Parent to Parent of PA

Starting/Running Support Groups

Listening Skills

One of primary functions of the facilitator(s) is to help members participate. This is not always easy because some members may have been shut down by their family or friends. Towards this end, nothing is more effective than the ability to really listen and, when appropriate, say just the right things to encourage continuance.

Listening

• Before the meeting and particularly with new members, familiarize yourself with the name and story of each participant from their Profile Card.
• Knowing the member's background, try to imagine yourself in his or her place.
• Always use the person's name to promote a relationships with people.
• Orient your body towards the person and talk from the same physical level.
• Us an "open" body position; don't cross your arms or legs, or lean to one side or the other. Sit centered and balanced.
• Speak in a soft, relaxed warm voice.
• Make as much eye contact with the person as possible.
• Focus on each person as they talk. While listening look at his or her facial expressions.
• During and between stories, try to be aware of the other participants and their reactions. There may be commonalities between people who react the same.
• Do not interrupt unless you have a "dominating" member.
• Above all, avoid giving advice or suggestions.
• Don't be afraid of silence or long pauses. This can be difficult. Pauses can give members time to organize thoughts, regain composure and continue.
• Resist the temptation to make physical contact during the telling of a story. A touch or hug, although temporarily comforting, will most often shut down the flow of disclosure.

Phrases That Encourage Disclosure

• "We know this is difficult for you"
• "We're here and we care"
• "It's all right to cry"
• "This is scary isn't it?"
• "It doesn't seem fair does it?"
• "You must feel like your going crazy"
• "This seems painful to you"

Phrases the Discourage Disclosure

• "We know how you feel"
• "It's god's will"
• "You'll see that its all for the best"
• "If you think you have it bad you should hear about..."
• "Can you sum it up? We're running out of time"

Handling Phone Calls

• Realize that the first call from a prospective member may represent the first step in reestablishment of personal control. Return all calls as soon as possible.
• Try to take or make calls from a place that is quiet with little interruption.
• Ask if the person would mind telling you what happened. Encourage full disclosure by asking details. Use his or her name frequently during the conversation and take detailed notes.
• Ask the name of their child or family who was born with or acquired a disability. Use the name throughout your conversation.
• Ask how the caller feels he or she is coping with their family member's disability.
• Ask how he or she heard about the support group.
• If the caller has not been to a group before, assure him or her that everyone is fearful at first.
• Tell the caller in detail about the meeting and stress that there is no obligation to talk.
• Try to get a safe mailing address and phone number, and ask if you can call to remind him or her on the day of the meeting. This often strengthens the resolve to attend

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