

# A Practical

# Guide

## for Setting up a Peer Support Group



Making a real  
difference together



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# Introduction

The information outlined in this resource has been developed as a guide for setting up and maintaining amputee-specific Peer Support Groups. An amputee Peer Support Group is a group of people living with limb loss (and sometimes family members and/or partners) who come together to share knowledge, information and offer mutually beneficial support.

Peer Support Groups can provide individuals with a safe open forum to share concerns. Peer Support Groups are made up of people who have shared similar experiences. Group members can work together to find solutions to problems and help one another to navigate the journey forward. A successful Peer Support Group will always have a clear purpose and be accessible to the people it is supporting. How these details are worked out will depend on the members of the group and the way the group is established.

It is important that family members and friends are invited to be a part of the group as they may be seeking information and support, in their own right.

## How to use this resource

This resource is designed for anyone impacted by limb loss who is considering starting a Peer Support Group. This resource outlines some key things to consider prior to setting up the group; during the planning and development phase of the group and during the life of the group. Throughout this Guide you will find a series of suggestions and tips, along with a 'how to' list and a number of templates to help to get you started.



# Section 1: Peer support groups

Some peer support groups are a gathering of individuals at a physical meeting space sharing experiences in a relaxed open environment, while other groups have a more formal structure, use agendas and offer educational opportunities for their members.

Some groups operate in a face to face environment while other groups choose to bring people together via other methods such as: online chat rooms, forums, blogs and social media. Online groups can provide a sense of community even though the members do not meet face to face. Online groups can be useful for people with geographical restrictions or for those with limited personal mobility.

The reason that people join Peer Support Groups can be wide and varied. Some people join a Peer Support Group to have access to information about their condition and to learn strategies to manage their condition, while others join groups to be supported by people with a similar condition who provide understanding and empathy, other people join groups to feel connected and to gain a sense of belonging.

## 1.1 Peer support group options

- Face-to-face groups with formally structured meetings; or informal groups such as regular lunch, afternoon tea or dinner style gatherings;
- Online chat rooms/forums/groups;
- Email groups;
- Peer-to-peer skype groups; and,
- A combination of the above.

## 1.2 Telephone and online support

Telephone support is a very flexible and an accessible form of peer support. Telephone support programs are valuable to peers who are isolated by location or mobility issues, or for those people who are unable to attend regular face-to-face meetings.

Online support is similar to self-managed groups - except the group is virtual in nature. People can take part in discussions online without physically moving from their homes or without making changes to their normal routines, while participating at a time that suits them. Being part of an online community allows peers to share their stories with a broad group of people who may have a range of different experiences.

At its best, being a member of an online community can be a rich source of information, encouragement and support. Online groups are usually moderated by a number of caretakers who manage the content of the group along with registration process of members.

## 1.2.1 Characteristics of a support group

- Made up of peers, people who share the same or similar experiences
- Leader/facilitator - manages and oversees discussion and content of meetings or online forum content
- Is voluntary in nature
- Is inclusive to a particular group, interest, and/or disability.

## 1.3 Support group benefits

- Promotes inclusion by creating community while helping people to realise they are not alone
- Can be cost effective and cheap to run
- Works to empower people
- Promotes information sharing
- Can reduce anxiety, stress and in some cases depression
- Provides a forum for shared experiences and the freedom to speak freely
- Reinforcement of the normalcy of reactions and experiences
- Offers the opportunity to develop new connections at times of isolation
- Enables opportunities to learn from others and gain support, encouragement and hope
- Provides a sense of belonging in a safe and comfortable environment

## 1.4 Aims of a Peer Support Group

- To provide members with information and knowledge about relevant topics.
- To encourage members to practise health self-management, stress management, pain-management techniques and build on communication skills for long term goals
- To provide support, encouragement and an opportunity for sharing personal problems while working towards appropriate solutions
- To provide social opportunities for people who may otherwise be isolated due to their physical limitations
- To raise community awareness about disability: amputation and issues affecting amputees
- To support and promote independence
- Encourage opportunities for mutual support
- To share amputee specific health-based information
- Assist people to develop skills and build confidence
- Help people gain access to local community-based services and information
- Respect the different ways that individuals cope with the trauma of amputation
- Respect and acknowledge each person's social values, cultural and religious individuality

# Section 2: Getting started

## 2.1 Is there a need for a Support Group in my area?

Before you put in the work to start a group, ask the very important question, is there a need for a group to be developed? If the answer is yes, the next step is to do your homework. Some of things you may like to consider include:

- Learning about existing groups in the area. Your group should complement, not duplicate, what is already available in the community.
- Visiting or speaking to other leaders or facilitators of organisations in the local community for information relating to how they run a successful group.
- Meeting with local community health services and health providers in your area. They can be a source for referrals for potential members and help to arrange guest speakers for your group meetings.

Ensure you have enough support and assistance from family members, friends and other members of your community to help you to get the group started.

Think about the focus and the purpose of the group, for example it may be to provide emotional support, social interaction, information and or resource sharing. It may also provide exercise/fitness sessions or a combination of the above activities. Remember that you don't have to be everything to all people or do everything at once. Start small so that you can build up over time. Begin to think about the structure of the group and how roles will be managed.



In most cases amputees leave hospital for rehabilitation and from rehabilitation where possible and practical, return home. When people arrive home they are often faced with a variety of new challenges. Many amputees indicate that they would like the opportunity to further understand their condition and gain insight from other amputees who have hard-earned knowledge and 'lived experience'.

## 2.2 Setting up and running a Peer Support Group

The main things to think about when you are setting up a group include:

- How are you going to set the group up?
- Who is going to help you manage and run the group?
- How is the group going to be managed and maintained?

**Limbs 4 Life can assist you in a number of areas, these include:**

<b>Planning</b>	Provide practical advice about starting a group.
<b>Information</b>	Provide access to a range of resources including printed information to share with your group.
<b>Promotion</b>	Help link your group to local medical and allied healthcare providers and community organisations. Promote your group via the Limbs 4 Life website. Help you to develop promotional information for your group.
<b>Referral</b>	Direct people to your group who live in your local community and near your local area.

## 2.3 New Groups versus Reforming Existing Groups

Some groups will be totally new. Others may be a re-formation or restructuring of a group that existed in the past, but has disbanded. If you are resurrecting a group, you should take the following into account:

- Why the original group no longer exists (low attendance, ineffective meetings, lack of interest);
- What type of structure the group had and how often the group met;
- What the leader or facilitator did, or did not do, to maintain the group; and,
- Whether any previous leaders or members are interested in seeing the group reformed.



## 2.3.1 Rural and remote communities

- Establishing groups in rural and remote areas may be complicated due to the lack of people and general distance.
- There are a number of issues that can affect smaller community groups which don't impact metropolitan groups, such as confidentiality; people tend to know one another in smaller communities and confidentiality and privacy can be much more difficult to maintain.
- The closeness that usually exists within rural communities may affect group dynamics, particularly if a member dies or leaves for an unknown reason.
- Consistency of attendance and information correctness; some people don't bother to attend group meetings because they think that it will be easy to catch up with one of the members in the local community, and access information second hand because it is easy to do so.

## 2.4 Gathering local support

Making connections with other Peer Support Groups or community groups can be a great way to:

- Get advice and helpful suggestions
- Identify ways to work together
- Share information and resources

It is important to have a good relationship with your local Community Health Centre and Local Council (Health Promotion Officer/Metro Access person and/or Disability Support Services);

- To find out what assistance they can provide
- To utilise their connections so that they can refer people to your group and create awareness about your group
- To assist with space or rooms to enable you to hold group meetings

You may also want to get to know the local healthcare providers including: dietitians, podiatrists, prosthetists, physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, psychologists, pharmacists and general practitioners. Healthcare providers can assist in a number of ways: being a guest speaker at your meetings and importantly, may also refer new people to your group.

Other community organisations that can be a good source of local information and support include; Lions and Rotary Clubs, U3A, and Probus Clubs along with community radio stations and local newspapers that can help to promote the work or purpose of your group.

**When you have enough members, schedule a date and time for the first meeting.**

**Plan ahead, give members a couple of weeks' notice so that they can schedule it into their diary.**

**Remember to follow up with a letter or telephone reminder a few days before the meeting.**

## 2.5 Planning a Meeting

This involves setting the time and place for your group to meet.

Deciding where to meet as a group should be a priority. Your local Council or Community Health Centre can be a good place to start and may assist you with information or point you in the right direction. Local service clubs can also be useful helping you to find space.

### 2.5.1 Considerations for a meeting venue:

- The number of people attending the meeting
- Finding a central location, accessible by public transport with plenty of accessible parking
- A welcoming, quiet, clean and comfortable environment that allows for privacy
- Access for people with all levels of limb loss, consider prosthetic, manual and motorised wheelchair users
- A venue which provides good lighting, heating and cooling
- Evening or after-hours access if required, with safe access to parking before and after the meeting
- Cost of room hire
- A safe environment without physical hazards
- Access to accessible toilets and kitchen

### 2.5.2 Planning your meeting schedule:

- How often the group will meet, for example fortnightly, monthly or bimonthly
- The duration of each meeting, for example 1 or 2 hours in length
- Time of day - consider the most appropriate time of day for members
- Days of the week - Monday - Friday or on the weekend
- Availability of the venue



#### **Seek member feedback.**

Develop a short survey and send it to members. Surveys can help you to collect some of the important information you need to help with the planning and structure of the meetings. Use the questions above as a guide to your first survey.

Your surveys should also focus on certain topics and themes. Don't forget to ask individuals what they hope to gain from attending meetings.

# Section 3: Running a Peer Support Group

There are no hard and fast rules about how a group should operate. This is something that your members will have to discuss and decide. The group should determine how it will operate and how decisions are made. Some groups prefer to keep their roles quite informal, with members taking on various responsibilities as they arise.

Other groups may wish to be more formal in structure by assigning specific roles for each task to a different group member.

## 3.1 Guidelines for Running a Peer Support Group

It is always valuable if the group sets some clear guidelines. Some examples of these are:

- All members of the group are able to suggest topics for discussion
- Meetings will start on time and any late members will need to catch up on arrival
- Members will take in turns, allowing others to voice their opinions and make comments
- Members will respect others opinions and listen, so that everyone can be heard
- From time to time guest speakers may be invited to address the group
- Aggressive and violent behaviour should never be tolerated
- Offer respect to all opinions, even if you don't agree
- Be open minded
- Contribute to a safe and comfortable environment

## 3.2 Group Member's Roles and Responsibilities

Regardless of the structure of the Peer Support Group it is essential to have a designated leader or facilitator of the group, as well as a back-up person to provide support and assistance. You can determine the roles of the group in time or establish them from the on-set.

### 3.2.1 Group leaders/facilitators

Selecting the right person to lead your support group is very important. The group leader or facilitator opens and closes the meetings, sets the tone for the discussion, helps members to learn how to listen and offers support to one another. They also deal with any problems that arise during the meeting.

### Group leaders/facilitators need to:

- Be approachable and welcoming to members
- Accept and be open to change
- Understand that everyone is different and may have different opinions
- Be open to learning from other people within the group
- Have empathy, understanding and knowledge of the issues affecting people in group
- Understand the importance of self-help and self-health-management
- Have adapted to, and accepted their own situation
- Respect all members of the group equally
- Be able to encourage other people to share responsibilities and to share the workload
- Have personal insight into their own life experiences, values and beliefs
- Be able to engage members and deal with conflict
- Seek, accept and act upon feedback from members about the group's progress

### 3.2.2 The ideal facilitator/leader will possess the following qualities:

**Flexible schedule:** The facilitator should have enough time to take care of the required tasks and commit to attending to each task.

**Lots of energy:** The facilitator should have a positive attitude and generally be in good health.

**Ability:** Ideally, the facilitator should be responsible, fair, organised, and able to work well with others.

**Support:** The facilitator needs to have access to resources to run the group (these may include: a phone, a car or access to transport), and people they can rely on for assistance if necessary.

**The desire to do the job:** The facilitator must have a connection to the group and its purpose.

### 3.2.3 The Facilitator/Group Leader

It is the job of the Facilitator to:

- Follow and direct the Agenda
- Make sure the meeting runs well
- Support everyone to have their say and make comments
- Check that people are happy with the decisions made
- Make sure the meeting runs on time
- Support people to be heard

Some groups like to choose one person to be the Facilitator/Group Leader at every meeting, while other groups may like to have people take turns to be the Facilitator/Group Leader. This means different people get to be the Group Leader at each meeting. There is no right or wrong way, it depends on the group, and the form of leadership should be a group decision.

### 3.2.4 Effective Facilitation/Leadership skills

#### Skills of effective facilitators:

- Awareness of self, balanced with awareness of the group and its members
- Tasks and activities of the group, balanced with the wellbeing of the group
- Empathy
- Listen more than speak
- Aim to understand everyone's perspective
- Flexibility
- The group is more important than the agenda
- Accepting that some days things work and some days, they don't
- Making good use of the suggestions that members and others make
- Being neutral
- The facilitator is doing the group's work, not the other way around
- The goals and outcomes are determined by the group, not the facilitator
- The facilitator guides the group, but doesn't control it



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### 3.3 How to Facilitate a Peer Support Group

You've put in a lot of hard work into preparing for your support group to begin, and now the day has come to begin your first meeting. If you are going to be the group's facilitator, here are some helpful guidelines and tips for running successful meetings.

If you haven't already determined some of the details and structure of the meeting the first meeting is a good opportunity to make decisions on some practical issues. These include: how often to meet, suitable times and dates for future meetings. Below is a list of things that have worked for other groups. You may choose to use some or all of these, depending on choices made by your group:

#### Set up

- Develop a simple agenda or list of activities to keep the group on track
- Provide sticky labels for people to use as name tags
- Set up an attendance sheet or book for people to write their name and details in, so that you can keep in contact with members
- Set up chairs in a circle so everyone can see each other
- Decide who is responsible for setting up and cleaning up
- Provide a bowl for people to leave a donation (gold coin or note) to help cover the cost of refreshments

#### Welcome

Ensure someone is responsible to welcome members and provide name tags

#### During meeting

- Make a time for introductions
- Set group rules
- Make time for information sharing
- Seek permission from those present, to share names and contact details within the group
- Provide details about the next meeting
- Schedule some informal time to catch up with new members

#### Action after meeting

- Allocate someone to document what needs to be done before the next meeting
- Decide if you think the meeting went well - seek feedback
- Decide if enough people attended, could the group be promoted in other areas



## Prepare yourself for the meeting

Take a few minutes to think about possible topics for discussion. If this isn't your first meeting, review the topics that were talked about last time. Go over any notes you wrote down. This can help you remember to raise ideas that members might want to revisit or receive updates on. If you plan to make any announcements of community events or activities that may be of interest to the group, make sure you have them ready. (see the meeting checklist for tips)

## Prepare the room for the meeting

Arrive 20 to 30 minutes early to set-up the room. Put the chairs in a circle large enough for late comers to fit in, allowing enough room for people who use wheelchairs to easily join in. If you're going to have refreshments, set them up on a table to the side or back of the room. If you're going to use name tags, have them ready. Have a pen and paper to take notes.

## Start the meeting

As people begin arriving, be sure to make eye contact and say hello, greeting them by name if you've met them before. Call the meeting to order (start) on time, or at least within five minutes of the planned time. This will help to encourage other members to be prompt and rewards those who are punctual. If you always start the meeting late because you're waiting for that one person who shows up 15 minutes late every time, you risk alienating those who made the effort to be there on time. A simple "let's get started," or "well, it's five minutes past seven o'clock, why don't we begin the meeting," is adequate.

## Opening a support group meeting

If this is a new group or there are new members present for the first time, explain the ground rules. The most common ground rule for support groups is that everything discussed in the group must be kept confidential. Have everyone introduce themselves, stating their names and a little bit about why they are interested in the group. Then begin the discussion, either by touching on something that was mentioned by one of the members or by raising a prepared topic.

## Encourage members to listen to one another

Being a good listener and acting as an example to group members means being an active listener, one who is obviously listening, hearing and understanding what is being said. How do you let people know that you're listening?

- Body language (leaning slightly towards the speaker, not fidgeting)
- Eye contact (looking in the speaker's eyes, not looking around the room)
- Brief encouraging statements, ("Uh-huh" or "Mmm-hmm")
- Nodding

## Encourage members to talk about themselves

One advantage of support groups is that they can create an atmosphere where members feel comfortable talking about and working through very personal issues and experiences. Disclosure: the act of revealing personal information gives other members a chance to offer support, ideas, and assistance. It can encourage other members to share their own experiences and fosters feelings of trust within the group. To maintain that trust, facilitators/leaders may find that they need to disclose personal information about themselves from time to time.

## Asking open ended questions

An open-ended question is designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the subject's own knowledge and feelings. It is the opposite of a closed-ended question, which encourages a short or single-word answer. Open-ended questions typically begin with words such as "Why" and "How", or phrases such as "Tell me about". Close ended questions will usually only attract a yes or no response.

## Offer support

This is the main reason your group exists! Fortunately, offering support is one of the simplest things to do during the course of running a support group. Giving members support can help them to realise that reaching their goals is possible; it can give them hope and let them know that you and others empathize with what they're going through.

Support consists of making statements that show understanding, empathy, and general regard for their well-being. Listen to the feelings expressed by members and address those feelings. Support can also be expressed through body language such as making eye contact or smiling.) Usually, members will offer support to each other on their own, or they will quickly pick up on how to do so, by following your example.

## 3.4 Closing the Meeting

Most support group meetings last between an hour and two hours. If the group is caught up in a particularly intense discussion or working to help a member solve a problem, you might go a few extra minutes overtime, but generally it's best to end the meeting before everyone is tired and eager to leave. When the discussion is winding down or when a previously agreed-upon ending time has arrived, wrap things up. Here are some ways you can close the meeting:

### **Make a summary statement:**

Summarize the topics that were discussed and outcomes that were chosen. Highlight any positive feedback or solutions that came up during the meeting.

## Ask for additional comments or questions:

- Check to see if anyone in the group has anything to add.
- Remind members about the next meeting.
- Let everyone know the time, date and place for the next meeting.

## Request help, if necessary:

Asking for help from members encourages them to take leadership responsibilities and fosters a sense of personal investment in the group's success. Ask volunteers to assist with the set-up or pack up of the meeting, or to take meeting notes, or assist with the refreshments.

## Give a final greeting:

Thank everyone for coming, say goodbye, and encourage them to come again.

## Make final notes:

Shortly after the meeting, make some brief notes about what was discussed while it's fresh in your mind. This information can be used to jump-start the next meeting. Keep any notes about the group in a safe place to ensure confidentiality.

## 3.5 Minute Taker

Minutes are meant to record basic information such as the actions assigned, and decisions made. Minutes can be saved and used as a reference or background material for future meetings. Meeting minutes shouldn't be an exact recording of everything that happened during a meeting. The following instructions will help you take useful meeting minutes.

### Before the Meeting

Create a template for recording your meeting minutes and make sure you leave some blank space to record comments. Include the following information:

- Date and time of the meeting
- The purpose of the meeting
- The meetings leader or facilitators name
- Assigned action items - who will be looking after each task
- A space to record decisions made during the meeting

Before the meeting, gather as much information as possible; the list of attendees, as well as details on the agenda. This way you won't need to scramble to understand what's going on while you're recording notes. *(See meeting minutes sample template)*

## During the Meeting

Don't try to record notes exactly, it's not necessary. Minutes are meant to give a broad outline of what happened during the meeting, they are not a record of who said what. Focus on understanding what's being discussed and record action items and who is responsible for looking after those items.

Record action items and decisions in your template as they happen, don't wait until after the meeting to remember or you may make a mistake or forget something.

## After the Meeting

Review the notes and add additional comments, or clarify what you didn't understand right after the meeting. Do this while the information is fresh in everyone's mind. Type your notes out into the template you created before the meeting - this will make the notes easier for everyone to read and use.

Send the final copy of the minutes to attendees right away.

## 3.6 Tips on Handling Difficult Group Members

Dealing with difficult group members can sometimes be hard. Support group facilitators must learn the delicate skill combination of control, mixed with kindness. This skill directly addresses problems with the group without insulting or offending members. You may use this approach during a meeting to get the discussion back on track, or you may wish to speak to the member in private after the meeting.

### 3.6.1 Managing conflict in the group

There is perhaps no greater challenge or more important task in a group than to establish a positive and cooperative group. That is a group which works well together. In order for a group to be effective all individuals should try to get along with one another. People have different views and ideas and sometimes people won't agree with each other. Having disagreements is normal.

The most important thing is how your group manages any disagreements, and how as a group you settle the issue. Disagreements and conflicts need to be resolved as soon as possible, so that the group can move on and continue to provide members with a positive and enjoyable experience.

When conflict escalates, it can sometimes be difficult to step back and consider the other person's perspective. Conflict is a group issue and everyone needs to play a part in resolving it, not just the leader/facilitator of the meeting.

## Effective strategies for dealing with conflict:

- Deal with it as it arises; leaving it doesn't solve the problem
- Choose your battles. Let it go if it really doesn't matter; decide if it's a minor or major issue (this does not cancel out the point above)
- Say what you want to say, not what you don't want to say; suggesting possibilities and recommending ways forward is easier to hear and more effective than complaining and criticising
- Speak for yourself; say how you feel and let others say how they feel
- Deal with the problem first and the effects afterwards. For example, if member's arriving late is the problem, disruption is the effect; find ways to encourage members to arrive on time
- Make problem solving a group activity. Groups are far more likely to implement solutions if they had a part in shaping them
- When you're angry, listen more and speak less

## 3.7 Problem Solving Tips

While solving problems shouldn't be the only goal of a support group, it is something that many members hope for and expect. All members should take part in the problem-solving process so that no single person is seen as the solution to their difficulties. It's the facilitator's/leaders job to help members learn how to help each other with problem solving tips.

### Clarifying the problem:

Make sure everyone fully understands the problem. If you aren't sure what the problem is, ask questions to get more information.

### Talking about the alternatives:

Bring up possible solutions to the problem, but be very careful to word them in a way that doesn't give advice. Telling people what to do is not the purpose or responsibility of a support group. It can take away a person's confidence. Try asking members to explain what worked well for them in similar situations. Another alternative is to directly ask the person with the problem what he thinks might work.

### Choosing which option(s) to take:

Have the group discuss the positives and negatives of each suggestion. That way you can then let the person with the problem come to a decision on their own. Some individuals may wish to take some time on their own to consider the possibilities. Let them know that the group cares and wants to know how things turn out.

## Offering help:

Sometimes members may offer assistance to one another. For example, if the problem being discussed is a member's problem with transportation to the meetings, other members might offer to give that person a ride.

## 3.8 Record Keeping of Member's Details

Who will keep the members' details? People are quite rightly concerned about their private details remaining private. Someone in the group needs to take responsibility for keeping this information in a safe place. Your group will need to agree whether personal information (such as phone numbers and email addresses) are shared or kept private. All these records need to be kept in a safe place in an organised way.

## 3.9 Confidentiality and Disclosure

At the beginning of any new group, and as each new person joins, the topic of confidentiality should be raised. The group needs to be clear about what information 'stays in the group' and what can be shared.

Emphasize the importance of confidentiality. In order for your members to feel comfortable about discussing personal issues and work through problems, they need to feel ensured that nobody is going to discuss personal problems outside of the group's discussions. Make sure this is understood by everyone.

The group may decide that personal information remains confidential, but that more general information can be shared. However, some groups may decide that nothing that is said in the group can be shared. It is up to each individual group. The group should have a plan in place and discuss what will happen if confidentiality is breached.

## 3.10 Evaluation

Evaluation means asking people what they thought of the meeting including:

- Did they enjoy the meeting?
- Were important issues and topics talked about?
- Did everyone get a chance to have their say?
- Did people listen to one another?
- What can we do better at the next meeting?

*(See Evaluation Checklist Sample Form)*



# Section 4: Keeping the support group going

## 4.1 Tips on Keeping a Support Group Going

### **Keep track of your group's progress.**

From time to time, ask members for their feedback on how they think the group is going. Find out how helpful the support group is, how comfortable they feel, and their likes and dislikes about the group. Use this information to make changes but discuss the changes with the members first.

### **Share responsibility for the group.**

Letting others take leadership roles helps them feel more committed to and invested in the group. Make sure members know that their help is appreciated. Everyone should have a job at meetings so seek feedback from members about which roles they would like to take on.

### **Make sure that everyone has a chance to talk and have their say.**

Some people are naturally more talkative than others. Asking direct questions can help to get quiet members to speak up - it is important that they have their say. It's also important to keep the more vocal members on-topic and gently remind them to let others have a turn at times.

### **Share rewards and failures.**

Let members know that you appreciate their contributions and assistance. If someone makes a mistake, don't place blame. You should work together to share the responsibilities of your mistakes and come together as a group to share the rewards.

### **Remember that this is a support group.**

The dynamics of a group may change over time - for example, the group could become more social in future as opposed to a formal meeting structure, it may change in terms of topics and function. No matter how the group may change, your group's primary purpose is to provide support and understanding to its individual members.

## 4.2 Promoting the Support Group

### 4.2.1 Attract and use referrals

Let local medical professionals and healthcare staff, community health education departments, clergy, administrators, media personnel and other such people know about your group and encourage them to tell people about it. Send out emails, letters, newsletters and if you have them, brochures or flyers.

If your local council has any community information and referral hotlines, be sure that they have the details about your support group.

Find out which organisations publish community or social service directories in your area and request that your group be included.

### 4.2.2 Posters and flyers:

Material to promote your group can be displayed at clubs, shops, hospitals, churches, libraries, schools, and post offices, just about anywhere that you think people might see them.

### 4.2.3 Press releases:

Sending information about your support group to the local newspaper may encourage them to write a story about your group. Newspaper articles can help to generate interest and attract members in the community that you didn't know existed, local papers are a wonderful way to convey messages about your group especially in rural and regional communities.

### 4.2.4 Paid advertising:

You could consider paying for an advertisement in your local newspaper and/or in publications or newsletters distributed by community organisations or businesses that aim to reach the people you wish to attract. Remember that there may be costs involved and sometimes these are expensive so ensure that the group can afford the advertisement before proceeding. It is also worth doing your homework to find out the area and coverage that the newspaper will be delivered to.

### 4.2.5 Letters to the editor:

These can be used to tell the public about your group. Editors are more likely to print a letter if it's in response to a current news story.

## 4.2.6 Community service announcements:

Getting these aired on local radio or television stations can help to get the word out to large numbers of people.

## 4.2.7 Register your support group

It's a good idea to register your support group with Limbs 4 Life. That way we can promote your group via the organisations website and amputees and their family members living nearby will know that your group exists. Limbs 4 Life is willing to work with your group and help promote the support you are offering to your local community.

For more information please contact us directly via the toll free number **1300 78 2231** or email **peersupport@limbs4life.org.au**

## 4.3. Closing the Group

Occasionally Peer Support Groups end operation. Before making the decision to close the group it is important to talk with members and discuss the situation. If your group faces this situation, there are certain steps you can follow so the group ends efficiently and with the least amount of disruption.

If the facilitator/leader or other members who assist with running the group no longer wish to be involved, other members should be given the chance to take over the group and run it themselves.

If some members are still interested in being a part of a Peer Support Group, help them to find another group or put them in touch with Limbs 4 Life. Depending on your location it may be possible for your group to join with another group which provides similar support.

Write a letter describing when and why the group is closing and thank people for their involvement. Send the letter to everyone on the mailing list including health professionals. Put notices in community newspapers or centres announcing that the group is closing so people do not show up for meetings.

Ensure all your records are stored in a safe place as they contain confidential information of 'members' details. Plan a final meeting and farewell party just prior to its closure.



## In summary

**Support groups bring people together who are facing similar issues.**

While not everyone wants or needs support beyond what is offered by their friends or family, a disability or health specific support group can help people to share experiences with others who understand their situation. Health specific support groups should provide connections with others in a similar situation, work to prevent isolation and promote general well-being for all members.

Limbs 4 Life supports the amputee community throughout Australia. The organisation is here to help and support you as a person with limb loss and as a limb loss support group. We look forward to working with you and building relationships with you, your group and your community to provide greater opportunities for all amputees and their families.

## Forms and documents

### Tool Kit Appendix

- 1 Sample Meeting Agenda
- 2 Meeting Checklist
- 3 Meeting Evaluation Checklist
- 4 Sample Format of Meeting Minutes

## 1 Sample Meeting Agenda

### SAMPLE AMPUTEE SUPPORT GROUP AGENDA TEMPLATE

<b>Item</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Venue</b>	Where the meeting is being held
<b>Time</b>	The start and finish time of the meeting
<b>Welcome</b>	Open the meeting and greet the group
<b>Present and Apologies</b>	Who is here and not here
<b>Minutes</b>	A summary of what happened at the last meeting
<b>Reports</b>	The things the group has been doing
<b>New Business</b>	Things people want to talk about or issues people want to work on
<b>Planning</b>	What are we going to be doing?

## 2 Sample Meeting Checklist

### SAMPLE MEETING CHECKLIST

Item	Tick or cross
Have someone chosen to welcome all new comers and members to the meeting	
Have name tags for all members attending the meeting	
Make sure the meeting room is booked	
Have pens and paper available for members	
Have a meeting agenda	
Arrange any catering such as tea, coffee and biscuits	
Print out any documents or papers you wish to share with the group	
Arrange for someone to help you set-up the meeting space	



### 3 Sample Evaluation Checklist

## SAMPLE MEETING EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Item	Yes	No
Were you happy with the meeting?		
Did we talk about all the important issues?		
Did everyone get to have their say?		
Did people listen to one another?		
Can things be done better?		
Was the venue suitable?		
<b><i>Additional comments:</i></b>		

#### 4 Sample of Meeting Minutes

### SAMPLE MINUTE FORM

*The following is a sample template for creating minutes of a meeting. The minutes are usually completed by the Minute taker, but can be assigned to someone else by the facilitator.*

<b>Group Name</b>	
<b>Date/Time of Meeting:</b>	
<b>Location of Meeting:</b>	
<b>Members Present:</b> <i>List all members that attended meeting).</i>	
<b>Members Apologies:</b> <i>List members that gave an apology who were unable to attend the meeting.</i>	
<b>Guests:</b> <i>List any guests that attended such as speakers, or any potential new members.</i>	
<b>Reading and Approval of Minutes:</b> <i>Specify date of minutes being approved.</i>	
<b>Meeting Business</b> <i>List key points of all discussions that were held. If anyone is responsible for completing a task or following something up, include those actions here.</i>	
<b>Announcements:</b> <i>List any announcements made.</i>	
<b>Future Agenda Items:</b> <i>List any suggested agenda items that are to be tabled for the next meeting.</i>	
<b>Next Meeting:</b> <i>List Date/Time/Location of the next meeting.</i>	