



Transition Peer Groups

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Group Manual

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TRANSITION PEER GROUP MANUAL

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INTRODUCTION TO TRANSITION PEER GROUP MANUAL

This Transition Peer Group Manual was developed as a roadmap for Transition Peer Groups (TPGs). This Manual is intended to support the development and implementation of successful TPGs in your Chapter. It was developed based on best practices and lessons learned from our Chapters and other resources.

Transition Peer Groups are one of TTN's Signature Programs. A Signature Program is an outcome of the TTN Board and the National Office recognizing the need to distinguish and articulate how TTN differs from other women's membership organizations. Signature Programs are unique, offered by all Chapters, and implemented consistently across all chapters.

TPGs are defined as small groups, often geographically organized, that are comfortable and trusting environments where the same members gather on a regular basis to:

- discuss what is important to them at this stage of life
- share ways to live with vitality and wisdom
- provide support to each other

For many TTN members, Transition Peer Groups are like a "home base," and for some, it is their initial experience with TTN.

The introduction and implementation of TPGs varies among the Chapters. For example, some Chapters introduced them at the time or soon after the establishment of the Chapter; some may not have implemented TPGs yet; some may have introduced TPGs very recently, especially new Chapters. Because TTN had not yet created Signature Programs, there was little standardization of TPGs. The TPG Manual helps ensure that TPGs are defined and applied consistently across all Chapters.

This Transition Peer Groups Manual addresses different components of TPGs, as listed in the Table of Contents.

This Manual is intended to be a helpful living document; in that light, your feedback/comments on the use of the TPG Manual will be appreciated and considered for later revisions. Please email us at info@thetransitionnetwork.org with your recommendations.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why does National/Board think this Transition Peer Group Manual is needed since there are many long-established TPGs?

- *This TPG Manual will help ensure that Peer Groups, now termed **Transition Peer Groups**, a TTN Signature Program, will be defined and implemented consistently across all Chapters.*
- *TPGs are unique to TTN and available to all Chapters. It is desirable for each Chapter to take advantage of our Signature Programs in order to create a robust menu of TTN offerings to our members. Also, potential members know that each Chapter offers TTN's Signature Programs.*
- *The TPG Manual is intended for existing chapters and for Chapters that are establishing TPGs for the first time.*
- *The TPG Guidelines will support consistency in implementation across Chapters.*

2. What are Transition Peer Groups (TPGs), and how are they different from Special Interest Groups (SIGs)?

Historically, Chapters have sometimes had different names for Transition Peer Groups, e.g., some Chapters previously called both TPGs and Special Interest Groups "small groups" or "peer groups." Other Chapters made a distinction between TPGs and Special Interest Groups. The correct definition for each of these groups is as follows:

- **Transition Peer Groups (TPGs)** *are small groups of 8-12 women, often geographically oriented, where members explore life-stage related issues. They are intended to be comfortable and trusting environments where the same members gather on a regular basis to discuss what's important to them at this time, share in ways to live with vitality and wisdom, and provide support to each other. For many of our members, TPGs are like a home base, and for some, it is their initial experience with TTN.*
- **Special Interest Groups (SIGs)** *are member-generated around topics or activities, meaning that any TTN member who wishes to start a group may do so. SIGs are topic or activity-focused, and bring members together who share that special interest. Examples include book clubs, travel, physical activities, food or eating together, and theater.*

3. How can the TPG Manual be implemented?

The TPG Manual is based on best practices gathered from our chapters and other resources and is intended for all Chapters to implement in the following ways:

- *Chapters that are establishing TPGs for the first time adopt the TPG Manual in full;*
- *Newly formed Chapters adopt the TPG Manual in full;*
- *Chapters with robust and successful TPG components may consider adopting parts of the TPG Manual to enhance their TPG implementation, or adopt them in full;*
- *Chapters with robust and successful TPGs adopt the TPG Manual as new TPGs are formed.*

4. Does every Chapter have to offer Transition Peer Groups?

- *When TTN Chapters are formed, they become part of the National TTN organization. TTN offers Signature Programs that are created by and for its membership. There is an understanding and expectation that Chapters will provide as many of the Signature Programs as are available to them as an important benefit of membership. TPGs are one of TTN's Signature Programs, those programs that are unique to TTN, and available to all Chapters.*
- *Women who are considering joining TTN know that each Chapter offers these Signature Programs, including TPGs.*

DEFINITION OF TRANSITION PEER GROUP

Transition Peer Groups are informal, facilitated groups composed of 8-12 TTN members who meet on a regular basis. These groups provide a safe and supportive environment where thought-provoking and stimulating conversations relating to transitions help members reflect on their lives - past, present and future.

Transition Peer Groups provide opportunities for connection, new friendships, and mutually supportive exploration. The intention of these groups is for women to share and learn from each other. Each group selects its own topics and shares the responsibilities that make a group run smoothly.

It is recommended that each Chapter provide experienced TPG's Advisors/Mentors to help TPGs during their initial meetings or at any point where TPGs feel they need support or re-direction.

While the groups are meant to create a supportive environment, they are not therapy groups and cannot substitute for professional help when a member may confront a personal life crisis and need special assistance.

Transition Peer Groups are a key benefit of TTN membership and it's one of the Signature Programs unique to TTN.

OVERSEEING AND MANAGING TRANSITION PEER GROUPS

It is strongly recommended that each Chapter have a process for managing and supporting Transition Peer Groups. Through such a process, women can easily and systematically be placed in groups that need members, and, when appropriate or needed, geographically assigned to a TPG. This centralized oversight and support process includes the following skill sets:

1. **Administration** - setting up TPGs, assignment of members to specific TPGs, managing wait lists and tracking statistics, and,
2. **Facilitation** - providing direction, support and guidance to the TPG groups, and resolving problems when they arise.
3. **Communication** – with TPG members, the Steering Committee representative who coordinates TPGs, and the TPG Advisory Committee, if one exists.

This managing and supporting process is a model that can range in complexity from a single individual who sits on the Steering Committee to a full committee that reports, through its Chair, to the Steering Committee. One example may be called a Transition Peer Group Advisory Committee, led by The TPG Chair. Its committee members may be named Transition Peer Group Advisors or Mentors. Each Advisor/Mentor supports specific TPGs.

This function fulfills many responsibilities, including:

- Placement of new members into a group and managing a “waiting list” based on space in groups;
- Support and guidance to the start-up of new TPG’s;
- Guiding the new TPG during the first few months to ensure its success;
- Support and Guidance to the TPG Liaisons/Administrators, who track and report attendance at the TPGs meetings, as well as report to the person responsible for all Transition Peer Groups or the assigned Transition Peer Group Advisors/Mentors, and communicate TTN upcoming events to the TPG members.

INITIAL TRANSITION PEER GROUP MEETING AGENDA

This session usually facilitated by a TPG Advisor/Mentor

See more detailed Facilitator Script (Appendix i)

Suggested sequence may vary slightly by Chapter

1. **Welcome and Introductions.** Initial sharing.
2. **Data Collection.** Give address, telephone number and email address for master list.
3. **Optional Opening Circle.** If this step is included, an opportunity for centering.
4. **Transition Peer Group.** Understand purpose and key concepts.
5. **Ground Rules.** Establish ground rules.
6. **Hints for Dealing with the Meeting.** Learn guidelines for making it work.
7. **Structure of Meetings.** Agreement on structure and frequency.
8. **Facilitation.** Decide how to rotate facilitators and learn Facilitation Responsibilities.
Decide if Host is Facilitator or if they are separate responsibilities.
9. **Schedule and location of meetings.** Decide where will they be held - in homes, someplace else? Set dates, meeting times (should be consistent) and places.
10. **Refreshments at Meetings:** Decide on the protocol for serving refreshments.
11. **Liaison/Administrator Role.** Learn the role and identify who will assume the role.
12. **Topics.** Brainstorm topics for future meetings. If there is time, have a short discussion on one of these topics immediately.
13. **Plan next meeting.** Determine topic for next time, who will facilitate and who will host?
14. **Process the meeting.** Give feedback on the session. What worked for you about this session? What could we do differently? Questions?
15. **Closing:** Share one word about how you are feeling right now.

SECOND AND SUBSEQUENT TPG MEETINGS

Important Items to Cover

Notice for upcoming meeting: Prior to each upcoming meeting, the host of the meeting sends a reminder email to the participants one week before the date of the TPG meeting with name and address and directions to the home of person hosting and the topic listed. Participants RSVP back to the host whether attending or not.

Facilitation: The TPG Advisor/Mentor minimally attends the initial meeting to launch the group with guidance on how TPGs operate. Some Chapters have extended the Advisor/Mentor attendance to between 2 and 4 sessions, to guide the TPG members as they begin to learn the skills of facilitation, and to transfer knowledge on how self-managing groups can be successful. Some chapters have the TPG Advisor/Mentor continue to conduct the session(s) and other chapters have the TPG Advisor observe and give guidance to the group's facilitator.

Time: Group members arrive on time. Keep track of the time. It is important to start on time and end on time.

Re-introductions for Second meeting: If desired, use nametags to help identify the members of the group. Go around the room again to review names, news, anything important on someone's mind. There may be some additional attendees so this will give them a chance to tell a bit about themselves. Get the names, addresses, etc. of any new members.

Follow-up to First Meeting: Continue discussion of the focus of the group; review the ground rules, decide on facilitation going forward; appoint a Liaison/Administrator if not resolved, and if desired, come up with a name for the group.

Participant List: To be updated by the Liaison/Administrator & distributed to everyone in the group and to the TPG Advisor/Mentor if there are changes.

MEETING FRAMEWORK – ONGOING TPG MEETINGS

See helpful articles to enhance TPG groups in the Appendix.

Suggested sequence may vary slightly by Chapter

1. **Start on time:** If you want to have social mingling time before the formal part of your meeting, consider starting 15 minutes early.
2. **Select Roles** at the outset of each meeting, and be aware of group member responsibilities for the meeting. See Roles and Responsibilities, pg. 13
3. **Liaison/Administrator** may record attendance, and provide an update of Chapter news and events See Liaison/Administrator Role, pg. 13 for more details.
4. **Optional Check-in:** If you choose to include this step, each woman shares a 1-2 minute update with the group about what she believes is important for the group to know about her at this time.
5. **Optional Opening Circle:** If you choose to include this step, have the group take 1-2 minutes to get into a quiet space and center themselves. See other options in Facilitation Techniques – Opening Circle and Talking Stick – Appendix vi.
6. **Ground Rules:** Post, review and read Ground Rules, especially for the first few sessions or when new members join. Reinforce if group is getting off track.
7. **Topic Discussion:** Reconfirm the topic. Engage in a conversation about the selected topic for the meeting. Make sure that everyone who wants to speak has a chance to share. This is the heart of the meeting. See Facilitations, pg. 12. See Optional Topic Discussions, pgs. 15-17.
8. **Optional Talking Stick.** If you choose to use this, it helps with sharing and listening. Place the talking stick in the middle of the group. See more information in Facilitation Techniques – Opening Circle and Talking Stick – Appendix vi.
9. **Process the Meeting and Plan the Next Meeting (last 15-20 minutes of the session)**
 - a. Ask, “What worked about this meeting?”
 - b. Ask, “What suggestions do you have for our next meeting so that our practices continually improve?” When a problem comes up think about what can be done so that the group can further develop. Brainstorming solutions is a good group practice.
 - c. The group then decides on a topic for the next meeting and who will facilitate.
 - d. Re-confirm the next date and identify where the next meeting will be held.
10. **Close the meeting:** Each person briefly mentions what she got out of the topic, or a one-word comment about how she feels now.

FACILITATION

Facilitation is a tool that helps guide and support positive communication. It allows everyone an opportunity to participate and feel part of the group.

The Transition Peer Group Facilitator is ideally a rotated role among the group members. The Facilitator's primary responsibility is to see that the structure and focus of the group are maintained, and that the group's dynamics are enhanced.

The role of the Facilitator is to:

Open the discussion

- Initiate the transition from the group check-in to the selected topic.
- Remind members of the importance of operating under the established Ground Rules and Guidelines, and prepare new group members by acquainting them with the importance of these documents.

Fully Step into the Facilitation Role

- Be attentive to what is happening at all times.
- Set boundaries for group members. Do not let one person dominate discussions.
- Remain neutral, listen actively, and avoid giving opinions.
- Keep the meeting on topic and redirect the discussion, if needed.
- Keep track of time unless the group has designated a timekeeper.
- Guide the group in decision-making.

Involve All Participants

- Ensure that each member who wants to speak has the chance. Encourage everyone to participate, but respect those who choose not to.
- Make comments that summarize common themes, or ask questions during the discussion to enhance the conversation and keep it flowing, as needed. Ask open-ended questions to elicit more input or draw people out, e.g., *How do others of you feel about X?*
- Encourage members to build on the ideas of others.

Listen

- Pay attention to people talking over each other, interrupting or involved in side conversations.
- Ask for clarification if someone's comment is not clear. Encourage members to do the same.
- Listen for recurring themes in what people say.
- Follow the conversation, and re-direct if people have wandered off track.

Process the Meeting and Plan the Next Meeting

- Inform the group when the meeting is 15-20 minutes from the end time. Wrap up the meeting by an ending process for continuing improvement of meetings. Ask for responses to the following questions:
 1. What worked or was effective about this meeting?
 2. What suggestions do you have to make future meetings even more effective?
- Invite the group to come to agreement about next meeting's topic.
- Establish the date and host of the next meeting.

Close the Meeting. Each person briefly mentions what she got out of the topic, or a one-word comment about how she feels right now.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF TRANSITION PEER GROUP MEMBERS

In an effective group, members share responsibility for TPG discussions by assuming different roles during the session. Shared responsibility reinforces everyone's investment in the group's success.

Below are useful roles for managing a TPG. Members are encouraged to rotate roles 1, 2, 4, and 5.

1. **Facilitator**

Keeps the discussion moving and on track, and ensures that each person who wants to speak is able to do so. See **Meeting Framework**, pg. 10, as a guide for organizing the time together. See **Facilitator Role**, pg. 11, for more detail.

2. **Timekeeper**

Monitors time for each part of the meeting, e.g., opening, brief check in, topic discussion, group processing, topic selection and location for next meeting.

3. **Liaison / Administrator**

Serves as a link between the TPG and the Steering Committee member responsible for all TPGs. The Liaison/Administrator may record and report attendance and group status to the Steering Committee representative for TPGs, and may confer with the Steering Committee representative if her group is experiencing a problem. She also updates her TPG on Chapter news and upcoming events early in the meeting, before the topic discussion begins.

4. **Recorder**

Some groups use a rotating Recorder to capture brief highlights from the meeting that are emailed to each member after the meeting.

5. **Host**

The meeting may be held at the host's home or another agreed upon location. It is the group's decision whether or not each host will provide beverages and light refreshments. A week before the meeting, the host sends out a reminder of the meeting and topic, along with her address, phone number and any special notes regarding directions. Include a request for an RSVP to the host. It is the group's decision if an RSVP should go only to the host or to the entire TPG.

6. **TPG Participant**

Engages in the discussion to enrich the group's conversation. Each person takes responsibility for how long she speaks so that others have ample opportunity to share. **Commitment to the group through consistent attendance is key to the group's success.** It is also a demonstration of the group's importance to every member.

CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES

1. Transition Peer Groups need to be safe places for their members to speak openly and honestly. An environment of trust and safety allows group members to share, and creates the foundation for a meaningful group experience. Whenever a new member enters a group, the confidentiality guidelines should be reviewed.
2. In the first meeting, it is important to mutually discuss, develop, and agree upon guidelines regarding confidentiality within the TPG.
3. TPG members may discuss the group topic or what they personally learned about themselves with others outside the TPG Group, as long as nothing is repeated that would in any way identify another group member, even if that person's name is not mentioned.
4. It is important to recognize that people have different sensitivities around sharing personal information. Work together to develop a growing awareness and respect for individual comfort levels around sharing and confidentiality. Examples of topics that may be particularly sensitive to some people are: age, health, family and other personal relationships, money, sex, views about religion and politics.
5. Use the Steering Committee representative who supports TPGs as a resource for consultation when there is a group issue that presents a barrier for a TPG. The intent in these cases is to provide guidance in order to improve the situation for the good of the individual members and the group as a whole. This person will respect all issues of confidentiality relevant to any TPG.
6. It is a serious issue if confidentiality is breached by a group member. Any breach of confidentiality must be openly addressed in the group. Each member must be in agreement with this guideline in order to remain a TPG member.

OPTIONAL DISCUSSION TOPICS

How to Choose Topics

Encourage and solicit ideas from the group first for discussion topics that interest the TPG members. Best practice informs us that group members who arrive at consensus about the discussion topic seem to be more committed to engaging in a meaningful conversation.

Remember that topics can vary in intensity. Everyone's comfort level of how much to disclose is different. It is important to recognize that people have different levels of comfort around sharing personal information. In your group, work together to develop a growing awareness and respect for individual comfort levels around sharing and confidentiality.

Examples of topics that are particularly sensitive to some people include: age, health, family and other personal relationships, money, sex, religion, politics, etc. As members get to know and trust each other they may become comfortable with topics that initially they may not be open to discuss.

*The topics listed below are options, and can be considered as needed.

Categories: Transition, Aging, Community, Health, Personal and Spiritual

Topics could fit in more than one category.

Following are suggested topics in each category that TPGs in different Chapters have addressed.

Transition

- Directions we are headed. Where are we going and how do we get there?
- Roads not taken: The roads not taken; a fork in the road, roadblocks and what we have learned from these experiences? What would we do differently going forward? Is there a fork you regret not taking OR one that made all the difference?
- Letting go: Going forward in your life...what is important to let go of?
- Losses and how they impacted your life going forward.
- Friendships: What does a great friendship mean to you? Have your friendships changed? How have they, and how do you deal with it?
- Is this the location where I want to stay i.e., Santa Fe?
- Life strategies.
- Making the most of the second half of your life.
- How we have changed as people over the course of our adult lives.
- Reinventing yourself: What does this mean to you?
- Passion: Defining and pursuing passions.
- Perfectionism or being a B+ person: The difference in impact on how you live your life.
- How where we grew up influenced who we became or how we are now.
- Grit, a predictor of success.

Aging

- The upside of aging: What helps you stay positive/positive as you age?
- The puzzles of life.
- Time: How is it with more time on our hands that we seem to have less time to get things done? Structuring time better; how we spend our time; passing time; obstacles; saving time; taking time; how we use time well.
- Loneliness: What does loneliness mean to you? What is the difference between being lonely and being alone? Do you feel lonely at times, even in a crowd, and how do you deal with those feelings? How can you find ways to become comfortable with where you find yourself?
- Meaning of beauty as we age.
- Self-image/body image: Perhaps use the DVD “Let’s Face It...Six women discuss their aging faces.” Use this as a jumping off point for discussion.
- Legacy...what we want to be remembered for.
- My bucket list: What is on that list? What is realistic? What will take more risk? What’s my timeline?
- Your survival kit- what is in it?
- Wills/ Advanced Directives.
- Death and dying. Thoughts on your mortality?
- Taking risks: Is it now or never? What are we afraid of?

Community

- Community and how being in community impacts our life. What different communities (neighborhoods) have we come from or been part of during our lives?
- If you were having a dinner party and could invite any 5 people, dead or alive, who would you invite and why?
- New beginnings in life and new beginnings in our group.
- Someone who made a difference (positive or negative) in your life.
- Different kinds of friends in your life.
- Holidays, traditions and memories. What traditions are important to you and add meaning to your life? What traditions are important to you during holidays? Are there any traditions that you want to create going forward? Are there any we are missing or want to add to our lives?

Health

- Wellness: How do you take care of yourself?
- Maintaining physical health/women’s health issues.
- Our complicated relationship with food.
- How have health issues affected our lives/physical limitations?
- The importance of being our own advocate, (medical, legal, financial, etc.)

- Handling stress.
- Resilience. What does it mean to you? How are you resilient? In what areas would you like to be more resilient?

Personal

- Strengths/weaknesses: Figuring out how our strengths and weaknesses, perceived or real, get in our way or help us develop what we want for ourselves?
- Discuss the person who influenced/shaped you the most and describe in what ways. What we learned from that person and want to take forward or not.
- Celebrating people. Discuss someone in your life who has inspired you, and in what ways?
- Favorite books? Movies? Why did you choose those?
- Your DNA.
- Happiness.
- What is fun for you? How can you have more fun in your lives now? How do you like to “Play”? Are we having fun yet?
- Fantasies.
- Family impact – each month a different person...mother, father, siblings, adult children.
- Relations with adult children. Sibling relationships.
- Sexuality: Is sexuality a taboo subject? All about sex: how to kindle or rekindle an ongoing relationship. Sexuality: perhaps use the DVD, “Still Doing It” as a conversation starter.
- Fears (intense topic: good for later in the group’s life).
- How do you say Yes when you always say No? OR. Vice versa... And which one are you?
- The best gift we ever received.
- Show and tell for grownups.

Spiritual

- Religion/spirituality.
- Forgiveness -What does it mean to forgive?
- Trust, anger and acceptance.
- Digging deeper.
- Peace and Tranquility: What brings you peace or gets you centered? What do you visualize when you want to find calm in the storm? Where do you find peace and serenity in your life?
- What helps you stay centered and motivated?

ADDING NEW MEMBERS TO AN EXISTING GROUP

When a TTN Transition Peer Group has been in existence for a while, has an identity as a group and formed bonds among the members, it may be a challenge to incorporate new members into the group. Therefore, when adding new members to an existing TPG, the current members should answer the following questions:

1. How can our group approach the process of introducing a new member(s) to our group that addresses the feelings and needs of both new and old?
2. How can we work together to support and reassure one another through this “normal” transition?

There may be a period of transition while the new and old members get to know each other. Acknowledge that change affects people differently and anyone should feel free to express their reactions and feelings. Both the new and current members need to know that it takes time to develop trust.

Having a new member join an existing TPG brings new perspectives and energy to a group. Most TPGs ultimately embrace our value of inclusiveness and the personal growth that comes from integrating new members into the group. When adding new members to an existing group, it is helpful to remember:

- Existing members should be asked for their agreement before accepting new members, and sufficient time should be given for the group to discuss their views about this change.
- Some groups have found it helpful to bring in more than one new member at a time, and to give the group an opportunity to gel before adding additional members, so that the group is not disrupted more often than necessary.
- The transition is eased when someone from the TPG volunteers to reach out to a new member prior to her first meeting to help her feel welcomed and more comfortable about attending their first meeting.
- When adding new members, introductions might include a brief description of where the person is in her life and what she hopes to get from the group experience. Following this, the other members would introduce themselves and tell something about their experience in the group.
- Soon after a new member is introduced into the group may be an ideal time for the group to review the purpose of the TPG, the ground rules and guidelines and have an open discussion about these. This will provide more clarity for the new member and an opportunity to ask questions. It is very helpful to give the new member a copy of the group documents such as ground rules and guidelines.

WHEN A MEMBER LEAVES A GROUP

It is inevitable in the life of a group that a member or members will leave. This may raise questions and reactions both for the member who is leaving and for the remaining group members. When the reasons are practical or realistic, such as moving away or returning to work, there is usually less to resolve. When the reasons are personal, either unstated, ambiguous or abrupt, or involve conflict with other members, discomfort with the topics discussed or the direction of the group, the resolution can be much more challenging for the group. Whatever the reason for the departure, the change can trigger mixed feelings on the part of the TPG members. When this happens it is important for the group to process the change.

Below are some guidelines for processing the change.

For the person who leaves or considers leaving the group:

1. If willing, it would be helpful to the group for the person who is leaving or contemplates leaving to share with the group her reason(s) for leaving, preferably in person or if not, in writing. She may want to share what worked/or didn't for her, as well as some suggestions for improvement.
2. If the member wants to talk to someone outside of the group about her departure (or is considering leaving the group), she may consult with the group's TPG Advisor/Mentor.

For the remaining group members:

1. Shortly after the departure of a member, the TPG should discuss the impact of the departure and what it means for the group. Each TPG member should be given the opportunity to express her feelings about the change. This could include trying to understand the reasons and feelings behind the decision to leave and what changes, if any, the group wants to incorporate going forward.
2. The group should decide if and/or when they are ready to take in a new member(s).
3. At the discretion and request of the TPG, the group's TPG Advisor/Mentor may be invited to attend the next TPG meeting to help the group process the impact of the change.

APPENDIX

INITIAL TRANSITION PEER GROUP MEETING – FACILITATOR SCRIPT

This session usually is facilitated by a TPG Advisor/Mentor

Please note: This page corresponds with the agenda in the Manual on pg. 8

It is helpful to review the agenda so they know what to expect. This initial meeting is primarily focused on logistics and getting set up for future sessions. Future meetings are topic focused.

Welcome and Introductions: In some chapters, each person wears a nametag for the initial meeting. Each participant, starting with the facilitator, briefly describes her background, where she is in her professional and/or personal life, when and why she has joined TTN, and what she hopes to gain from joining a Transition Peer Group.

Data Collection: Circulate a sheet to get addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of all attendees. The Liaison/Administrator will type up the list to be distributed to all attendees and the TPG Advisor/Mentor. This role will be discussed later in the session.

Optional Opening Circle. The purpose of an opening circle is to help center the group and create a sacred safe space in the group coming together. This is done by having the group members take 1-2 minutes to get into a quiet space and center themselves. The facilitator does this by having a bell, lights a candle, reads a poem, listens to music, etc. to initiate the centering. The facilitator asks group members to close their eyes or go inside. After 1-2 minutes, the facilitator hits the bell or verbally asks the group members to open their eyes and come back to the group/room.

Transition Peer Group. TPG groups:

- are informal, facilitated groups composed of 8-12 TTN members
- meet on a regular basis and provide a safe and supportive environment
- help members reflect on their lives - past, present and future
- provide opportunities for connections, sharing and learning from each other
- choose topics and share the responsibilities that make a group run smoothly
- are not therapy groups and cannot substitute for professional help

Ground Rules: It is important for the TPG group to develop its own ground rules regarding how they want to operate. One way to do this is to have the women:

- 1) Think about the best group discussions they have been a part of and reflect on what made these discussions so satisfying.
- 2) Ask them to think about the worst group discussions in which they have

participated and reflect on what made these discussions so unsatisfactory.

- 3) For each of the positive characteristics identified, the group suggests three or more things they could do to ensure that these characteristics are present in their TPG meetings.
- 4) For each of the negative characteristics identified, the group suggests three or more things they could do to ensure that these characteristics are not present.
- 5) Use the suggestions to draft a set of ground rules to which all agree and ask someone to type them up for distribution.
- 6) Post them at the meetings and periodically reflect whether the ground rules established at the beginning are working and make adjustments as necessary. A couple examples of ground rules: Confidentiality is key. What is said in the group, stays in the group. Share feelings and experiences, but not advice.

Hints for Dealing with the Meeting: It is important to establish as a ground rule that all members should share equally in the talking time, and always express differences in a respectful way. Some members who are less comfortable talking in groups may take time to join in. Usually gentle encouragement and patience will resolve that issue.

Structure of Meetings: Reach agreement on the time, structure and frequency of the meetings. Commitment to attending Transition Peer Group meetings is very important. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, it is expected that participants will attend each meeting. It would be up to the group to decide how many absences one can have before no longer being able to participate.

Facilitation: It should be decided how the group is to be facilitated going forward. Since this is a peer group, it is recommended that the role be rotated among the members. Everyone should have the opportunity to facilitate if they so choose. Some groups determine that the facilitator is the person where the meeting is to be held.

Schedule and Location of Meetings: Set a schedule for the next few meetings, including dates and locations. The meetings should rotate among the homes of the members unless some other option is preferred and established. It is helpful if the frequency, and time are consistent, e.g., the second Tuesday of the month at 4 p.m. Each member is responsible for responding to the meeting notice, whether they will or will not attend.

Refreshments at Meetings: The group should decide on the protocol for serving refreshments at meetings. Determine if the group wants to provide water and tea, no refreshments or want something more.

The Liaison/Administrator Role: Explain the Liaison/Administrator function and identify who

will assume that role either at this meeting or the next one. The Liaison/Administrator is responsible for the administrative work of the group. She is the TPG's group contact with the Steering Committee Representative for TPG's and forwards the participant list to that person and any additions and deletions of group members as they occur. She also provides the participant list to the Transition Peer Group participants and updates it as needed and re-distributes it. She also makes announcements about upcoming chapter activities. See Liaison/Administrator role, pg. 14.

Topics: It is important to decide upon a discussion topic in advance of each meeting. Encourage and solicit potential topics from the group. Best practice informs us that group members who arrive at consensus about the discussion topic seem to be more committed to engaging in a meaningful conversation.

Have the group come up with topics. If they are stumped, which seldom happens, then suggest some of these that have been successfully tried by many groups: use of time, friendships and how they change over time, transitions, dealing with loss. If there is time in the first meeting you may want to have a short discussion on one of these topics immediately. (See Appendix on Optional Discussion Topics.).

Plan next meeting: What topic will we discuss the next time?
Who will facilitate the meeting?
Who will host?

Process the meeting: Get feedback from the group. What worked for you about this session? What could we do differently? Questions?

For future meetings, inform the group and/or get feedback from the group on whether The TPG Advisor/Mentor will attend the next meeting(s) and what role she will play. In some chapters, the TPG Advisor/Mentor minimally attends the initial meeting to launch the group with guidance on how TPGs operate. Some Chapters have extended the Advisor/Mentor attendance to between 2 and 4 sessions, to guide the TPG members as they begin to learn the skills of facilitation, and to transfer knowledge on how self-managing groups can be successful. . Some chapters have the TPG Advisor/Mentor continue to conduct the session(s) and other chapters have the TPG Advisor observe and give guidance to the group's facilitator.

Closing: Have participants share, One word about how you are feeling right now.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE GROUPS

Adapted from "Sacred Circle – A Guide to Creating Your Own Women's Spirituality Group" by Robin Deen Carnes and Sally Craig

Sharing

One person at a time takes a turn speaking while the others listen. The person who is speaking holds a talking stick/stone/bowl and everyone listens as long as she holds it. If she so desires, she may not speak and just passes along the talking stick to the next person. Or, instead of being passed from one person to another, the speaker puts it down and the person who wants to speak next picks it up.

In sharing, it is wise to practice speaking from the "I." That is, rather than generalizing about how people feel, or how women feel, or even how someone else must feel, say how you feel. In this way the speaker speaks their truth and is supported by mindful listening.

Once everyone has a chance to share, a more typical conversation may ensue. People may comment on other's sharing and the impact it had on them. Sometimes women notice themes that emerged and raise these for further examination.

Listening Without an Agenda

The role of the listener is to listen without an agenda. It is not relevant whether or not you agree or disagree with what someone is saying. What matters is that you listen carefully and accept what is being said as her reality. While you are listening, you are not planning what you are going to say when it's your turn. You are 100% present for the person who is speaking.

Attentive, non-judgmental listening provides the supportive, encouraging environment needed to coax people out of their fear of judgment and their self-protective armor. It involves listening at a very deep level so that one builds a relationship of trust and respect.

Rotating Leadership/Shared Ownership

Rotating leadership allows everyone in the group to take the group to take responsibility for leading the group. Sharing the leadership means sharing the investment and ownership in the group. Any decision about the topic gets made by consensus.

Confidentiality

Intimacy depends on trust. One of the essential elements of trust is knowing that what you say in the group will not be repeated outside the group.

This does not restrict anyone from describing her own group experiences to anyone she chooses. It does restrict people from sharing what someone else said with anyone, including another group member who might not have been at the meeting, in which something intimate was shared.

Taking Responsibility for One's Own Needs

Everyone should take responsibility for her own needs. There may be a situation where one person is experiencing a crisis, and feels the need for the attention and support of the group and the group is glad to oblige. Members ask for what they need rather than expecting the group to know and respond appropriately to all situations.

Self Reflection

Successful women's circles, like all true communities, must be able to step back and observe themselves. Members need to speak up with their perceptions about their own and the group's functioning whenever concerns arise.

It is recommended that groups schedule at least one meeting a year to review and assess itself.

Keeping the Group in Alignment with Its Purpose

Keeping the behavior of the group in alignment with its purpose prevents the group from straying off in a tangential direction.

Examples of non-alignments can be:

- People may feel that the group has leaned too far in the direction of a therapy group and can then redirect the group's attention for the next session.
- Getting too loose with bantering and chitchat. It's all too easy and certainly fun to engage in excited talk as we reconnect with one another. So, consider encouraging members to come 30 minutes before the start of the formal part of the meeting for the catching up part.

Commitment

You are creating a community when you form a circle. Powerful community is the result of both shared intention and commitment.

There is accountability to one another and to oneself to show up. When you are feeling down or when an uncomfortable dynamic has surfaced in the group, committed members don't stay away; it's even more reason to show up. People are going to miss meetings. However, underlying all specific incidents of absenteeism is the commitment to be in the group.

FACILITATION TECHNIQUES – OPENING CIRCLE AND USE OF TALKING STICK

In some chapters, TPG members have an opening circle to help center the group and use a talking stick to help facilitate the communication.

Opening Circle: The purpose of an opening circle is to create a sacred safe space in the group coming together. There are many ways this can be done. One way is by having the group for 1-2 minutes get into a quiet space and center themselves. Depending on the exercise, the facilitator may ask group members to close their eyes. Some different options for centering could be ringing a bell, lighting a candle, reading a poem, doing a breathing exercise or listening to music. If group have closed their eyes, after 1-2 minutes, the facilitator asks the group members to focus back into the room by opening their eyes or by ringing a bell.

Talking Stick: The Talking Stick is a tool used to allow all TPG members to present their message. Only the person holding the stick is allowed to talk.

There are several reasons for using a talking stick:

- There are two elements that are important in a successful peer support group: the sharing and the listening to one another. The talking stick helps facilitate both. It allows group members to be more present and listen when someone is sharing and it is a way to honor the person who is speaking by listening to that person.
- It allows a group member the “space” to speak uninterrupted as well as being cognizant of the time speaking by the act of holding the talking stick.
- It helps balance out the time for all group members to share.
- It allows group members to be more present and listen when someone is sharing.
- It is a way to honor the person who is speaking by listening to that person.
- Putting the talking stick back into the middle of the group after sharing helps slow down the time for group members to respond and ideally can allow for some self-reflection before speaking.

~ Adapted from the Santa Fe Chapter

SUCCESSFUL GROUP PRACTICES

We encourage Transition Peer Group Members to develop and follow their own ground rules for their group. These behaviors are some examples of healthy group practices common in high-functioning groups. This chart may be used as a tool for TPG members to discuss how they want to manage their group together.

PRACTICE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE; HOW TO FOSTER AND SUPPORT IT
Equal opportunity – Group time is shared equally.	Every group member has a turn to speak. Take turns going around the circle. If someone has been quiet for a while, ask if they would like to speak. Speak from your heart and listen to your own words.
Listen respectfully and fully to deepen your understanding	When one person is speaking, listen without interrupting. Listen with your heart and mind. Ask if group members feel heard. No phone, texting or emailing during the group time, except in an emergency.
Ask questions - it's okay to be curious	Ask open questions for clarity or to discover additional meaning. If you want to know more, ask for an example or just ask the person to please say more about ...
Speak consciously- share the time equally	Be conscious of your share of air-time; stay on topic; one person speaks at a time.
Inclusion - Make an effort to see that each member of the group is included, respected and appreciated	Ensure every group member is included in any group communication or activity. Treat every group member as she would like to be treated (if you are not sure, ask). Foster inclusion by sitting in different places each time and making an effort to get to know each group member.
Speak for Yourself	Speak about and from your own experiences; use "I", not "we" or "they."
Suspend Judgment - Become aware of your own biases and judgments	Remind yourself that everyone is doing the best she can; what is impossible, upsetting or difficult for one person may be easily handled by another. When you become aware of a bias or judgment you hold, simply set it aside so you can really hear what the other person is saying.
Ask before assuming - be curious	Try to be aware of any assumptions you are making about the other person and what they are saying. Ask questions instead of making assumptions.
Resist the impulse to advise or fix the other person - share your own experience	Wait until the other person asks for help or ask them if they'd like to hear your suggestions. Often people only need to be heard and they are not looking for a response or solutions. Try to be very clear if you want to give unsolicited advice.
Respect different opinions	Others may have a different perspective or idea than you do; be curious about their thinking or opinion; our opinions are generally based on our experiences; ask about the other's experience that led them to believe what they are saying.

~ Adapted from Washington DC Chapter

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR TRANSITION PEER GROUPS

- Each transition peer group is a unique collection of individual women. Although most groups follow a similar format and structure, no two groups are identical.
- Attend a new transition peer group meeting with an open mind. Give yourself a chance to get to know the other members. Jumping to conclusions can limit your options and the group's potential.
- Voice your thoughts and feelings about the purpose/focus of the transition peer group you want to be a part of. In addition, coming to a consensus around the culture and norms of your particular group is important to the healthy development of your group. Such a discussion and negotiation over the focus and norms should take place periodically over the life of the group.
- Work to establish effective communication during and between meetings. Ensure that each woman who wants to speak is able to do so in the time available. Monopolizing conversation or allowing others to do so reduces group effectiveness. It is essential that the group feel safe and inviting so that each woman's voice is heard.
- Establish a comfort level regarding shared facilitation. Be an active participant: think about discussion topics, activities for the group, or other ways you can contribute to the meeting.
- Be committed to your transition peer group. Being present and on time on a regular basis is your way of doing your part to help the group become a cohesive whole. This commitment contributes to the group's success.
- The Liaison/Administrator is the link of communication between the TPG group and the Steering Committee representative for TPGs.
- Issues raised in a transition peer group are **confidential**. Trust, group safety, and cohesion depend on this.
- Although members of a transition peer group, as friends, can provide some support to a member confronting a crisis, transition peer groups are not therapy groups and cannot substitute for professional help.

~ Adapted from Philadelphia Chapter