



Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

PARENT GROUP LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM



MODULE 2: PLANNING AND GETTING STARTED

Total time: 135 minutes, including break

Module agenda

Welcome and objectives—5 minutes

Review Module 1—10 minutes

Engaging stakeholders—30 minutes

Break—10 minutes

Recruiting new members—20 minutes

[Handout 1: “Recruit Members for Your Support Group”](#)

Learning about your members—10 minutes


[Handout 2: “Parent Survey Sample”](#)

Group structure—25 minutes

 Activity: Designing practical goals for your group

Creating a plan—15 minutes

[Handout 3: “Action Planning”](#)

 Homework!

Closing—10 minutes

Materials and preparation

NOTE: Familiarize yourself with the entire curriculum, including all handouts and activities, to ensure that you are fully prepared to deliver it.

- Review the activity and prepare any materials needed.
- Prepare the three handouts of this module to distribute to participants.
- Review the action plan activity on page 22.
- Review the homework that you will assign participants on page 15.
- Gather needed materials:
 - ✓ Name tents and markers for participants (from the previous session)
 - ✓ Flip chart and markers for facilitator
 - ✓ Computer with Module 2 PowerPoint slides loaded and ready to display
 - ✓ Method to display slides, such as projector and screen or large monitor visible to the participants
 - ✓ Fidgets, coloring materials, and snacks (optional)
- Set up the room. We recommend setting up the chairs and tables in a semi-circle or a U so participants can see you, each other, and the presentation. We also recommend having extra chairs and a space that accommodates free movement.

Module 2: Planning and Getting Started

AdaptUSKids ?

Welcome and objectives (5 minutes)

Objectives

- 1 Understand how and why to engage stakeholders early and effectively
- 2 Finding and engaging new members
- 3 Developing a survey
- 4 Using surveys to guide the group's structure and your planning

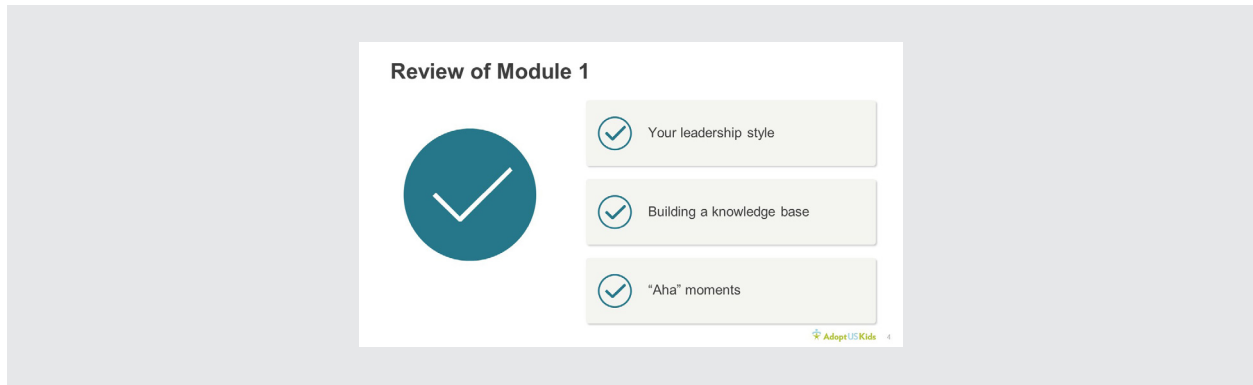
AdaptUSKids 3

Say

Welcome back! Today, we'll be learning about engaging parents and other stakeholders in starting or improving a support group that meets participants' needs. Together we will develop ways to engage potential members; identify members' needs and interests; access and understand data about children and their families; and plan effectively.

But before we dive in, I'd like to check in with you all about the first module.

Review module 1 (10 minutes)



Ask

Do you have any thoughts about Module 1? Was the material presented in a way that was helpful? Did the session move too fast, too slow, or at the right speed?

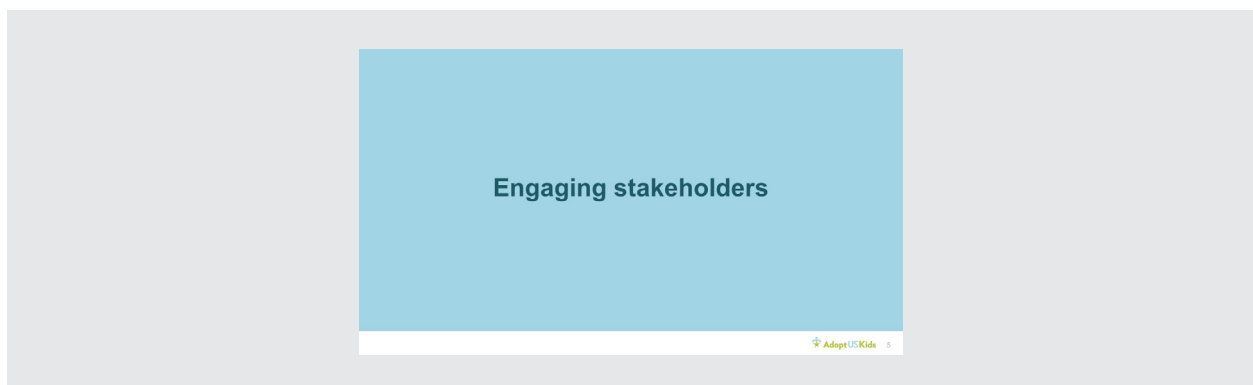
Can anyone share how what you learned about yourself as a leader will shape your next steps in launching your group? How will your leadership style support your group going forward?

Have you had a chance to look at the leadership resources? Has anyone begun building their knowledge? What was that like?

What about "aha" moments? Does anyone have a new understanding of themselves or a new resource that they'd like to share?

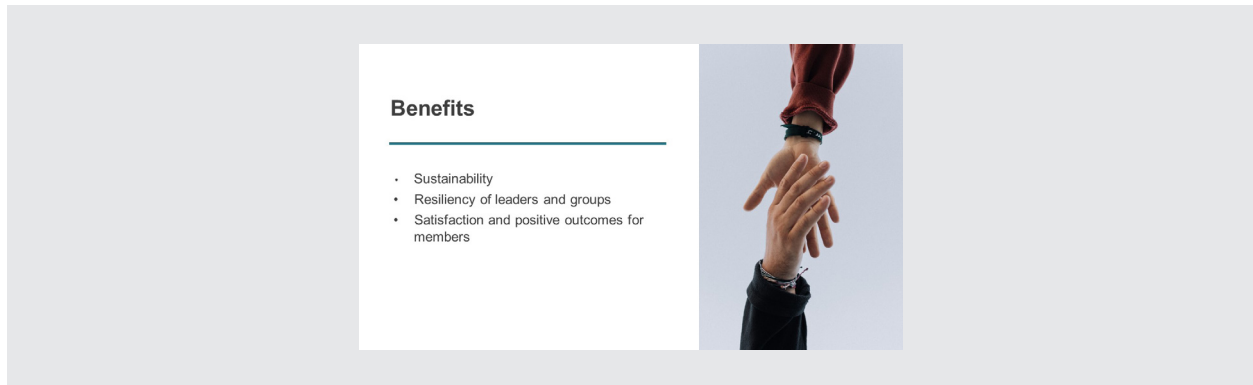
(after discussion) Thank you! Let's begin.

Engaging stakeholders (30 minutes)



Say

Effective leaders have learned that they need the support and partnership of others. No successful group is a one-person show. When your members feel ownership of the group from the beginning, it creates a sense of shared leadership, which in turn supports group sustainability, resiliency, and satisfaction for all group members.



Say

- Sustainability is about keeping members engaged over time, even through a change in leadership.
- Resiliency refers to the ability to take care of yourself and maintain hope in the face of challenges—both at home and in the group. A resilient group is able to weather challenges like leadership changes, shifts in group dynamics, or crises individual members face.
- A group that engages its community is better able to meet the needs of its members and therefore continue to thrive and grow.
- We'll talk more about all of this in Module 5 of this training.

Ask

Can you think of specific reasons why engagement leads to these three outcomes?

Do

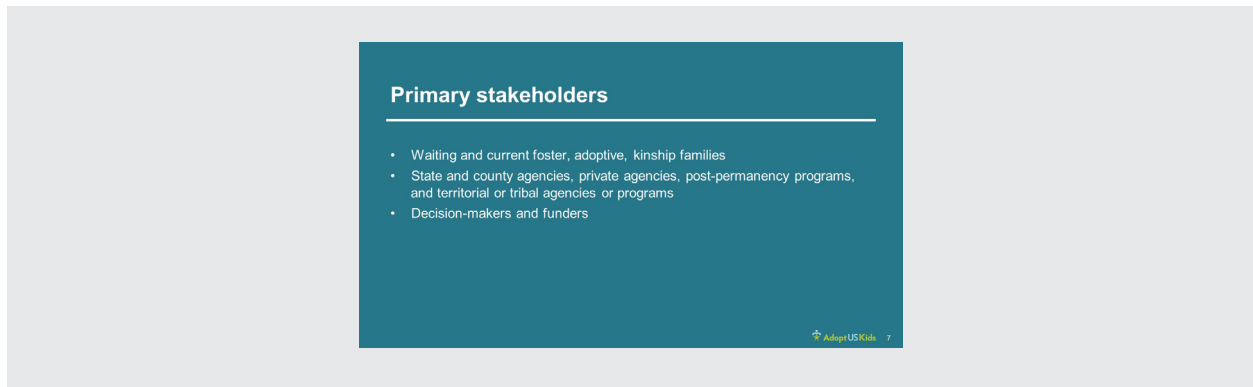
Record the answers on a flip chart, asking for more information about the responses as needed.

Offer these if they don't come up:

- Active engagement from all group members gives a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the group's success.
- Engaged members are able to apply their unique talents to the group's success, making the group more dynamic, flexible, and able to withstand challenges.
- Groups that have high community engagement are better able to tap into partnerships for resources, making them better able to meet members' needs.

Ask

So, who are your primary stakeholders?



Say

Let's think more about these primary stakeholders. In your area, whom do you need to engage, and how will you do that? For most of you, the group will be one of the support services that your state, county, tribe, or partner agency will provide. That agency will likely have ideas about how the group will run and the families it will serve, as well as the source for future members.

There are others in the community who may have a stake in your success, either because they are offering funds or in-kind support or because your success will help their networks:

- Schools that serve a lot of children in foster care or adopted children
- Community service providers
- Businesses that are interested in providing support to local groups as a measure of demonstrating their goodwill to the community

What matters most is having parents involved from the start. Or if you're going to be leading an existing group, from as soon as you're considering making changes. The group is for them, and so it must be about their needs. Schedule planning meetings at times that are convenient for them. Offer alternatives for providing input, such as virtual meetings, call-in options, or surveys. This initial, thoughtful engagement will be part of your long-term success.

An important first step is to bring people from these various groups together for a planning meeting to set expectations, define responsibilities, and create a strategic plan.

As you are meeting with the stakeholders, discuss specific local family needs and determine if there is a need for a targeted support group in addition to or instead of a more general group. Among the people that often have their own group are transracial families, kinship caregivers, LGBTQ+ families, parents of older youth, and waiting families. You may want to provide groups for children and teens. If this is the case, please remember that these are very different from groups for parents. The leader's expertise and approach must be consistent with child development and childhood trauma best practices, which is beyond the scope of this training.

Once you have developed the plan for starting or improving your support group, this initial stakeholder team should remain invested in your success.

Ask

What could you do to keep your stakeholders invested in the group's success?

Do

Record the answers on a flip chart, asking for more information about the responses as needed.

Reinforce or offer the following:

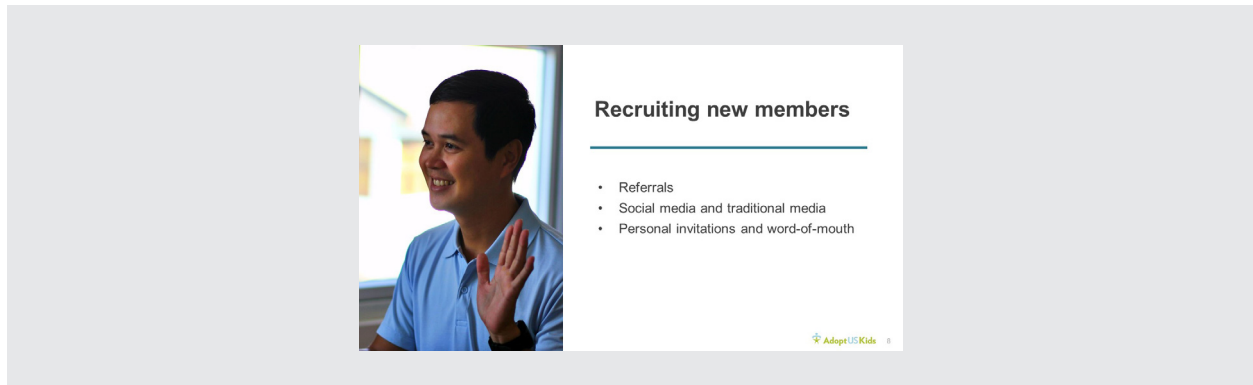
- Valuing them in the creation, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the effort
- Keeping them informed and excited about what you do
- Checking in regularly to ask what they see as the needs of the community
- Encouraging them to connect to potential support, funders, or other resources
- Asking for help in finding possible group members
- Finding tasks or jobs for them to do that match their interests and use their talents
- Thinking about ways you can help them meet their goals
- Maintaining their enthusiasm with praise, celebrations, small tokens of appreciation, and regular reminders of your accomplishments
- Engaging them in decision-making

Say

Try to leave your meeting with each planning committee member agreeing to complete one action that will continue to serve the group.

Break (10 minutes)

Recruiting new members (20 minutes)



Say

Now you're ready to recruit members for your new or existing group! Let's think about some of the ways this can be done. What ideas do you have?

Do

Encourage everyone to brainstorm ideas, emphasizing that all ideas are good ones. As ideas are generated, reinforce or offer these points.

REFERRALS

- From stakeholders. Ask if you can include a flyer about your group in any regular or upcoming emails or mailings (newsletters, listservs, mailings with adoption assistance or foster care payments, etc.).
- Schools and pediatricians' offices. Speak to guidance counselors, nurse practitioners, and doctors about sharing the information specifically with families.
- Social services directories.
- After-school programs, daycares, community centers.
- Notices to groups or gatherings of existing adoptive, foster, and kinship parents, including social events.
- Posters and flyers at clubs, shops, groceries, hospitals, churches, libraries, schools, post offices—just about anywhere that you think interested people might see them.
- Word of mouth.
- Presentations at preservice training panels or other community meetings.

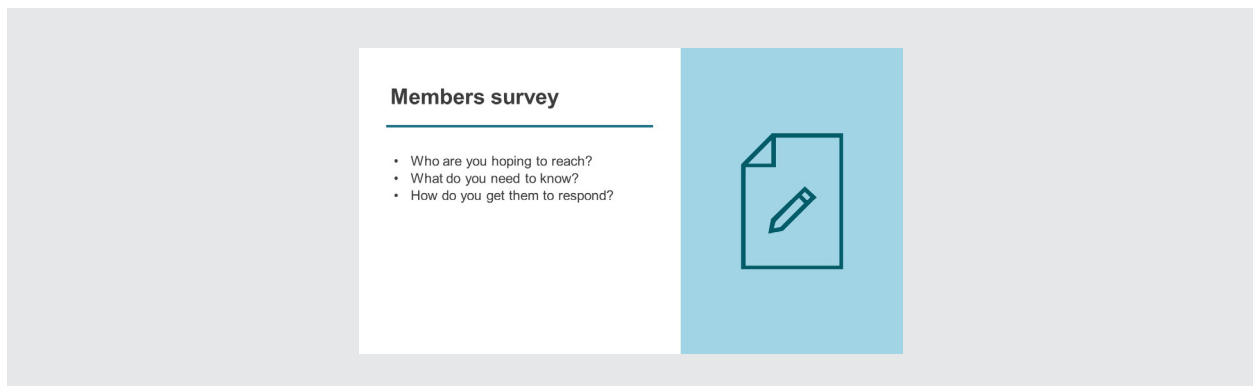
SOCIAL AND OTHER MEDIA

- Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Use your agency’s page, but also try to connect with other groups in the community that parents frequent.
- Local adoptive/foster parent blogs or websites.
- Press releases, especially in local community papers.
- Paid advertising in the local newspaper and in newsletters, if you can afford it.
- Letters to the editor; more likely to be printed if they’re in response to a story the paper has published about a related topic.
- Public service announcements, especially on community television stations.

Do

Share Handout 1: “Recruit Members for Your Support Group,” and let participants know that this is a good guide as they begin the work.

Learning about your members (10 minutes)



Say

A support group’s success comes from meeting its members’ needs. A survey is one way to keep your members engaged. Ask them to share it with their families and get the information back to you.

There are several ways surveys are useful to group leaders. For a new group, the survey will be essential in determining what your potential members are looking for in terms of both support and community building. Look for trends in the responses. It may be that your members are seeking a particular focus that can guide your planning.

For a new leader coming into an established group, surveying the members is your first step in assuring them that you are listening and are committed to meeting their needs as best you can. If you meet the members’ needs, they will embrace you.

Ask

Can you think of some questions you would ask existing group members?

Do

Record responses on a flip chart. Allow time for brainstorming and be sure to include:

- Have your needs changed since you first joined the group? In what ways?
- Do you want the group to continue as it has?
- If not, what new directions could the group go in?
- What new topics should the group be looking at?
- What have you most appreciated about the support group?
- What improvements would you like to see?

Ask

Now what might you ask parents and caregivers who are not yet attending your group?

Do

Record responses on a flip chart.

Say

Those are great ideas!

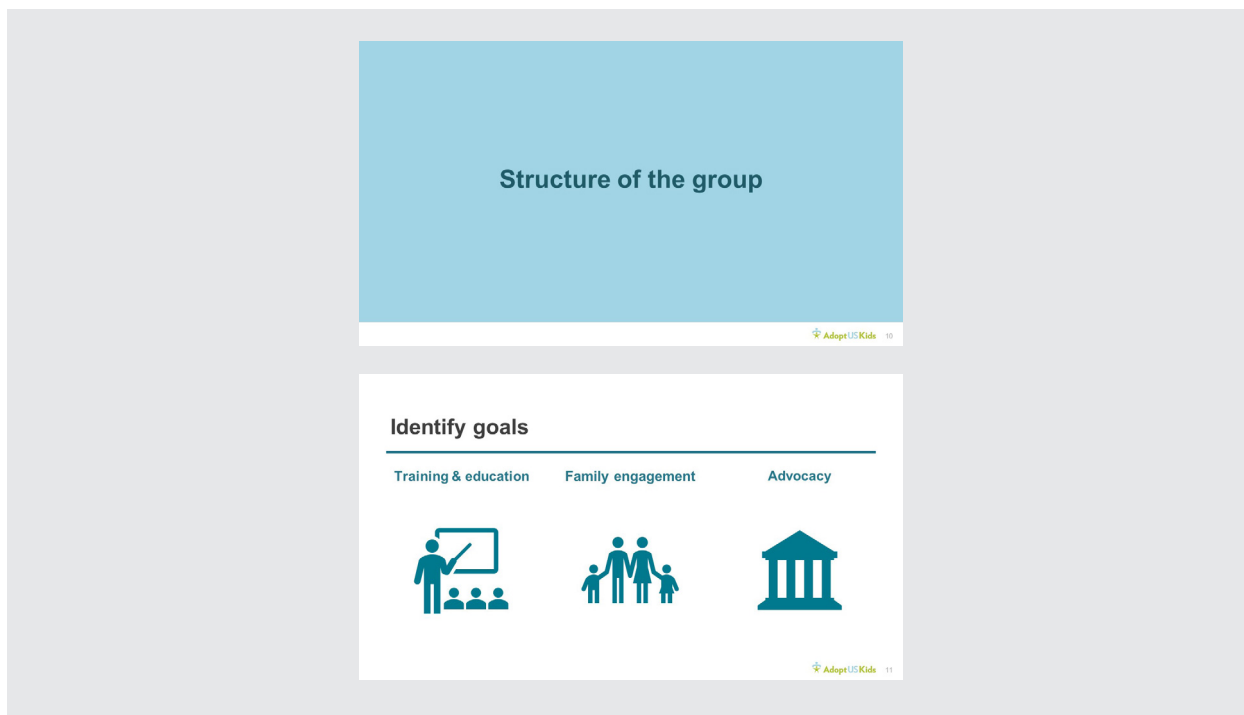
For both new groups and new leaders coming into an established group, your survey should reveal what the focus of your group should be. This will guide your goal-setting.

If you're part of a group already, we'd love to have you adapt and use a survey before our last session. For those who are not yet connected to a group, surveys can be shared through your agency to get a sense of what families are looking for. If you are able to do the survey and look at results soon, discuss the results with one another to ensure that your members will find what they need in your group.

As your group grows, use or adapt this initial survey to survey new members, and survey all members periodically to learn what the group wants and needs. There's more on that in Module 5!

Do

Share Handout 2: "Parent Survey Sample," and let them know they can adapt it as needed.



Group structure (25 minutes)

Say

Once you have survey results, you can use them to plan what your group will be like. Will there be discussion, training, or a combination of both? For most groups, a varied agenda that combines new learning, emotional support, effective parenting strategies, and opportunities for community building is ideal. You may want to work with your members to create a calendar of topics or events to guide your meetings. AdoptUSKids has a number of discussion guides that may help. A book club model can also be very helpful, and the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) has a [book club curriculum](#) available on the book *Wounded Children, Healing Homes* by Betsy Keefer Smalley, Tim Callahan, Jayne Schooler, et. al.

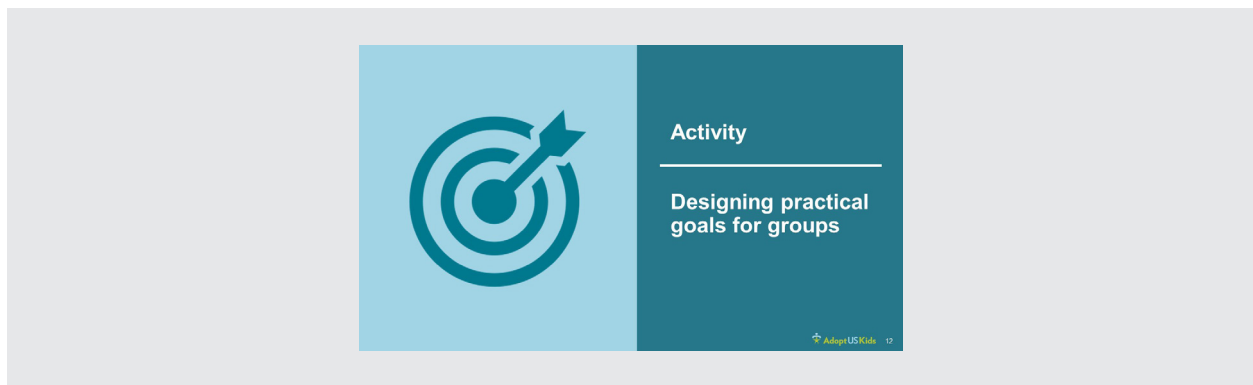
Say

Training and education can be key components of a successful support group. Begin thinking about what topics have been identified in the survey as well as potential trainers or guest speakers who can address these issues. Remember to always plan for networking time, even when you schedule a training session. Caregivers need this time to connect with one another and continue to build supportive relationships. Many leaders find that having a formal training session first and reserving time for networking and open discussion after the presentation works best.

Another aspect of support you should consider is support for the children. Do you have the capacity to host a children's or youths' group at the same time the parents meet? By supporting all members of the family, you have taken a giant leap toward satisfaction and success for your members. Perhaps you only have the ability to host occasional family get-togethers or social events. These can also help children and youth not feel alone, and can build a sense of community.

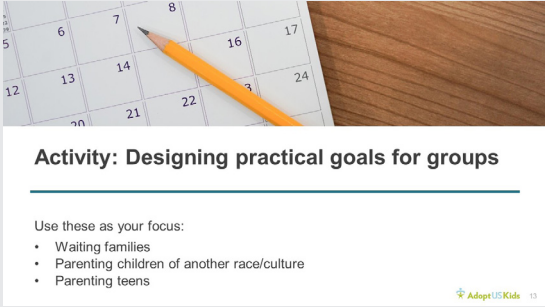
For some groups, the need for parenting strategies, venting, and validation, or training and education, have been met for the most part, but the members are looking now to have a positive impact on other children, families, and systems. This is the opening for doing valuable advocacy work. By sharing the lived experience and recommendations of families and youth, your group has the potential to influence decision-makers on local, state, and national issues that affect not only your families, but others both now and for the future. If becoming an advocacy-driven group is your goal, you can find many resources to support that goal on the North American Council on Adoptable Children website (www.nacac.org/advocate/).

Activity: Designing practical goals for your group



Say

Now let's practice coming up with some goals for specific types of groups.



Activity: Designing practical goals for groups

Use these as your focus:

- Waiting families
- Parenting children of another race/culture
- Parenting teens

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Do

Divide participants into groups, based on the three populations listed on the slide (if there are other ideas presented by the participants, add or change groups to reflect the group's interest). Provide a flip chart sheet and markers to each group and ask them to brainstorm goals and methods to achieve those goals. Have each group work for about 10 minutes and report back for about 5 minutes, making sure the following points are addressed from each group.

Suggest the following goals for **waiting families** if they don't come up:

- Keeping the members engaged in the process
- Providing additional training and opportunities to gain skills and knowledge
- Retaining your pool of prospective families

If your trainees are interested, offer the AdoptUSKids resource for leaders of groups intended for waiting families.

Suggest the following goals for **parenting children of another race/culture** if they don't come up.

- Providing a safe space for parents to understand racism and its impact on their children
- Providing strategies and skills for promoting a strong, positive racial identity for children
- Expanding a diverse network of cultural mentors and guides

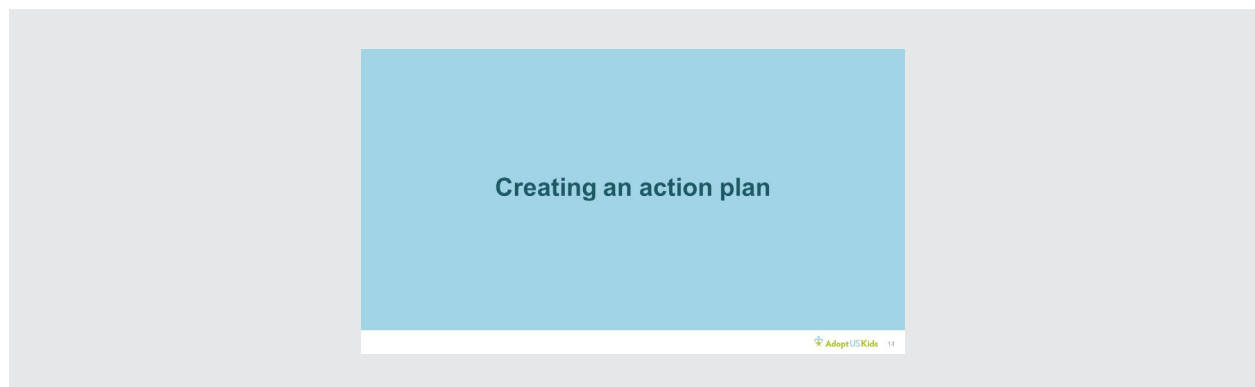
Suggest the following goals for **parenting teens** if they don't come up:

- Managing the conflict that is expected between teens and parents
- Safety measures for internet use; dating; drug and alcohol use; becoming a licensed driver, etc.
- Planning for adulthood
- Good communication

Say

Remember, it's really important to be guided by any goals that members and potential members shared in your survey, no matter the focus of the group.

Creating a plan (15 minutes)



Do

Demonstrate for participants how to create an action plan for launching their group. A template is provided as Handout 3, “Action Planning.” This will be assigned as homework between sessions.

Planning for this training					
What?	Who?	How?	Where?	When?	Who else?
Schedule dates for training	Me	Checked schedules of key participants	Checked what location was available on those dates	3 weeks before event	My team, supervisor, building manager
Secure space	Me, building manager	Email followed by phone call	Visit space for approval	2 weeks before training	
Invite participants	Administrative assistant	Email or postal mail, followed by phone call	Provide location, directions, any relevant info	Mail as soon as confirmed; follow-up call 1 week prior	My team members, if interested
Prepare materials	Me → Admin →	Flip chart prep Fidgets Room prep Copies		Complete by day before start	

Say

Here’s an example of how you would use the template provided in Handout 3, “Action Planning.” In thinking about this training, I wanted to make sure I had a plan for each component of getting the training off the ground. As you think about your own action plans, be as detailed as you can. This will help ensure that you don’t miss anything.

For those of you starting a new group, there will be a lot of upfront actions that will help determine the who, what, where, and when of that new group. For those of you who are stepping in as a new leader of an existing group, the details will be more about what information you need to respond to in your efforts to move into a role that someone else has already begun. If that previous leader was well respected and missed, what can you do to honor their legacy? If they were not as effective as they could have been, how do you address any negativity and begin fresh?

Say

Everyone look at Handout 3, “Action Planning.” This template currently includes three mock objectives that a group leader may have as part of their action plan. Your homework before the next session is to complete at least one strategy for each of those three objectives. We will begin Module 3 by sharing the strategies each of you came up with.

Closing (10 minutes)

Do

Write responses to the following questions on your flip chart.

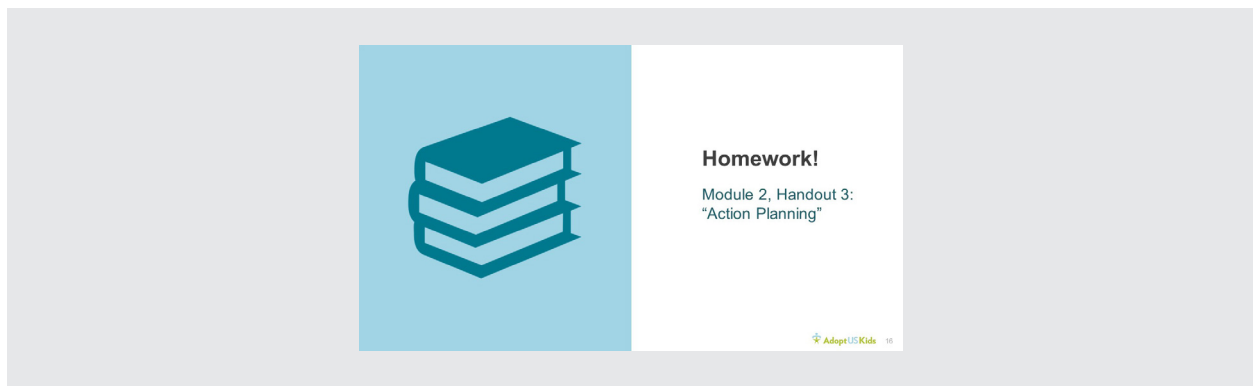
Ask

So, let’s check in before we end:

- How are people feeling?
- What are you thinking will be the easiest part of starting a new group or stepping in as a new leader for an existing group?
- What will be the most difficult?

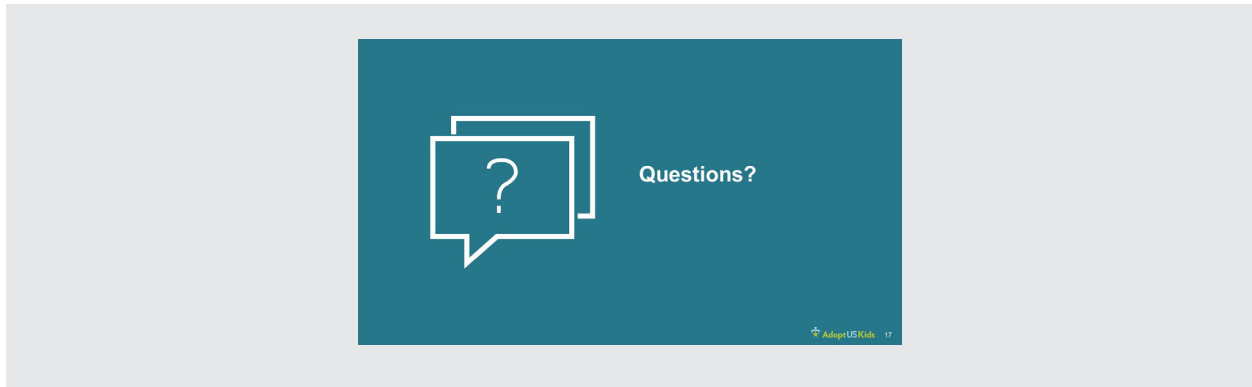
Say

I want to encourage you to keep talking to one another between our sessions and into the future. You will all learn so much more from each other and from your own experiences moving forward than a training session can teach you. Remember, just as with the support group, your peer network is one of the most effective tools for success.



Say

Remember, assessment and planning are essential to your success, whether you are starting a new group or continuing an existing one. Successful support group leaders are always thinking about adapting to changing needs and circumstances and planning for the future!



Say

Thank you for all the planning work you've done today! I hope you feel better prepared to hit the ground running as you start or continue your group. In the next session, we'll be going over the basics of facilitation. See you on _____ for the next module and don't forget your homework!

Also, remember there are more resources available for you on the AdoptUSKids website at <https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/category/support-families/parent-groups/>.

Recruit Members for Your Support Group

Recruitment may look different depending on how your group operates. If your group is supported by a state, county, tribe, territory, or a private agency, you may have more support than those managing an independent support group. But, recruitment of new members is important no matter what! Talk with your agency's leadership about the importance of recruiting new members and keeping your group relevant to newer families.

Consider how large you want the support group to be before you start recruiting. Generally, it's best to have a group that's large enough to function well even when some of the members are absent but small enough for all the members to feel comfortable. As a rule, 5 to 15 people is a pretty good number; anything larger too easily becomes unmanageable and impersonal.

There are many ways to get the word out about your group, and the most successful support groups usually use some combination of all of them.

Use referrals

- Network with other groups and professionals in your area. Let local faith leaders, doctors, administrators, agency directors, social workers, media personnel, nurses, and others know about your group, and encourage them to tell people about it. Send emails to the offices of local organizations that address your group's area of concern, such as the local mental health agency. You might also make presentations to some agencies and organizations.
- If your city or county has community information and referral hotlines, be sure that they have information about your support group.
- Find out which agencies or organizations publish community or social service directories and request that your group be included in the next one.

Use the media

- **Social media.** The easiest and most effective way to reach people these days is through social media. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are some of the platforms you can use to get the word out.
- **Posters and flyers.** These can be posted at clubs, shops, hospitals, community centers, recreation centers, places of worship, libraries, schools, post offices—just about anywhere that you think interested people might see them.

- **Calendar announcements.** Send digital calendar invites about your support group meeting dates and times for inclusion in community calendars. These could be sent to neighborhood associations, community centers, libraries, local parks and recreation departments, social service agencies, or any other organization that keeps a public calendar.
- **Paid advertising.** Ads in the local newspaper, as well as those in publications or newsletters put out by agencies or businesses that reach folks you are trying to engage are a good idea, if you can afford them.
- **Letters to the editor.** These can be used to tell the public about your group. They're more likely to be printed if they're in response to a story the paper has published about a related topic.

Use personal invitations and word of mouth

This is the most informal method of recruiting people for support groups, but it's the most effective. The "people chain" happens when one person tells another person about a group, and then that person tells another, and so on. Tell everyone you can about the group, and ask them to tell others. When your group starts meeting, encourage members to tell others about the support group.

Once you have enough members, contact them to let them know the date and time of the first meeting. Give them a couple of weeks' advance notice so they can make any necessary adjustments in their schedule, and follow up with an email, text, or call reminder a few days before the meeting.

Parent Survey Sample

1. Would you like to participate in an adoptive, foster, or kinship parent group?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe. Please keep me informed of your group's activities.

If no, why not? _____

2. If you would like to attend parent group meetings, but can't right now, please explain why:

3. Are you a(n) *(please mark all that apply)*:

- ☐ Adoptive parent
- ☐ Foster parent
- ☐ Guardianship parent
- ☐ Kinship caregiver
- ☐ Prospective foster or adoptive parent

Other (please specify): _____

4. If applicable, how long have you been an adoptive, foster, guardianship, or kinship parent?

5. Mark all that describe your family:

- ☐ Single parent
- ☐ Includes birth children as well as children through adoptive, foster care, kinship care
- ☐ Multiracial/multicultural family
- ☐ LGBTQ+ parent(s)
- ☐ LGBTQ+ child(ren)

6. How many children are you caring for who are:

- _____ Adopted
- _____ In foster care
- _____ In informal kinship placements or guardianships
- _____ Your or your partner's biological children

7. Please tell us if you are caring for a (*please mark all that apply*):

- ☐ Sibling group
- ☐ Teen(s)
- ☐ Child with a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)
- ☐ Child of a different race/ethnic background than yours
- ☐ Child with developmental disabilities
- ☐ Child with developmental trauma
- ☐ Child with mental illness
- ☐ Child with behavior disorder
- ☐ Child adopted from another country
- ☐ An infant

8. List the age(s) of your child(ren):

- ☐ 0 to 5 years
- ☐ 6 to 11
- ☐ 12 to 17
- ☐ Over 18

9. Place a checkmark next to the topics you most would like to discuss with other parents:

- ☐ Strengthening parent-child relationships
- ☐ Behavior of children
- ☐ Grief and loss
- ☐ Trauma
- ☐ Race and culture
- ☐ Teen needs and behaviors
- ☐ Reactions of family and friends about adoption
- ☐ Child development
- ☐ Addressing child's questions about adoption
- ☐ Working with birth family
- ☐ Sexual acting out
- ☐ Raging/destructiveness
- ☐ School-related problems
- ☐ Advocacy/system improvement
- ☐ Accessing needed support services
- ☐ Allegations

Other (*please describe*): _____

10. How often would you like to meet? (Please select one.)

- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Every other month
- ☐ Once a quarter

Other (*please specify*): _____

11. When is the best time for you to meet?

- ☐ Daytime (indicate time of day): _____
- ☐ Early evenings (5:30-7:30 p.m.)
- ☐ Late evenings (7:30-9:30 p.m.)
- ☐ Saturday (indicate time of day): _____
- ☐ Sunday (indicate time of day): _____

12. If a parent group were formed, would you be willing to help:

- ☐ With refreshments
- ☐ Provide transportation for another parent
- ☐ With outreach to other members
- ☐ Greet newcomers and make them feel welcome
- ☐ Prepare the room before or after the meeting
- ☐ Plan group meetings/activities
- ☐ Find childcare

Other (*please specify*): _____

13. What would you most like to get out of a parent group?

14. What special skills do you have to offer a group of this nature? (Are you skilled at public relations, graphic design, accounting, training, writing, fundraising, bargain shopping, etc.?)

15. Contact information:

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Preferred method of contact: _____

Action Planning

It is essential that new leaders have a SMART plan in order to successfully launch their group and start with an eye toward sustainability. SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely.

As you break your goal down into objectives, aim to make each of them SMART. Then identify strategies that you think will help you achieve your objective. Here are some sample objectives and questions to help you choose successful strategies.

Tips for success:

- Don't take on too much at once. Focus on two or three objectives, and as you achieve them, move on to others.
- If over time you're not achieving an objective, rework it. Was it overly ambitious? Not specific enough? Are the strategies not a good fit for the objective? Do you need more partners before that objective can be achieved?

Objective: Engage five new potential members by May 1.

Strategy	Who is responsible	Due date	Resources required
Sample: Post about group formation and upcoming meeting in the Adoptive Families of the Triangle Facebook group.			

Choose successful strategies by asking:

- Who is the target audience? (Is the group meant to support foster parents? Adoptive dads? Families with transracial placements? Grandparents raising grandkids?)
- What materials do you have to advertise your group? (Flyers, business cards, content for emails and newsletters, etc.)
- Where does your target audience currently congregate, either in person or virtually? (School groups? Facebook groups? Community centers? Places of worship?)
- Who has close access to your target audience? (Workers at a placing agency? Mental health providers? State subsidy workers? Leaders of advocacy organizations?)

Objective: Identify two new partners to contribute to the group's success by May 1.

Strategy	Who is responsible	Due date	Resources required

Choose successful strategies by asking:

- What does the group need most? (More members? Space to meet? Financial or material resources? Childcare? Technology support?)
- Who is already invested in the success of groups like these?
- What partnerships would be mutually beneficial?
- Are there existing connections that can be leveraged?

Objective: Learn the needs and wants of current and prospective group members to guide group goals.

Strategy	Who is responsible	Due date	Resources required

Choose successful strategies by asking:

- Are you primarily focused on current members of your group or new members?
- Will you have different strategies?



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