



SETTING UP A SUPPORT GROUP – COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS!

DO I NEED TO RUN A SUPPORT GROUP AT A CERTAIN DAY OR TIME?

You are volunteering your time and so it has to revolve around what you are doing in your life – work, family, etc.

Some groups run monthly, some weekly, some bi-monthly, some at night, some during the day, some at weekends, some for an hour, some for two – it varies. It has got to work with your schedule so you have autonomy over when you run it and the times you do so.

All we ask is that it is run in a consistent pattern, just so that potential attendees know when you will be on and have somewhere to turn to.

WHAT VENUE SHOULD I HAVE IT IN?

Again, you have autonomy over this as it has to work on a practical level for the group leader and the accessibility of where they are. Current groups run out of places like: community centres, church halls, community rooms in supermarkets, libraries, soft plays, independent café's, health centres, hubs, workshop spaces, well-being centres – lots of places!

The best advice we can give is to try and get somewhere for free. That way you will have very little outlay. However, if you can't get a venue for free, you are welcome to fundraise for your group to help cover costs.

Ultimately the group space has got to work for you. There are things that are useful if you do have a choice of venue. Car parking, good transport links, space for prams or buggies, tea/coffee making facilities, comfortable seating etc. Some potential group leaders ask if they can bring their children – absolutely! We don't expect you to have babysitting in place

to run your sessions. And attendees can choose to come with little ones or not. It is absolutely your call. A few toys or books for little ones left out can be helpful for this too.

Often when searching for a venue, your greatest friend can be Facebook. If you put an appeal out for a free space and what it is for, you may find that people come back to you with hidden gems that they know about, however, they may not be advertised as such.

Additionally, we will give you a blank template for a risk assessment for you to fill out so that it ties in with your own venue. The insurance for your group is covered by PANDAS.

DO I NEED A DEPUTY LEADER?

Again, this is something that is up to you. Many of our groups have 1 leader only, some have a leader and a deputy, and some have decided to be 'co-group' leaders. It can be helpful to have someone else that can step into covering the role if needs be, if one leader wants to take time off etc. It is also helpful when it comes to dividing the work out. However, it is not a necessity. If down the line of running your groups, you meet someone that you think would be good as a deputy, then by all means let us know and we can put them through the necessary training and db's checks etc.

WHAT CHECKS DO I NEED?

If you have a current db's. that is from a role within the NHS, we can accept that. For everyone else, we will get you put through a DBS check. Due to the volume of volunteers across the charity, we ask that you make a contribution of £20 towards this check. This £20 cover contributes to your DBS, your affiliation, gives you access to all of the training which is all CPD, and you will be given a number of resources digitally to help support the running of your group.

COMMITMENT TO PANDAS

To be affiliated to PANDAS with your group, we ask that you touch base with us regularly (at least monthly). We have a zoom drop in on the 2nd Tuesday evening of the month for half an hour. It is just a chance to meet other group leaders and chat about what's going on for you. If you can't attend this, then we ask that you set up a one-to-one with the groups support manager. We also get you to fill out a monthly update form which only takes a few minutes and should just be part of your volunteering time. This gets sent over to the group support manager on the last day of the month. Additionally, well-being checks with our safeguarding manager will take place quarterly.

We are also aware that there may be times that as a group leader, you need to look after your own mental well-being. If you ever feel that you need a break from delivering your group to refocus and get some time for your own self-care – we understand that. We just ask that you communicate to your group that you're taking some time off and of course, let the support group manager know.

If you decide to stop running your group, you MUST notify the support group manager and close any social media accounts linked to you group. This gives continuity as a charity, and clarity about what is available to prospective attendees. We don't want any attendees trying to contact groups that are no longer running in the event that there is a safeguarding concern.

Training

At the same time as you are getting put through your dbs. check, we will ask you to complete some online safeguarding training. This will allow you get your group up and running. The dbs. and safeguarding training are the two things that will make that happen for you!

Dani, our training director puts together lots of training packages over the year. Again, this is CPD for you and you are invited to jump in on the many courses that are in operation. You will receive birth trauma training, perinatal mental health training – amongst other training opportunities. Dani will keep you updated with the blocks and what is on offer.

Should sessions be structured or more free-flowing?

Again, this is something you have autonomy over. Many groups have specialist sessions where they have a guest speaker, or organise a nice creative activity like candle making, or craft sessions, beauty therapy or even have an event e.g., a picnic, party, walk – many things. However, this is not an expectation. It all depends on any funding you have what you can manage.

Other groups just have a cuppa and some snacks out and just chat. You may want to mix it up between structured and less 'organised' sessions. It is PEER support so the crux of it, is to have a safe space where others can share what is going on for them. Often, attendees might not want to share, and they will talk about anything but what is going on for them. If the conversation ends up being about tv, then that is ok. So long as you have a safe, inclusive, welcoming space.

Something to be mindful of is, if you do get in a guest speaker, we ask you that **don't** get in a sleep or breast-feeding specialist. The reasoning behind this is that these are areas that are quite 'triggering' for attendees. Whilst we have no control specifically over what the attendees will talk about, we would advise that you signpost them in the correct way. We

want to remain impartial and do not want anyone giving advice, medical or unsolicited. The core of your group is peer support for perinatal mental well-being. If you're unsure of a potential guest speaker, please just speak to us at PANDAS.

Fundraising

You're more than welcome to do fundraising for your group. You can use money you get to cover the costs of venue spaces, teas and coffees, well-being packs/care packages – treats for attendees! We do have a cap of £1500 if you decide to open a bank account for your group. The reason being, is that as a charity we have to be transparent. We have to be able to (under the charity commission) say what funds are available (in any division) and what they are for. Please note that you don't need a bank account if you don't intend to do any fundraising for your group.

If you do need funds there are several ways of doing it. All local authorities have money they need to give away to community projects – so check out what they have in your area and apply for some group funding. You can also host events like – teddy bears picnics, raffles, afternoon teas, bake sales, jumble sales, etc.

Additionally, we ask that our support groups take part in an annual fundraiser for the central charity. We have absolutely no expectations about what you should do for it, or indeed how much you bring in from it. Again, you have all the autonomy with it. It is purely to boost momentum and do something fun across the groups. Previously groups have held coffee mornings with just folk putting change in, some have done walks or sporting events, some had raffles, some had book sales – all kinds of things. You do not need to make a minimum amount for this, it is purely for comradery and hopefully bringing a penny or two our charities way.

Do we receive help to promote our group?

On receipt of your dbs, affiliation form and safeguarding training completion, we will email you a number of assets to help advertise your group. You will get a digital badge with your groups area name on it to help you if you decide to have social media pages. You will be given a template for a press release too that you can fill in the blanks of and send to your local press, as well as some pdfs of leaflets etc. Additionally, we will send you policies and paperwork to support your journey as a pandas group leader. You will also be added to the closed Facebook group, and WhatsApp that we have.

Note on social media pages

Please note that if you decide to have a social media page/event page to promote your group, this should be done with the aim of providing information on the logistics of the group only. Please do this in line with the values of PANDAS and its social media policy.

The main PANDAS support groups are there for general, online, peer to peer support and are moderated according to ensure its content is safe for all users, and so any potential safeguarding issues are dealt with efficiently. If you discover attendees of your group are looking for a safe, online place to receive support please do direct them to the main PANDAS groups. We do not want you, as group leaders, to be in a position where you also have to monitor social media pages for safeguarding issues so it's important that you do this, please.

Please do keep your group social media pages public and viewable by all. This will ensure all can access important information about your group (time, location, how to book on etc) without the need to identify themselves if they do not want to (by "liking" or following the page for example).

I would like more people to attend my group, what can I do?

Online Community - Please search and add yourself to as many local area online groups as possible lots are via Facebook and ask the administrator if it would be possible to advertise your group online.

Community- Notice Boards- Lots of small shops, halls, libraries, supermarkets and retailers have notice boards please ask if you can advertise your group to spread the word.

Search for local parent and baby groups and speak to the leader to see if they will allow you to advertise. Search for local antenatal classes, and see if they will spread the word and allow you to advertise.

NHS community - GP surgeries are the No1 go-to for advertising your group. Please use your groups fundraising to print leaflets to distribute throughout GP surgeries, local hospitals, health visiting centres and also us your local Maternity Voices partnership you can find your nearest by searching online.

Local press- Community press usually welcome adverts or stories about mental health groups such as PANDAS support groups. If you are a new start up group, send them the standard press release, available from your Support Groups manager. If an existing group approach your local broadcast and or press and ask to be featured for the benefit of the community.

Here to support!

Ultimately, we are here to support you with your support group journey. Everyone at PANDAS has a listening ear and if there is anything you aren't sure of, or you want to ask any questions about, please just let us know!

And thank you for your interest in setting a group up!

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