

Co-Leading A Support Group

Two is better than one!



Being an active leader is a large responsibility. We encourage support groups to have multiple leaders to share responsibilities whenever possible. Some combination of patient and healthy leaders is ideal, allowing each baton when needed, especially when health issues arise. Ongoing communication between leaders and willingness to integrate various leadership styles and meeting formats will ensure the group's longevity, while also fostering the same level of flexibility and adaptation among group members.

Sharing leadership roles keeps the meeting format fresh and interesting. There is not one meeting format or style works best for everyone, nor is there a single leadership style that is considered most desirable in leading a successful support group. Each leader has a special combination of abilities to offer to the group. Delegating tasks may occur naturally, based on obvious individual strengths or may require more careful examination.

As a leader, it is equally important to recognize and acknowledge the individual strengths of each group member, both in terms of group volunteerism and in daily coping with scleroderma. Negative perspectives are contagious, as are positive ones. Learning about how others cope successfully with scleroderma can be an empowering experience and reinforcing positive group interactions improves the overall group atmosphere and may even lighten your workload.

Seeking student and senior volunteers is another way for support group leaders to obtain the help they need. Local universities, especially schools of social work or nursing require students to perform a specific number of hours of volunteer service to graduate. High school students also receive credit for community service hours and many senior groups also like to volunteer. Volunteers can facilitate the group by posting and mailing meeting flyers, making copies, setting up and breaking down meeting rooms, and even help to lead meetings. Hospital social workers also serve the needs of patients in their community. Don't hesitate to ask the resident social worker at local hospitals to help you find meeting space, facilitate the group, create and post meeting announcements, and encourage attendance. Healthy groups continually grow and change. Meeting locations may vary according to individual group needs, as can the meeting format. Determining what works best for your group requires a group process, as opposed to being leader oriented or limited. Encouraging ongoing group feedback puts the majority of the responsibility for the success of the group back where it belongs – on the group. Do not forget to rely on your local Chapter or the National Office for support. We are here to help you with anything that you need.

If you are interested in starting a support group in your area please contact the SFMC at (248) 595-8526 or e-mail MIchapter@scleroderma.org