

How to Start an Adult Sibling Grief Peer Support Group (ASGPSG)

What follows is a very brief outline of how to begin an ASGPSG in your area. It is in the form of questions and answers.

Q: What is an Adult Sibling Grief Peer Support Group (ASGPSG)?

A: An Adult Sibling Grief Peer Support Group (ASGPSG) is a group of bereaved siblings (ages 18 and older) who have agreed to meet on a regular basis for a pre-determined period of time to offer one another mutual help and support.

Q: What is a “peer-based” group and how does it differ from other grief support groups?

A: A peer-based adult sibling group means that all members are equal and all are bereaved siblings. Many grief support groups are peer-based (such as The Compassionate Friends) and although peer-based groups may have a facilitator, this person is not usually a professional counselor (although he or she might be). There is also no attempt to engage in therapy or psychoanalysis. This is merely a group of bereaved siblings helping other bereaved siblings.

Q: How do I find bereaved adult siblings who might be interested in joining the group?

A: You need to advertise the group for at least one month prior to the first meeting. Radio, newspaper, church bulletins, funeral homes, hospice organizations, and other more general grief support groups (such as TCF) are all ways you can advertise. Make sure that all of these venues will advertise free of charge. You might also make up a flyer and send to various mental health facilities, hospitals, and funeral homes (see sample flyer at end of Q & A). Post the flyer in grocery stores and coffee shops—and any place where a cross section of people gather. You can also post a message on the ASG message board. You need to post your contact information, including your name, e-mail address and phone number. I recommend creating a separate e-mail address through one of the free services (like Yahoo) for this purpose. You might also want to rent a post office box for correspondence, rather than using your home address and use your work phone number to receive phone calls from those interested in joining the group.

Q: How do I find a meeting place for my group?

A: Ask around and find a place that will allow you to meet free of charge. Churches, temples, schools, hospitals, and libraries are your best bets. Secure a specific meeting night and room for at least 6 months. I do not recommend that you meet in your home.

Q: How often should we meet?

A: This is up to each individual group. Make a decision once you meet with your group for the first time. Most groups of this nature meet once per month for 6 months. You can meet more or less often. After six months, decide as a group whether or not you want to

continue to meet. You may use the chat room at the ASG website to meet “virtually” with your group between meetings, so long as you welcome others outside the group who might wander into your chat. You may reserve the room as a private chat if you make this request one week ahead of time to the Webmaster. You may not use the room during the ASG weekly chat (8-9 pm EST Sunday).

Q: Should we have an “open” or “closed” group?

A: Again, this is up to you and the group. An open group is open to drop-ins; a closed group is not.

Q: Are there basic confidentiality requirements we need to observe?

A: Yes. Each group needs to observe the following (I suggest you print these 5 goals out and make up a flyer to give to all members):

Adult Sibling Grief Peer Support Group (ASGPSG)

Group Goals and Process

1. Confidentiality: Thoughts and sensitive issues shared within the group remain within the group.
2. Regular Attendance: Meetings should be a top priority in our healing process.
3. Nonjudgmental Behavior: This means that we can confess our OWN shortcomings, if appropriate, but not those of OTHERS, and that we do not give advice unless asked.
4. Offering Support: Be caring and sensitive to one another. This means listening and working toward becoming a caring supportive community of bereaved persons.
5. Accountability: Be responsible to each other and open to change. We are all responsible for the success of the group and we should all work together.

Q: What do we do at each session?

A: There are several excellent resources that can help you to plan meaningful activities (see below) but my rule of thumb is to come prepared with an agenda, but allow the group to unfold the way it is meant to unfold. That is, allow members to discuss

whatever they feel needs to be discussed during that particular session. Generally, each session begins with an opening reflection (a poem, musical selection, etc.) and ends with a closing reflection (encourage others to bring in meaningful poems, music, etc.). Each session will have a topic or theme. I recommend using the book, “Surviving the Death of a Sibling” as a general outline. Because I wrote the book with this use in mind, you can use the chapters as guides for discussion. (Most independent bookstores will offer discount rates for grief groups, so try to secure the book in bulk for your members at a discount rate). So, during the first session, you might introduce yourselves and talk about “Receiving the News” (chapter 1) of your sibling’s death.

Other resources include, *Death and Grief: Healing Through Group Support* by Harold Evan Smith and *The Support Group Manual: A Session-By-Session Guide* by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff. Neither of these is *sibling-specific*, though. Much of the support group literature is spiritual in nature (Smith’s book certainly is), but you can edit sections dealing with prayer and other religious themes if you want to have a secular group (my group is a secular group).

We also light a candle at the beginning of each session to symbolize our deceased siblings’ continued presence in our lives. We have also, on occasion, brought in photographs of our siblings and shared them with the group.

I have designed several very meaningful activities that are available upon request.

Q: What if I have further questions?

A: You can e-mail me at tjwrayauthor@aol.com or wrayt@salve.edu. I’ll be happy to help you in any way I can. I am also available to speak to local grief groups.

SAMPLE FLYER:

Adult Sibling Grief Peer Support Group

Who We Are:

We are surviving brothers and sisters who have suffered the devastating loss of a sibling. We are adults, with a lifetime of memories cut short. We have come together in grief to comfort one another and to help one another navigate the complexities and challenges of learning to live in a world without our siblings.

The Adult Sibling Grief Peer Support Group is open to any bereaved adult sibling (age 18 or older) who has suffered the death of an adult (age 18 or older) brother or sister.

Meetings:

The 4th Thursday of each month, 7 PM
Central Congregational Church, Fireplace Room
296 Angell Street, Providence RI

Contact:

TJ Wray, 341-3109 or (better) tjwrayauthor@aol.com

Visit:

www.adultsiblinggrief.com for sibling loss support and information.