



Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future

PARENT GROUP LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM



MODULE 5: GROUP SUSTAINABILITY

Total time: 150 minutes, including break

Module agenda

Debrief and review objectives—10 minutes

Review homework—5 minutes

Group sustainability—20 minutes

Conducting needs assessments—20 minutes

 Activity: Drafting survey questions

Break—10 minutes

Burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and self-care—20 minutes


 Activity: Creating a self-care plan—15 minutes

[Handout 1: “Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress”](#)

[Handout 2: “Secondary Trauma and Self-Care for Support Group Leaders”](#)

[Handout 3: “Self-Care Activities for Your Group”](#)

Planning for your transition—15 minutes

 Activity: Practice running a support group—30 minutes

Closing remarks—5 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 three activities and prepare any materials needed.
- Review the homework assignment on page 4 and prepare any needed materials.
- Prepare the three handouts that you will distribute to participants.
- Gather needed materials:
 - ✓ Name tents and markers for participants (from the previous sessions)
 - ✓ Flip chart and markers for facilitator
 - ✓ Computer with Module 5 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.

Debrief and review objectives (10 minutes)



Say

Today we're wrapping up! We'll talk about what you can do to ensure that your group is sustainable and long-lasting.



We'll also spend time talking about the importance of self-care, for leaders and for members. It can be important for you as support group leaders to not only have your own support systems generally, but to also cultivate networks of other support group leaders that you can lean on and learn from. Investing in your own support system as a leader is a big part of making sure your group will last. But first let's review the last session and talk about the homework.

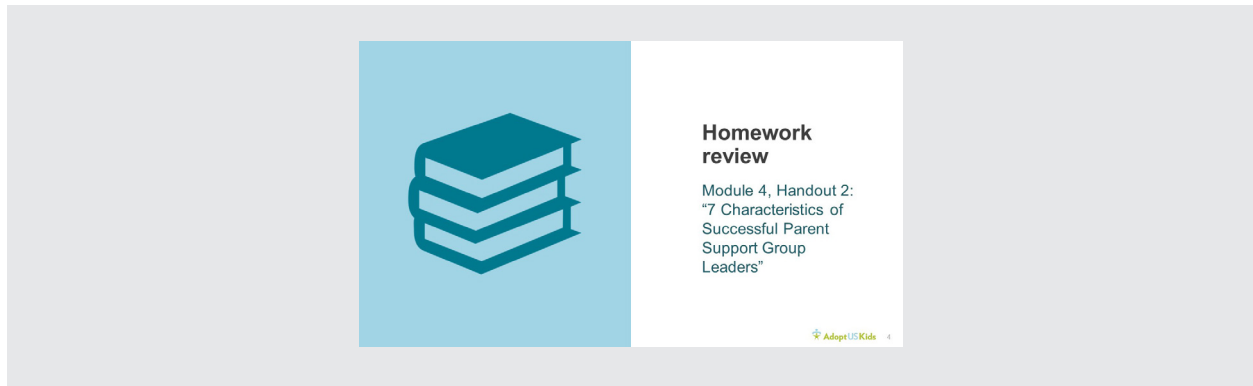
Do

Do a quick review of what was covered in the previous session, answering any questions and providing encouragement and feedback.

Say

After reflecting on the last session, do you have any questions or need clarification about anything? Did anyone have an opportunity to try out some of the icebreaker activities? Did you have any aha moments?

Review of homework (5 minutes)



Say

What did you think of *7 Characteristics of Successful Parent Support Group Leaders*? Are there other characteristics that weren't mentioned that you think are important? Which of these characteristics do you think you'll have to work on?

Do

Record responses on a flip chart. Bring out the answers from the last session, where attendees were asked, "What characteristics of a leader contribute to a group environment where the group members feel safe, welcomed, and heard?"

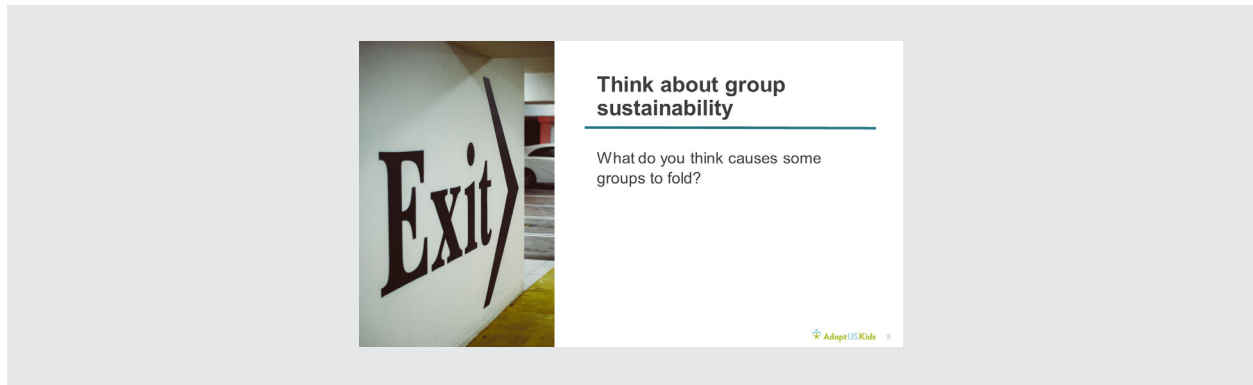
Say

At the end of the last session, these were the responses you gave when I asked you what characteristics of a leader contribute to having group members feel safe, welcomed, and heard. Have your answers changed after reading the homework? Did anyone bring up the importance of having your own support system last time? Why do you think it may be harder to think of our own support systems as a part of what makes us good leaders?

Do

If someone did include having a strong support system as part of their answers from the last session, make sure to give them credit for seeing the importance of this.

Group sustainability (20 minutes)



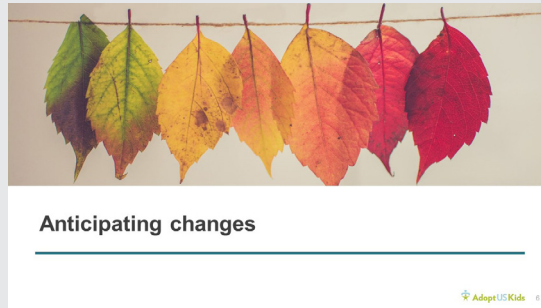
Say

Now we're going to pivot to a critically important topic for all groups (and organizations). Many groups start strong and then struggle. When groups fold or become less useful for their members, it can be a substantial loss for the parents and caregivers who were relying on the group for support. What do you think causes groups to run into trouble?

Do

Reinforce or offer the following:

- Burnout of leader
- Leaders' kids grow up and they move on with no succession plan
- Unmanaged conflict or tensions in the group
- People aren't getting what they need from the group so they stop coming
- Group direction/focus doesn't change with group needs
- Other changes that aren't anticipated



Say

You may have noticed that a lot of those reasons relate to change. Change is a normal part of group dynamics. But change can be hard and can even cause groups to fail. When you, as the leader, can anticipate change and plan ahead, the group is much less likely to experience serious difficulties during a period of transition.

Changes in membership

- Departing members can feel like losses or failures
- New members may feel that it's difficult to find their place in the group

Say

When people leave groups, it can often be a substantial loss for the entire group, and the leader may view it as a failure. It's important to remember, though, that it's normal for group members to come and go. People may get what they need from the group and then move on. In fact, it might mean that your group is really helping people and they no longer need the support of the group.

On the flip side, when new members start attending an established group, they may feel unwelcome and unsure of how to find their place within the group.

It's important for leaders to recognize how departures and additions affect the group and how they can help as those dynamics change. Properly handling both entrances and exits will go a long way in preventing a problem caused by changing membership.

Ask

So, let's brainstorm ideas for how to help normalize changes in membership for your group? Let's start with when new members join, then talk about departures.

Do

Record participants' ideas on a flip chart. Reinforce or offer the following for when new members join:

- Help them learn about similarities between themselves and existing group members as you introduce them to the group. For example, say things like, "I want to make sure you meet Beth. You both have teenage girls in your home. I'm sure you will have a lot to talk about!"
- Use icebreakers frequently, relying on ones for newer groups when new members arrive.
- Help new members understand any group history or existing dynamics, or any shared language that the group uses that may confuse them. Establish a norm that anyone in the group can call out acronyms or phrases that are unfamiliar to them.
- Review group agreements and develop new ones as necessary with the new member's input.
- If possible, talk with new members before their first meeting so that you understand what they hope to get out of the group.
- Ask an established group member or a co-facilitator to look out for new members in the first couple of meetings to help ease their transition as you're occupied with facilitating the discussions.
- Celebrate change by helping your group focus on what that new person brings to the table. Say something like: "I'm so glad to have a newer foster parent join the group, we could all benefit from your fresh perspective!"

Reinforce or offer the following when members leave:

- Watch for patterns. If multiple people or households are leaving at the same time, you may need to ask yourself and the group if there is something going on. Surveying those who are leaving (and those who remain) can help you understand if people are leaving because there is a problem that needs to be addressed, or if it's just a normal group change.
- Be open about how departures can be felt as a loss and ask the group if they want to process any feelings they have about this person no longer attending.
- Know that you won't always (or even usually!) get closure. Sometimes people just leave, and that's OK too.
- Take your lead from the group. It may be that the group is less concerned than you are!
- Process with a co-facilitator or leadership mentor to work through your own feelings. Departures are an opportunity to practice the self-reflection skills we talked about earlier. Is my concern over group departures based on real group needs, or is it based on my feelings of failure? Are my feelings grounded in reality?

Reinforce or offer the following for both:

- Rituals around entrances and exits may help your group members both celebrate the change and acknowledge the difficulty and loss that can be associated with transition.

Conducting needs assessments (20 minutes)



Routine needs assessments are an important part of group maintenance

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Say

As we mentioned earlier, groups can collapse because the members' needs changed and the support group didn't change with them. Groups and their members evolve and grow. The needs of your group will almost certainly change over time. In order for you to understand your membership and anticipate shifts that you should make as a group, do periodic needs assessments.



Activity: Drafting survey questions



Activity

Drafting survey questions

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NOTE

Depending on the size of the training group, this could be a large group activity, or a small group activity with each small group given a different type of question to explore. Leave about 10 minutes for the activity.

Say

When you think about surveying your group to understand their needs, it's really important to ask the right questions so that you get the answers you need. Finding the right words for your questions can be pretty hard! Let's practice and draft some survey questions together.

Start first with what you want to learn. Do you want to evaluate how effective your group is at supporting your members? Do you want to learn what discussion topics group members want to focus on? Does your membership have competing priorities and interests, and you need to know what most people think? For this exercise, let's say we want to generally understand if the members of the group feel supported and learn what their highest priority discussion topics are.

What if we just asked these questions:

- Do you feel supported? Yes/No
- What topics are you most interested in?

Do

Put these questions up on a flip chart.

Say

Would these questions get you what you wanted? Why or why not?

Do

Reinforce or offer the following:

- These questions probably won't get you very useful answers to your questions.
- Support looks and feels different and is defined differently by everyone. You need to define important concepts in the questions you ask. Does support mean that your questions are answered and you get advice? That you have friends? That you have a place to vent?
- Provide more responses than just "yes" or "no." Ask members to respond to a series of statements asking if they "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree."

Say

Now let's work in your group to develop some better questions.

Do

Have them work on these questions together until you have a handful of agree/disagree statements to help them understand if members feel supported and a rank-choice question to help them know what topics the group wants to discuss. You could have them rank the topics of grief and loss; birth family

dynamics; race, culture, and identity; sibling relationships; and navigating the child welfare system from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important. You can always leave room for them to add other topics.

Reinforce or offer the following suggestions:

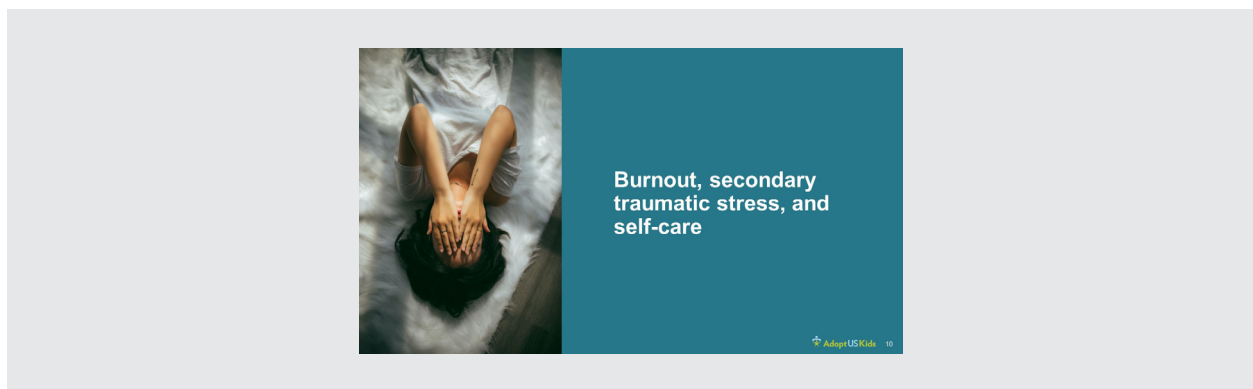
- For example, ask if they agree with the statement: “The group is a place where I can safely talk about the challenges I experience as an adoptive parent without judgment.” Be as specific as you can so you will understand what every response means.
- Open-ended questions have their place, but it can be hard if survey respondents don’t have any ideas to respond to. Listing some topics and asking them to rank them can be more effective (and can help prevent you from having 10 different answers from 10 different respondents).

Say (after the activity ends)

Needs assessments need to be revisited for them to continue to be meaningful. Aim to update your needs assessment at least once a year, or more frequently if you’ve experienced a lot of changes as a group.

Break (10 minutes)

Burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and self-care (20 minutes)



Say

Groups also frequently fold when a group leader burns out and can’t continue to lead the group. This isn’t just about overextending and burning your candle at both ends, though. It’s actually very important to be aware of the symptoms of secondary traumatic stress and how we may be suffering from it.

Do

Distribute Handout 1 on symptoms of secondary traumatic stress.

Say

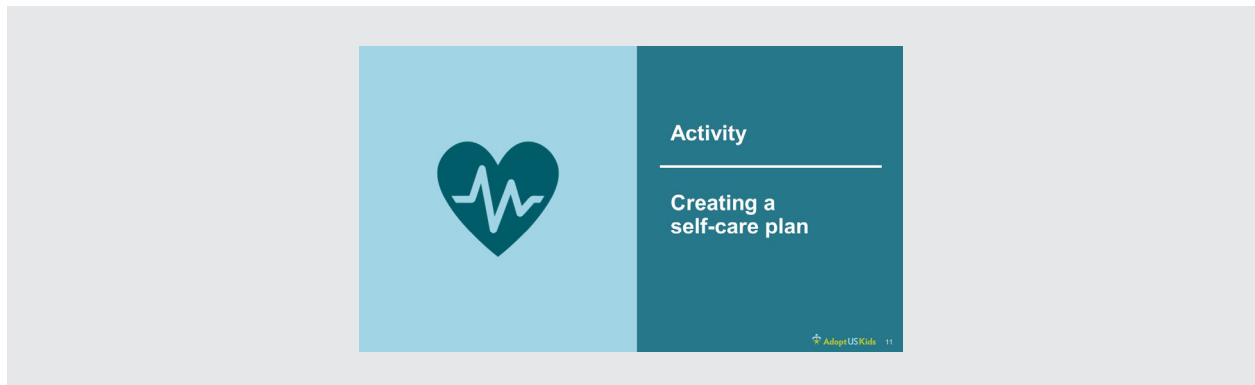
Secondary traumatic stress—also known as vicarious trauma—is frequent, repeated, or continuous exposure to other people’s trauma. As a support group leader for resource parents, you are vulnerable to this vicarious trauma for three reasons:

- You likely have your own experiences caring for children who have experienced trauma and loss.
- You meet with and lead a group of other caregivers, often hearing the stories of the trauma they experience while parenting as well as the stories of their children’s trauma histories.
- As a leader, you are likely to be in a position to provide one-on-one support to members who are having additional challenges.

Look at the handout on the symptoms of secondary traumatic stress and take a moment to think about how you personally respond to stress. Recognize how vicarious trauma may show up for you and be prepared to routinely check yourself for symptoms of secondary traumatic stress.



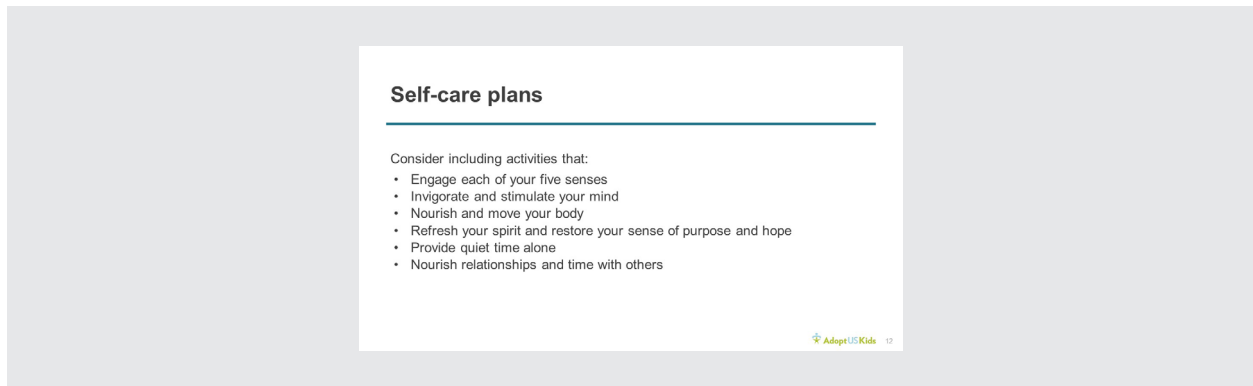
Activity: Creating a self-care plan (15 minutes)



Say

Support group leaders are often natural helpers. It’s tempting to want to be everything to everyone. But if you overcommit yourself to supporting your members inside and outside of the group, it’s very likely you’ll burn out, leaving your group in a leadership crisis and leaving you the worse for wear. Be careful not to overcommit or overextend yourself. Establish boundaries with your group

members. What days and times is it OK to call or text you? Are you willing to come early or stay late if a group member is having a hard time? It's great to be there for folks, but try not to give so much of yourself that you have nothing left to give!



Self-care plans

Consider including activities that:

- Engage each of your five senses
- Invigorate and stimulate your mind
- Nourish and move your body
- Refresh your spirit and restore your sense of purpose and hope
- Provide quiet time alone
- Nourish relationships and time with others

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Say

We know taking time for self-care is essential. How do we make it a priority? We have to create a self-care plan that includes strategies to prevent becoming overwhelmed, as well as strategies to help us cope when we do become overwhelmed. We're each going to take a moment to create a self-care plan right now.

Self-care plans need to be realistic so that you are likely to follow them. Great ideas that are too costly, time consuming, or inconvenient won't be used. So first, let's each make a list of simple things that you can do every day to renew and refresh your own mind, body, and spirit. For some people, this list includes such things as listening to music, doing a crossword puzzle, eating a piece of chocolate, or taking a walk.

Do

Allow everyone about three minutes to write a list of daily activities.

Say

Ok, now, let's add a few things to your list that you do a little less often—perhaps a weekly hike with a friend or a date night with your spouse or partner.

Do

Allow about two minutes for everyone to write their less frequent activities.

Say

Finally, let's add a couple of special occasion items to your list. These would be things you only do once or twice a year, but looking forward to them gives you strength and encouragement. Such items could include a weekend getaway, running a marathon, or attending a meaningful conference or celebration.

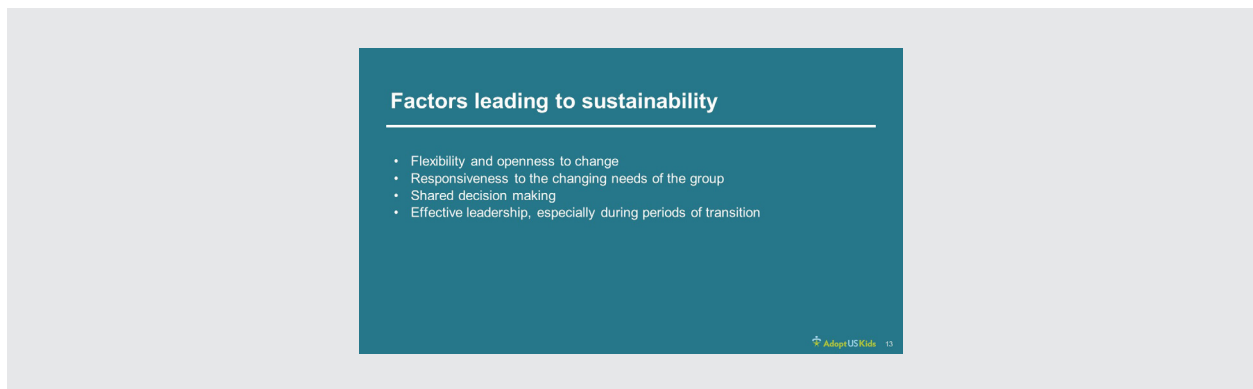
This may seem like a simple activity, but taking the time to really think through your plan for self-care can help you stick to it and take better care of yourself when you need it most.

Do

Allow about two minutes to add special occasion items.

Say (when the activity is over)

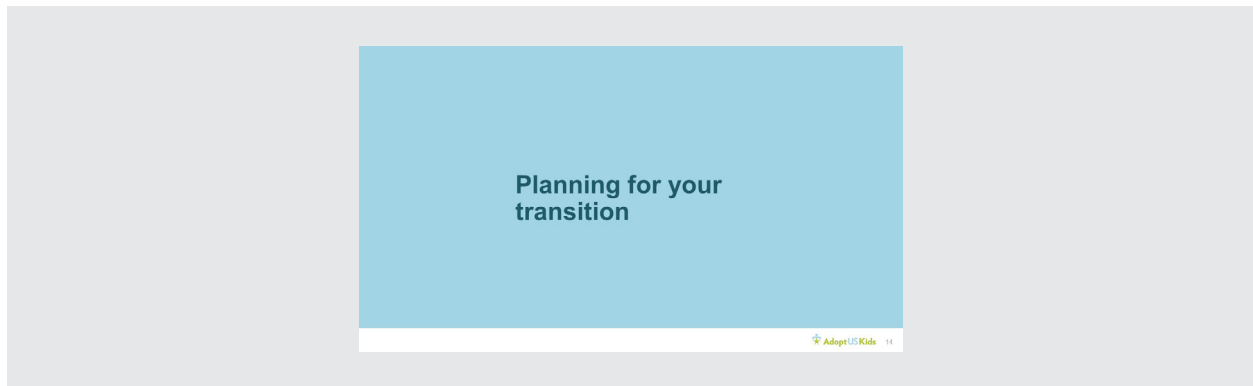
Handout 2 of this module is a tip sheet from AdoptUSKids. Take a moment when you can to read through it and learn more about vicarious trauma and self-care. It's also important to model self-care in your group. Handout 3 has some self-care activities that you can do in groups. Make these activities a routine part of your group meetings, and also use them when you've had a particularly challenging time as a group.



Say

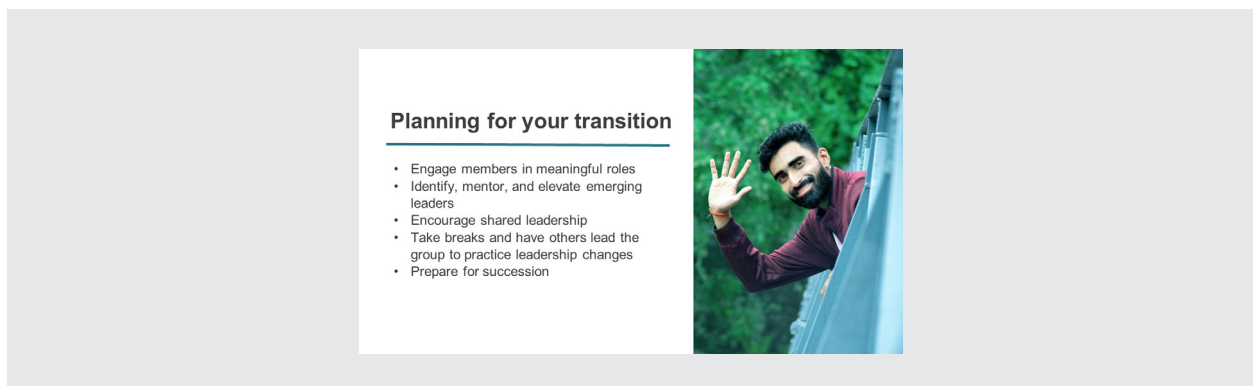
Self-care is about sustaining yourself. You also need to sustain the group itself. Overall, the main factors that contribute to improved group sustainability are flexibility and openness to change; responsiveness to the changing needs of the group; shared decision making; and effective leadership. There are many different kinds of effective leaders, but effective leadership is mostly about paying attention and being proactive rather than reactive. You can't set a group up and then neglect its planning and care. You have to nurture your group to ensure that it has staying power.

Planning for your transition (15 minutes)



Say

As a good leader, it's important that you are readying your group for when you will no longer lead it. Groups can become too attached to and enmeshed with their leaders, which can result in the group folding when one particular person is no longer able to lead. To prevent that, there are some things that you can do to plan for your eventual exit, however far in the future that may be.



Say

The best way to ensure that your group has a leader after you're gone is to help other members see themselves as leaders and recognize their shared ownership of the group's success. Give every member a role to play with in the group, and mentor and elevate emerging leaders as each member's skills become clear.

Consider having a true co-leader, someone you partner with on all aspects of leading the group. This helps to prevent burnout, makes things easier if either of you have a crisis or time away, and makes eventual transitions much smoother.

A great strategy for your own self-care can also encourage others to try their hand at group facilitation: take a break! Breaks are important for you, and it's important that your group members see other people periodically taking the reins as a normal part of group functioning. It's also a good idea to have an emergency back-up plan for who will run the group if you are suddenly unavailable.

Finally, when it is time for you to leave, make sure there's a clear plan of succession, with everyone understanding who is filling the various roles you played in the group.



Activity: Practice running a support group (30 minutes)




Say

Now that you have learned so much about support groups, it's time to put much of what you've learned into practice. You're going to get to practice being a leader!

Do

Explain that participants will model facilitating a support group, starting with one new leader and passing off to the next until all members have had a chance to facilitate. The most efficient way to do this is with a “fishbowl” demonstration. Ask for two or three volunteers to lead the support group, explaining that each will have a chance to lead for about five minutes. Divide the remainder of your participants in half, explaining that one group will be in the support group and the others will sit outside the circle to observe and provide feedback. As facilitator, you will be with the observers on the outside of the group. Let the first leader begin, instructing everyone that after five minutes the leadership will pass to the next volunteer to pick up where things left off. Finally, debrief with the “attendees” of the groups and the “leaders” to get their feedback. When debriefing, ask participants to highlight what worked well and provide alternative ideas for anything that seemed a bit off (don't just critique, critique with a solutions focus).

Closing remarks (5 minutes)




Last words of advice

- Be positive
- Laugh
- Engage everyone early
- Remember: 90 percent of communication is non-verbal
- Accept that conflict is normal
- Support one another!

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Say

Let me leave you with these last words of advice as you go forward to lead your groups. Keep focused on the positive and laugh often. Engage everyone in the group early during each meeting and remember that 90 percent of communication is non-verbal. And remember that conflict is normal, don't be afraid of it. Your members are lucky to have you, and you're doing important work for families! I hope you will be there for one another as you provide support to families in the future.



Questions?

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Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress

This checklist can help you identify common signs that you may be experiencing overexposure to the trauma of others, leading to secondary traumatic stress (STS) or vicarious trauma. When you begin to see increases in these symptoms, it is time to activate your self-care plan.

Note: Many of these signs and symptoms may also be indicative of an underlying medical or mental health issue. Don't hesitate to seek medical attention, even if you think these symptoms are caused by STS or vicarious trauma. Sometimes self-care alone isn't enough.

Cognitive <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty focusing or concentrating• Easily or frequently confused• Feeling indecisive or making irrational or impulsive decisions• Diminished self-confidence or increased self-doubt• Increased worrying• Pervasive negative thoughts• Forgetfulness or memory lapses	Physical <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased or worsening headaches• Increased or decreased appetite• Increased or decreased need for or ability to sleep• Frequent minor illnesses such as colds• Changes in heart or breathing rates• Rashes, eczema, or other skin outbreaks• Shakiness (hands) or loss of physical strength• Increased clumsiness or being more accident prone
Emotional/relational <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling overwhelmed• Vague, ever-present sadness• Experiencing survivor's guilt—a feeling of guilt or shame that you have survived a trauma or experienced fewer ill effects than others with similar experiences• Feeling helpless or powerless• Loss of sense of purpose or meaning• Unable to rest or relax• Irritable, cranky, moody, or always “on edge”• Questioning your own belief system• Withdrawing from friends, spouse, others• Feeling alone, isolated• Loss of interest in intimacy or sex	Behavioral <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neglect or avoidance of responsibilities• Loss of interest in activities that typically brought pleasure• Tics or nervous habits (nail-biting, pacing, etc.)• Increase in smoking, drinking, or use of other substances• Excessive working or overactivity• Decrease in quantity or quality of work• Increased perfectionism or obsession with details• Increased conflict with co-workers

Secondary Trauma and Self-Care for Support Group Leaders

Frequent, repeated, or continuous exposure to other people's trauma. Sound familiar? This is a common definition for secondary traumatic stress (STS) or vicarious trauma. It is a condition that often affects social workers, first responders, and others who routinely engage with people in moments of crisis or who are reliving and retelling their trauma narratives as part of the healing process.

As an adoption, foster, or kinship support group leader, you are vulnerable to STS or vicarious trauma for three reasons:

1. You likely have your own experiences caring for children who have experienced trauma and loss.
2. You meet with and lead a group of other caregivers, often hearing the stories of the trauma they experience while parenting as well as the stories of their children's trauma histories.
3. As a leader, you are likely to be in a position to provide one-on-one support to members who are having additional challenges.

That's a lot of trauma-weight to hold on your shoulders. How can you successfully lead while also coping with your own frequent exposure to the trauma of others?

When flight attendants provide safety instructions, they always include the reminder to “put your own oxygen mask on first” before assisting anyone who might need your help. This is simple advice but is not always easy to follow, particularly for those in leadership positions. Taking time for self-care may seem indulgent, unnecessary, or simply impossible, until the day we find we cannot breathe. As we see and hear the grief, loss, trauma, and pain of children and their caregivers, we can become overwhelmed, numb, and drained.

Taking time for self-care is essential. How do we make it a priority? We have to create a self-care plan that includes strategies to prevent becoming overwhelmed as well as strategies to help us cope when we do become overwhelmed. This plan can be divided into three easy-to-remember ABCs: awareness, balance, and connection.

A is for Awareness

As a leader, you have probably learned quite a bit about trauma. You likely understand how traumatic experiences, particularly during childhood, change the brains of children and adults. You have probably become adept at learning to see beyond children's behaviors to the causes behind those behaviors. You may also be familiar with concepts related to historical and multi-generational trauma that may affect those in your group.

But have you taken the time to explore how all of this trauma affects you? It is helpful to know the general warning signs of too much trauma exposure, as well as the specific signs that may apply to you.¹ Once you become aware of the warning signs, you can learn the strategies that work best for you to prevent overexposure, when possible, and to cope with STS.

“But wait,” you might say, “helping others gives me my sense of purpose. I don’t see it as a negative.” In fact, those studying STS and vicarious trauma have come to understand that on the other side of these challenges are equally compelling strengths that caring for and supporting others can enhance. For every negative term you might hear such as burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma, there are corresponding strengths, including increased capacity for empathy, resilience, and compassion satisfaction. So take heart, the STS you experience may also be serving to help you grow and build your skills that make you strong, confident, and successful in your role as leader. The key is to develop the awareness necessary to diminish the harmful impacts of STS while maximizing the benefits of helping others.

B is for Balance

Preventing burnout and coping with the other harmful impacts of STS requires a self-care plan that you are likely to follow. Great ideas that are too costly, time consuming, or inconvenient won’t be used. In determining what will work for you, it is important to consider balance across multiple life domains.

Make a list of a few things you can do every day to renew and refresh your own mind, body, and spirit. For some people, this list includes such things as listening to music, doing a crossword puzzle, indulging in chocolate, or taking a walk. Then add a few things to your list that you do a little less often—perhaps a weekly hike with a friend or a date-night with your spouse or partner. Finally, add a couple of special occasion items to your list. These would be things you only do once or twice a year, but looking forward to them gives you strength and encouragement along the way. Such items could include a weekend get away, running a marathon, or attending a meaningful national conference.

Consider including activities that:

- Engage each of your five senses—sight, sound, scent, taste, touch
- Invigorate and stimulate your mind
- Nourish and move your body
- Refresh your spirit and restore your sense of purpose and hope
- Provide quiet time alone
- Nourish relationships and time with others

¹ For more information, please read Handout 1, “Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress,” also available online at professionals.adoptuskids.org.

C is for Connection

Nurturing existing relationships is incredibly important, yet not all of our friends and family understand the unique challenges or special rewards we experience as parents of children with trauma histories. While the support groups we lead can be a source of our exposure to the trauma of others, these groups can also be part of our self-care plan and healing strategy. They provide opportunities for learning and practicing new skills or banding together to advocate for our children.

As humans, relationships are necessary for survival. Don't neglect yours! As a group leader, it is difficult to balance the leadership role with the role of a member in need of support. If family and friends have a hard time relating to our parenting journey, fewer still can relate to or understand the complex challenges we face as support group leaders. This is why it is vitally important for support group leaders to form our own networks and communities of support. Using a co-facilitation model can help in this regard, as well as belonging to in-person and online communities for group leaders, such as the Facebook page offered by the North American Council on Adoptable Children or the webinars provided by AdoptUSKids.

Stick with it

Once you have made your self-care plan, share it with your spouse, partner, or close friend so they can serve as an accountability buddy. Put it on the refrigerator, your bedroom mirror, or in the notes section or calendar of your phone. Without these reminders, you are least likely to remember your self-care strategies just when you need them most.

Think about how you will implement your self-care plan. Spread your daily activities throughout the day and into the evening and your less frequent activities across the week or year. Occasionally take time to share your self-care strategies with the members of your support group. When you make self-care a priority, you are also setting a good example for them as they learn to manage their own health and wellness.

Take a break

Don't forget, sometimes practicing self-care means taking a break from group leadership. Give yourself a week or two of respite while a co-facilitator takes charge, and step back into your leadership role when you are refreshed and ready to be fully engaged. Benefits of periodic respite include:

- Reduced stress and increased patience
- Enhanced coping skills
- Improved energy and physical health
- Increased opportunity to gain perspective
- Strengthened relationships

Although often challenging to arrange, building respite into your life is essential. When you demonstrate this by stepping aside from your leadership role from time to time, your entire group is

better served and you set an example for others to follow, while providing opportunities for up-and-coming leaders to develop their skills. When a group has a leader who attends to self-care and encourages members to regularly do so, the long-term vitality and sustainability of the group is enhanced.

Resources

Publications

4 Keys to Effective Meeting Facilitation for Support Group Leaders

<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/4-keys-to-effective-meeting-facilitation-for-support-group-leaders/>

7 Characteristics of Successful Parent Support Group Leaders

<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/7-characteristics-of-peer-support-group-leaders/>

“Self-Care Activities for Your Group”

https://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/pro-hub/self-care-activities-for-your-group-web508.pdf

“Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress”

https://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/pro-hub/symptoms-of-secondary-traumatic-stress-web508.pdf

Recorded webinars

Effective Facilitation of Parent Support Groups

<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/effective-facilitation-of-parent-support-groups/>

Engaging Parents and Caregivers in Support Groups

<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/engaging-parents-and-caregivers-in-support-groups/>

Peer Support Strategies for Kinship, Foster, and Adoptive Families in Tribal Communities

<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/peer-support-strategies-for-families-in-tribal-communities/>

Self-Care Activities for Your Group

Everyone can benefit from incorporating more self-care strategies into your group meetings. Here are some activities to consider including in your group to promote self-care and prevent secondary traumatic harm.

On-the-spot ideas

Activities that you can use on the spot if group members are experiencing symptoms of vicarious trauma:

- Breathing exercises, such as blowing bubbles
- Move—stand and stretch, take a quick walk around the room, practice a chair-yoga exercise
- Use humor to defuse—tell a joke or find something comical in the room
- Practice a quick mindfulness exercise, such as popping a chocolate or mint into your mouth and closing your eyes while you spend 30 seconds tuning out everything else
- Color, doodle, or draw
- Pause and play a short piece of calming music
- Do a three-minute writing exercise—invite everyone to stop talking and spend a few minutes writing about how they are feeling at the moment

Come up with your own quick fixes to use in times of stress:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Ongoing exercises

Activities that can be built into the group's regular schedule and structure:

- Gratitude moment—everyone names a few things they are thankful for today
- “I see you” moment—participants pair up and spend one minute sharing strengths, positive attributes, or other appreciations about one another
- “Gift exchange”—everyone names one gift, talent, or strength they bring to the group
- LOL moment—everyone goes around the room and shares the funniest thing they did, saw, or experienced this week or month
- Success stories—everyone shares one success they experienced in the past week or month
- Looking forward—everyone names one thing they are looking forward to between this meeting and the next

Come up with your own self-care routines to build into support group meetings:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



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