



Families Make the Difference

Parent Support Groups Guide

This document provides guidance to parenting facilitators when helping parents set up support groups as part of the Families Make the Difference program. Support groups have a long history of helping people as they undergo life transitions and behavioral change.



Introduction

Research related to parent support groups and other self-help groups have found that participants benefit from them in several ways: parents draw social and emotional support from each other, they exchange ideas and coping mechanisms, and they serve as role models for their peers. Self-help groups can also be a way to sustain positive parenting changes in communities with limited resources and are based on empowerment approaches.

While IRC parenting programs have witnessed parents form support groups spontaneously, facilitators often play a critical role in encouraging parents to come together in order to reinforce their newly acquired parenting skills. When support groups are well established initially, they can continue long after the parents have completed the 10-session parenting skills training program (without further direct support from the parenting facilitators). However, research indicates that the most successful groups are those facilitated by a person trained to guide discussions.

Guidelines and Tips for Facilitators Setting up Parent Support Groups

At the end of the first session, take 15 minutes to introduce the idea of parent support groups and help interested participants decide how they will form their groups. Parent support groups are typically small, about four to six parents per group.

Some suggestions for explaining the purpose of parent support groups:

- Parent support groups help strengthen new parenting skills by allowing discussion and practice of those skills.
- Support groups allow opportunities or mutual praise and encouragement.
- Support groups facilitate the exchange of experiences relating to children and family members in the home, and they generate solutions to ongoing problems.
- Support groups extend the benefits of Families Make the Difference beyond the 10-session program. Parenting is hard work and parents need to support each other over the long run!

Some suggestions for forming parent support groups:

- Group parents according to where they live, so it will be easy for them to get together.
- Group parents according to the age of their children.
- Allow parents to offer their own criteria and ideas about forming groups.

Some suggestions for the creating a positive environment for parent support groups:

- Have one or two parenting facilitators support or lead the first two or three sessions.
- Have the parents choose, nominate or volunteer a member of their group to co-lead the second or third group session.
- Have parenting facilitators check in and provide support to the elected member facilitator on a weekly basis for the duration of the program.