of numbers!
- Should be confident in handling money and keeping accounts
- Systematic and organised
- Can give due attention to details



Qualities Common for President, Secretary and Treasurer:

- Friendly and able to connect with people
- Understanding
- Can be firm when needed
- Trustworthy
- Understands the value of time and can utilise it well
- Open to others' opinions and accepting feedback
- Interested in working for the group
- Has family support or can convince them
- Can balance familial and group responsibilities and give time to both
- Consistent in speech and actions



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It helps if the leaders are able to read and write in their own language. The treasurer should be comfortable with mathematics, at least addition and subtraction.

The roles and qualities of the President are applicable for the Vice President. In the absence of the President, the Vice President may have to play that role.

Similarly, the Assistant Secretary and the Assistant Treasurer may need to play the roles of Secretary and Treasurer respectively. The qualities for these posts apply to them also.

We should remember that personal qualities and interest in working for the group are much more important than educational qualifications. Ultimately, the group should decide what works for it.

How should we choose our leaders? Should we change them periodically?

As elsewhere, here too, the group should decide. The leaders can be men or women. It may be good if some names are suggested and then all group members vote. Or, they may all agree by consensus. It is important that the leaders are chosen after members have some understanding about each other and their qualities and interests.

Leaders can be changed after a period of time. For instance, we know that our governments have a fixed term and can be changed through elections. However, we should give them enough time to learn and grow. Sometimes, one year is not enough. We can consider two to three years or more. The group can decide the time period.

It is also good to keep the past leaders involved so that they can pass on their experiences and insights to those who come after them. They can be given some other designation – like advisors.

In a parents' group in Kolkata in West Bengal, the group leader was not able to attend several meetings. She had a lot of household work and found it difficult to manage that and give time for the group. She shared this in a meeting. The group members discussed and then collectively agreed to choose another person in her place. She felt relieved. She said that she liked being a part of the group and would try to continue to support it as much as she could.



Some Possible Rules for a Parents' Group

- * *Members should be present in as many meetings as possible.*
- * *They should come for the meetings at the scheduled time.*
- * *Members should participate actively in discussions and decisions that are taken.*
- * *Members should respect each others' opinions and experiences.*
- * *All the members and the managing committee have to work together in order to achieve the group's objectives.*

Rules for Our Group

Why does a group need rules? When should these be made?

Rules help members know how the group will function, what is acceptable and what is not. It also reduces the chance of misunderstandings. Just like choosing leaders, rules should be made only when the group members have become slightly familiar with each other and are ready to commit to working together. The rules should be discussed and decided collectively. They should be simple so that all members can understand and follow. It may be helpful if the experience of

another parents' group that has framed and follows rules is shared. The rules can also be written on a chart paper and displayed for easy reference. Suggestions for aspects which can be considered are given below.

Membership

- Who can become a member?
- Duties of members (like attending meetings)
- Subscription fee/contribution to be given by each member
- Grounds for asking a member to leave the group

Points to Remember

- All members should be mindful of each others' circumstances.
- Subscription should be fixed based on consensus and mutual convenience.
- Members should be able to speak to the group leaders in confidence about their financial situations with respect to meeting group obligations.
- All members may not be able to participate in everything – this has to be accepted and respected.
- Responsibilities should be shared among group leaders and other members.

Group Processes

- Deciding on means of facilitating participation
- Decision making
- Choosing leaders and determining how they will function
- Deciding which behaviours they will not accept

- Agreeing on what will happen if a member does something considered unacceptable
- Deciding the process for handling difficult/challenging situations



Points to Remember

- Group leaders must give equal importance to all members and work collectively.
- Members cannot be disqualified based merely on lack of attendance or inadequate levels of participation.
- Members can be disqualified when they do anything illegal or that which adversely affects the reputation of the group.
- The consequences of group decisions for the members has to be considered (i.e. whether they will find it difficult to follow or face some problems because of it).
- Convenience of members should be considered when choosing date, time and location of meetings. Meetings can also be held on a particular date of every month (i.e. first day or first Saturday of every month).

Review and Updating Rules

- When will the rules be reviewed?
- How will this review happen?

- How many members have to agree for a change to be made to the rules?

Points to Remember

- At least an annual review of the rules can be done.
- Depending on the evolving situations, new rules can be added. Existing rules can also be modified. Such changes can be done through special meetings.



All members have to understand and follow the rules. The rules should be written in the local language and placed where these can be easily accessed by all the members.

Pratidhwani is a state level parents' group in West Bengal, India. It was initiated with representation from parents' groups across the state. It reviews its rules every year. Discussions during one such exercise yielded a new rule - core committee members must have 70% attendance. So, if a member failed to attend at least seven out of ten meetings, then he/she would be asked for an explanation. If he/she was unable to contribute, then the core committee could collectively decide on replacing him/her with another member. This rule was formulated as the core committee realised that it had a lot of responsibility and needed people who could take it forward.

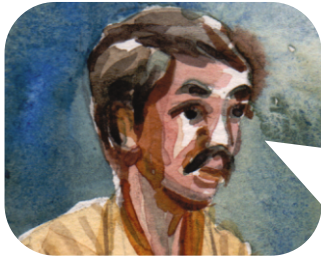
SOME CHALLENGES, SOME SOLUTIONS



What can we do when members are not able to attend meetings regularly?

The group leaders should try to find out the reasons for irregular attendance. The place and timing of the meeting may need to be changed. Women members may be facing problems at home, especially if family members do not approve of their attending meetings. We may need to speak to other family members and convince them. We may need to encourage the women members as well. We should always try to understand their circumstances. Moreover, members who can't attend meetings regularly should not be blamed or singled out. We must remember that we formed this group to support each other.





What should we do when there are differences of opinions among members?

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Even in our own families, we don't always agree on everything. We argue. It will be the same in the group as well. Here, the leaders have an important role. They need to listen to all the sides impartially and then suggest what is best for the group. They may need to talk to the concerned group members separately as well. The leaders should share that even though their points were not prioritised or accepted this time, they are valued members of the group. Moreover, it has to be stressed that the group's interests should be given more importance than that of individuals.





Sometimes, our society doesn't treat everyone equally. This may get reflected in our group also. What should we do then?

People who are in positions of power because of various reasons (i.e. better financial or social standing, education etc) may feel that they should be the decision makers in the group as well. Sometimes, siblings of deaf children may not be taken as seriously as the other members who are parents.



This may be because of their age. We should treat all members equally. We have to ensure that members don't speak to each other disrespectfully. We have to remember that we have all come together for the same objective and need to work collectively for that. We have to, therefore, ensure that political, religious or other factors do not exert an undue influence on the group. We should clarify such aspects in the initial stages and ensure that these are included in the rules.

Points to Remember

- Participation of all the members should be consciously encouraged from the beginning itself.
- There may be differences of opinions among members. These situations need to be handled with patience, sensitivity and skill.
- Group leaders have to rise above their interests and ensure that decisions are taken collectively.



Group members expressing their consent in a meeting

Acknowledgement

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- *Udita and Anwasha (parents' groups of deaf children in Kolkata)
- *Pratidhwani (West Bengal state level parents' group of deaf children)
- *Representatives of deaf youth from the above mentioned districts who are deaf role models
- *Graham Bell Centre for the Deaf (GBCD, Hooghly)
- *Khagenhat Welfare Organisation (KWO, Jalpaiguri)
- *Child in Need Institute (CINI, Kolkata)
- *Various government functionaries including service providers, community members and other like-minded individuals who contributed

Odisha, India

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- *Representatives of deaf youth from the above mentioned districts who are deaf role models
- *Citizen's Association for Rural Development (CARD, Brahmapur)
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Deaf Child Worldwide is the leading UK charity committed to supporting deaf children and young people in some of the world's poorest communities. We provide vital support for deaf children and young people in South Asia, East Africa and Latin America focusing on communities where the need is greatest. We work with partner organisations to ensure that deaf children and young people are fully included in family, education and community life.

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