

# How to Start a Support Group

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Suppose that some women from your local church Women's Ministries group come to you, the Women's Ministries director, asking for help in starting a support group for them. They may be a group of divorced women, overweight women, grieving women, women whose adult children have left the church – there are many possibilities. What do you do?

## **Here are some suggestions:**

1. Pray for guidance. You may wish to ask these women to pray with you.
2. Ask other interested persons to help you plan. Perhaps do a survey to find other women interested in this particular topic.
3. Involve the pastor. Be sure he knows of your plans and ask for advice or support. The pastor may suggest other interested persons or resources.
4. Choose a leader and others willing to help. A member of the support group will probably make the best leader for the group.
5. If necessary, get permission of the church board. You will need this if you are requesting funds, church meeting rooms, etc. If you request funds, make out a preliminary budget and submit it.
6. Set the time and place of your first meeting.
7. Study the needs of the group. What type of support do they need? Fellowship and support from each other? Experts to give advice? Inspiration and affirmation? You may want to do a survey of perceived needs. Plan a program to begin meeting these needs.
8. Plan the content of your program: Arrange for a speaker, facilitator, or activity. Remember to plan for a devotional thought and prayer. Arrange for someone to open the room and have lights, heat, air conditioning, seating, etc. ready so the room is comfortable. Arrange for any equipment such as projectors, public address systems, overhead projectors, paper, pencils needed during the meeting. Arrange for refreshments if desired. If the meeting will involve parents with children, arrange for childcare. Arrange for cleaning up after the meeting.
9. Advertise your first meeting. Do this by word of mouth, telephone, church bulletin, posters

and Women's Ministries newsletter, depending on the type of group and the means available. But use every means you can – telling people something just once does not work any more.

10. Evaluate. After the meeting, meet with the leaders and discuss what went well. What needs to be planned before the next meeting? What needs to be changed? Make notes and discuss with your committee or helpers so you don't forget.

**For an effective support group:**

DO provide fellowship occasions  
DON'T allow gossiping or complaining

DO provide communication opportunities  
DON'T promote or allow prejudice

DO maintain a biblical perspective  
DON'T be cliquish

DO have an accepting attitude toward all  
DON'T waste time

DO speak in a basic language so that all can understand  
DON'T get off the planned subject

DO maintain confidentiality  
DON'T label people