



**Toolkit for Parents' Groups  
Supporting Deaf Children**

**4**



**Volume IV: LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD**

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# **Toolkit for Parents' Groups Supporting Deaf Children**


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**Volume IV: LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD**



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# INTRODUCTION



This is the fourth volume of the *Toolkit for Parents' Groups Supporting Deaf Children*. In the first, second and third volumes, we saw how a parents' group can be formed and the activities that it can possibly undertake. Some of the key challenges that may come up and how these can be dealt with were also highlighted. In this volume, we explore how a group can reflect on its progress and also plan ahead for itself. Some challenges at this stage of planning ahead and possible solutions are outlined as well.

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# CONTENTS

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**Enhancing Group Identity**

**04**



**Reflecting On Our Journey**

**10**



**Planning Ahead**

**15**



**Some Challenges, Some Solutions**

**20**



# ENHANCING GROUP IDENTITY

## How can we enhance our group's identity?

For a group to grow strong with a distinct identity, we should consider the following:

- Members need to identify themselves with the group and love being a part of it
- They have to believe in the group and it's potential
- Members need to relate strongly to the name of the group and take pride in using it

04



- They should use opportunities in their interactions with others to highlight their work as a group
- They need to gradually explore ways of expanding their activities and also seeing how these can be promoted/publicised (for instance, use banners, flyers and other materials in activities; share monthly/annual newsletter or other publications etc; make announcements using public address system/mike on special days )

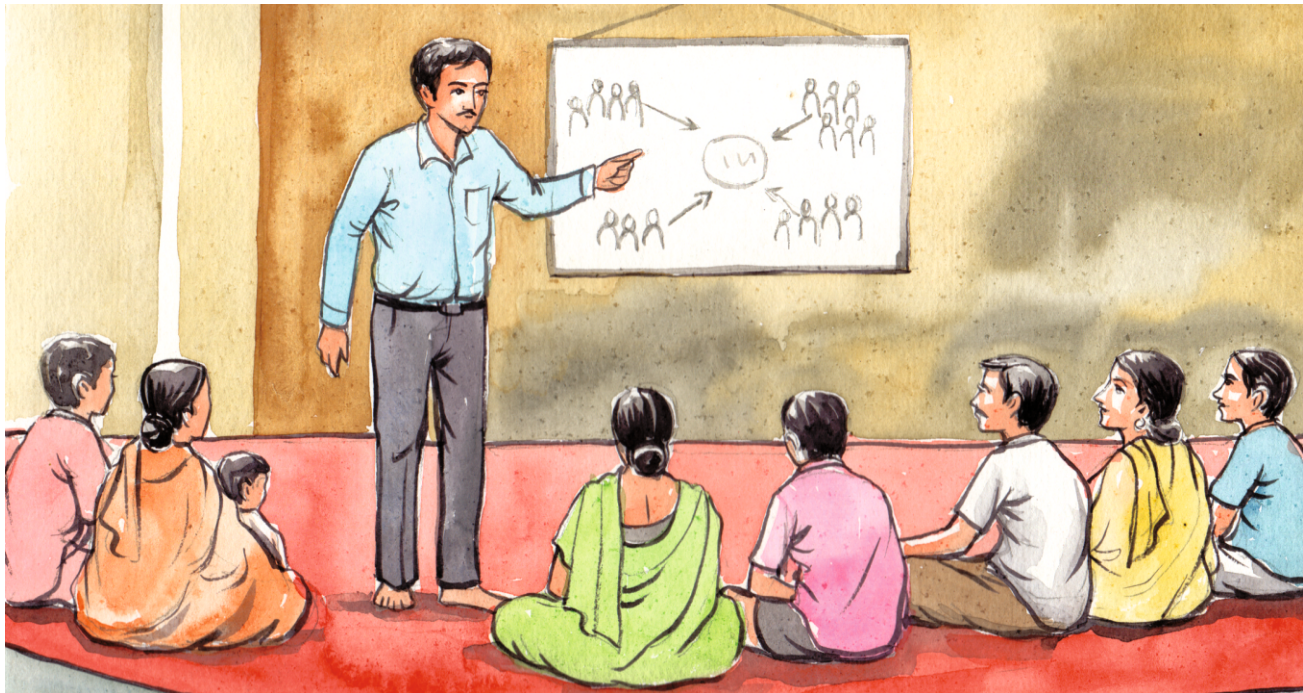
**Some group members want to go on a picnic. They say it will help us come together as a group. Should we do this kind of activity?**



We should definitely undertake fun activities like picnics and outings. These will help in bringing all the members closer and enhancing group feeling. This will lead to more ownership and strengthen the group identity as well. However, such activities need to be planned carefully keeping all the members in mind.

**If more members keep joining us, then are there any specific aspects that we need to consider?**

- As more people become aware of our group, we may find many other parents showing interest. These interested parents can be oriented and welcomed into the group.





- When numbers increase, it may help to have a tiered structure especially where factors like distance can affect participation of members.
- We can have smaller groups wherein members can come together easily. Their representatives can then come together at a central level. This can take the shape of some kind of a central/core/steering committee.
- The group can decide on a structure that suits the requirements of the members.

In Kolkata, parents/guardians of deaf children first began to come together at centres run by a non-government organisation (NGO). These parents/guardians formed groups at that level. Their group leaders then came together to form a group at a central level. The central level group acted like the core committee. They took key initiatives, sought information from the NGO etc. Its members then ensured that these were communicated to all. Similarly, issues and concerns that could not be addressed at the first level were brought by the group leaders to the central group. Here, they could help each other find solutions.

In Hooghly, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar, parents' groups evolved at the block level. These comprised of all parents/guardians of deaf children in these blocks. Of the total 60-65 members, close to half meet regularly and are active. They ensure that other members are kept informed and involved in broader group processes. In one block in Hooghly, these very active members have also formed a core committee for themselves that helps in managing the bigger group.

*As a group grows big and has multiple layers, it is also important to keep track of certain aspects.*

- The needs and interests of all members should be addressed as far as possible.
- All members should participate regularly in the group processes.
- Efforts must be made to discuss and build consensus among members on all key matters.

### **Is it necessary to have our group registered legally?**

This is an issue that needs to be discussed properly within the group and then decided upon. Some of the advantages and considerations related to registration are mentioned below.

08

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Gains legal recognition</li><li>○ Is seen as more credible</li><li>○ There is greater scope for becoming more systematic (since certain rules have to be followed)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Members have to understand that the group can no longer function in a very informal manner and they need to follow legal norms</li><li>○ They will have to ensure that meetings are held regularly, that these are noted in the minutes register which is kept updated</li></ul>

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Can avail more opportunities – can apply for work as a group with government departments / agencies and non-government sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Records of all financial dealings have to be maintained properly and an annual audit has to be ensured (to be done by a registered agency)</li> <li>◦ An annual meeting has to be held where the financial record and activity report have to be presented and endorsed</li> </ul>

The relevant office at the district/state level can be contacted for further details. It is important to remember that groups can decide to function without registration. They can choose to take a decision on this at a later stage. In the meantime, they can still strengthen their group processes and grow.

# Reflecting On Our Journey

A parents' group can benefit from reflecting upon its journey, achievements, strengths and areas of improvement. An activity that can trigger such a discussion is outlined in this chapter.

## **Aim of the activity:**

- To allow group members to easily and confidentially share how they feel about the functioning of their group
- To lead to a discussion where areas of good performance/functioning can be identified, celebrated and considered for future use
- To also help identify areas that need to be developed further or changed

This exercise requires a **facilitator**. A respected group member who is known to be unbiased and experienced in facilitating discussions can play this role. An external person (i.e. experienced member from another parents' group or a supporting organisation) can also be requested to be the facilitator. Group leaders should participate in this exercise and not take on this role. The instructions given in the following pages will help the facilitator in conducting the activity.

## What you will need:

Pens, paper, list of statements capturing key aspects of group functioning, board, chalk and duster/ chart paper

## What to do:

1. Hand out pieces of paper to each member of the group.



2. Read out a statement from the list provided. Ask group members to express their response to the statement by drawing a sad/neutral/happy face on the piece of paper.



3. After they have drawn, ask members to fold the pieces of paper and hand them back. They don't need to write their names on the paper.



4. Open all the pieces of paper and note the responses for the statement on a board/ chart paper placed on a wall for display.

5. This process has to be repeated for all the statements. Count and note the responses, for each statement, on the board/chart paper.



6. Initiate a group discussion. First, highlight the positives (where there is a clear majority of smiling faces). Then, mention the statements where neutral or sad faces dominate. Encourage group members to discuss why they feel the results have come out as they have and their personal experiences and opinions related to this.



7. Help members identify priority areas that they need to work on further.



8. Depending on availability of time, continue the discussion. Or the group can discuss how to build on the positives and plan for areas of improvement in the next meeting. Conclude the activity by thanking all the members for their participation.

## Use of Symbols in this Activity



**Completely disagree**

For example, a group of 15 members express their response to a statement in the following way:



**Partially agree**

4 draw sad face (completely disagree), 5 draw neutral face (partially agree) and 6 draw the happy face (fully agree)






**Fully agree**

These numbers i.e. 4, 5 and 6 should be written in the respective columns against that statement (*see pg. 14*).

## Points to Remember

- A supportive environment needs to be created so that members can share their responses frankly and confidently using the three symbols.
- The discussion should be facilitated in a manner which ensures that individual members are not blamed for anything. Also, members should not be forced to share their experiences if they don't want to.
- Specific aspects of a group's functioning are mentioned in eight statements. These can be modified or further aspects added as needed.
- A single topic can also be covered more extensively (i.e. progress made in networking with other district, state and national level groups). Related statements would need to be framed.

## List of Statements

Statement	 Completely disagree	 Partially agree	 Fully agree
There is a bond of friendship between group members and we know that we are all committed to working for the betterment of our deaf children.			
People in our neighbourhoods and also in the village/larger community know us as a parents' group supporting deaf children.			
We are all able to come together as a group to identify what we want to do and how we want to do it.			
We are able to take responsibilities and complete our activities well.			
We are able to write and maintain our minutes in a satisfactory manner.			
We maintain records of the money received and spent.			
Our group leaders facilitate our discussions and actions and they step in to resolve any concerns or problems within the group.			
We have some sense of direction – of how we want to see the group grow in the coming years.			





## PLANNING AHEAD

### Can a group make an annual plan?

Yes. It is good if a group can discuss and finalise an annual plan collectively. The plan should be aligned to the group's objectives. It can include:

- Observing key days such as the International Week of the Deaf, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities etc

- Conducting various awareness related activities
- Interacting with government service providers, state level parents' group (named Pratidhwani in West Bengal) and likeminded non-government organisations

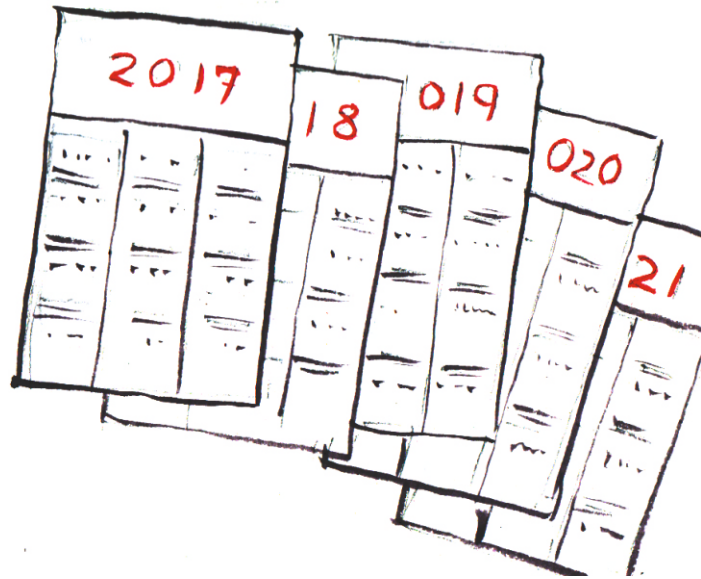
We can determine the costs and plan for the financial aspects as well.

### **Should a group also think beyond one year to a three or a five year time frame?**

It is always good to discuss how we want the group to grow in the coming years. We can trigger this discussion by considering where our children would be in two-three years and what would be their needs and concerns at that stage. We can also think about what else we would like to do as a group.

16

For instance, we may have already started communicating with other parents' groups in the district and the state. We can review the progress made so far and consider how we want to build on these experiences. We can check if our neighbouring states have parents' groups and try to link with them. Gradual involvement in larger processes at the state and



national levels would help us in using our collective voice for drawing attention to various issues and contributing to the wellbeing of deaf children and young people in a more substantial way. We can identify and build partnerships with other parents' groups, government departments and related service providers and supporting organisations for this.

Discussions on such aspects may help us in identifying continuing and new areas of focus for the next three to five years. Of course, these aspects have to be agreed upon collectively. Even if we can't decide on all the details, it would help if all group members have a general sense of direction. If the group so feels, an external person (from another experienced parents' group or a supporting NGO) can be requested to facilitate such processes of reflection and planning.

### **Are there any other roles or activities that we can consider as a group?**

The group has the flexibility to explore options and decide on any further roles and activities that it wants to undertake. For instance, we can see if some of the more educated members want to take on the responsibility of coaching children of other group members. Since they themselves are parents of deaf children, they will be better equipped to support education of other children as well. The parents who teach can be paid some money by other parents as an incentive.

Parents' groups in Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar have opened five support centres where educated members provide tuitions to children of other group members. They obtained space for holding the classes. Typically, they sought permission from local clubs to use their premises. In one case, parents spoke to the Vice chairperson of the Municipality and got permission to use a room in a building. Also, in one group, a parent who drives a motorised rickshaw (toto) gets children to the centre and back to their homes. The other parents provide some financial assistance to those who teach at the centre (i.e. Rs 200 per month per child). But all parents are not forced to pay. The parents who teach have been provided additional inputs by the non-government organisation supporting the parents' group.



**A parent teaching children of other group members**

We may also find that some of our members have the capacity to be good trainers. We can encourage them to grow in this role. They can support other parents' groups in the district and also elsewhere.

The group can also see if the deaf children can be encouraged to come together as a club. The parents' group can provide support as needed. This club may prove particularly useful as the children cross into adulthood and find peer support to help them with this exciting and challenging stage in their lives.

Meanwhile, the group should track its own functioning as well. If it has grown large, then the role and activities of the core committee should be considered periodically. It is important that the core committee at the block/district level meets regularly and facilitates sharing of information and actions in the larger group.

Also, it would be helpful if the group plans regular and periodic interactions with peers at the district, state and national levels.

### **Points to Remember**

- The discussion on making an annual plan should happen only after the group has worked together for some time.
- It may be useful to first plan for three months and see how that works out. Next, planning for six months can be considered. Subsequently, the group can make an annual plan. The financial aspects should also be considered here.
- Any changes made in the group's objectives, norms of functioning and other aspects during the reflection and planning processes have to be agreed by all members and duly noted.

# SOME CHALLENGES, SOME SOLUTIONS



**How can we ensure that the parents' group stays vibrant and connected?**

A group has to remain engaged in some activity for it to stay vibrant. Sometimes, due to unavoidable reasons, there may be a gap. Then, attempts should be made to bring the members together and do some activity as soon as possible.



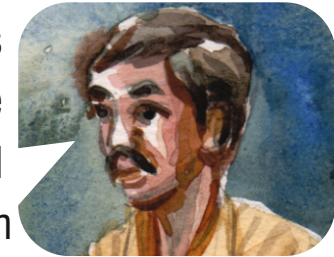
We should also see if some members are dominating others.

This may happen as some members may grow more in knowledge and experience and feel that they are better equipped to take responsibilities. Ego related issues may also come in. Such aspects need to be considered and attempts made to involve all members as far as possible.



**How can we retain the interest of members whose children have grown and moved into college?**

A group will remain relevant only if it continues to address issues and concerns of all the members. While a lot of the discussion may happen around children who are school going, it is also important to track the needs of older children and those who have moved into adulthood. The group leaders should involve their parents in discussions as well. Moreover, talking about college and/or employment will benefit all the parents since they would also like to secure their children's future.







**With time, more new members may join. There may be differences in opinions between the new members and the older ones. What can be done then?**

Differences of opinions occur within our families as well, particularly between generations. The older members may feel that the new members are not following all the rules properly or are in too much of a hurry to accomplish things. The new members may feel that they are not being given adequate importance. It is important then to highlight the benefits that both sets of members bring to the group. We can learn from the experience of the older group members while the new ones bring their knowledge, curiosity, fresh ideas and energy. A group can grow only where both old and new members contribute and complement each other.





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- \* Guardian Forum (Parents' group of children with multiple disabilities in Jalpaiguri)
- \*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)
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- \*Various government functionaries including service providers, community members and other like-minded individuals who contributed

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- \*Pratidhwani Puri Sadar, (parents' group in Puri)

- \*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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- \*Representatives of deaf youth from the above mentioned districts who are deaf role models
- \*Association of People with Disability (APD, Karnataka)
- \*Samuha (Karnataka)
- \* Various government functionaries including service providers, community members and other like-minded individuals who contributed

**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.**

**Deaf Child Worldwide is the international development arm of the National Deaf Children's Society (charity number 1016532).**

**Deaf Child Worldwide  
Ground Floor South, Castle House  
37-45 Paul Street  
London EC2A 4LS, UK**

**Web : [www.deafchildworldwide.info](http://www.deafchildworldwide.info)**

