

# Successful Peer Leadership of Parent Support Groups

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# Housekeeping

- This webinar will be 90 minutes long and will include time for questions via the online chat function.
- We will record this webinar. We will share the recording with you and post it on [professionals.adoptuskids.org](https://professionals.adoptuskids.org).
- Your line will be muted throughout the webinar.
- The webinar will include poll questions and opportunities for you to share information via the chat function, including if you are having technical difficulties.
- Please evaluate the session after the webinar. You will receive an email from AdoptUSKids.

# About AdoptUSKids

Our mission:

- Raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system
- Assist states, territories, and tribes to recruit, engage, develop, and support foster and adoptive families

# Goals for this webinar

- Discuss the value added when support groups are led by foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers
- Share characteristics of successful peer leaders of support groups
- Provide strategies to improve your leadership skills as a peer leader

# Poll 1

# Value of peer leadership

- Adoptive and foster parents and kinship caregivers bring expertise from their lived experience.
- Participants may feel more comfortable sharing their challenges in groups led by peers.
- Peers lend an authenticity to the guidance they give.

# Peer leaders face certain challenges

- Often provided limited training/preparation for role
- May have limited resources to manage their group
- Group leadership requires a unique skill set
- High potential for burn-out

# Polls 2 and 3



# Characteristics of successful peer leaders

- Optimism
- Open-mindedness
- Self-awareness
- Empathy with boundaries
- Support for yourself

# Optimism

- Critical for sustainability of the group
- Belief in resilience and the power of support to nourish it
- Hard-earned vision that requires work to be maintained

# Optimism

## Building optimism:

- Approach every interaction from a strengths-based perspective
- Be intentional in cultivating hopefulness—in the group, and in yourself

# Open-mindedness

- Successful leaders are open to other ideas and disagreements.
- Hearing diverse perspectives makes the group stronger.
- Helping others to find their own solutions builds everyone's skills.

# Open-mindedness

## Building open-mindedness:

- Know your experience is just one of many experiences
- Wait before offering advice
- Be a continual learner
- Ask thoughtful questions
- Be open to healthy disagreement

# Self-awareness

- Communication and leadership style
- Past experiences/traumas impacting leadership
- Need for self reflection and emotional regulation
- Acknowledgment of strengths and limitations, including biases

# Self-awareness

## Building self-awareness:

- Reflect before responding
- Acknowledge which hat you're wearing—leader or parent—during discussion
- Take your emotional temperature during meetings
- Reflect before and after meetings

# Empathy with boundaries

- An empathetic leader is critical to the group's effectiveness.
- Empathy without boundaries leads to burn-out.
- Peer leaders especially struggle with finding this balance.



# Secondary traumatic stress

- Repeated exposure to the trauma of others can lead to secondary traumatic stress.
- Symptoms may be physical, cognitive, behavioral, or emotional/relational.

# Empathy with boundaries

Building a healthy balance:

- Develop a self-care plan and prioritize it.
- Learn and recognize the symptoms of secondary traumatic stress.
- Build self-care activities into your groups.
- Ask for help.

# Empathy with boundaries

Setting healthy boundaries:

- Set limits and stick to them.
- Know the support services in your community and share with the group.

# Type into “Questions” on the control panel

What tools or activities do you use in your groups to help everyone recover from difficult discussions?

# Support for yourself

- Peer leaders need support both as caregivers and as leaders.
- Leadership role may mean losing some components of support they had received from the group.

# Support for yourself

Building the support you need:

- Develop or join a peer leadership network.
- Find a peer leadership mentor—and be that mentor to an emerging leader.
- Find parents who are not in your support group to offer you peer support.

Type into “Questions” on the control panel

What support have you gotten? *or*  
What support have you needed and not gotten?

# Other leadership skills

- Organizational and time management skills
- Meeting facilitation skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Conflict management skills
- Cultural competence
- Ability to improvise and flexibility



# Developing leadership skills

- Identify your strengths and challenges and practice the skills that come less naturally to you.
- Try lots of different approaches and keep what works for you.
- Own your mistakes.

# Questions?

# Resources—publications

Available at [professionals.adoptuskids.org](https://professionals.adoptuskids.org)

- *7 Characteristics of Successful Parent-Support Group Leaders*
- *4 Keys to Effective Meeting Facilitation for Support Group Leaders*
- *Secondary Trauma and Self-Care for Support Group Leaders*
- *Providing Peer Support for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families*
- *Peer Support: A Key Strategy for Supporting Resource Families in Tribal Communities*

# Resources—recorded webinars

Available professionals.adoptuskids.org

- *Peer Support Strategies for Families in Tribal Communities (February 2019)*
- *Effective Facilitation of Support Groups (December 2018)*
- *Engaging Parents and Caregivers in Support Groups (October 2018)*
- *Using Facebook Groups to Support Families After Placement (July 2018)*

# Coming soon!

AdoptUSKids is publishing more tools, discussion guides, and other resources for parent group leaders.

Stay informed about upcoming events and publications [adoptuskids.org/newsletter-sign-up](https://adoptuskids.org/newsletter-sign-up).

# Contact information

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Contact [consultation@adoptuskids.org](mailto:consultation@adoptuskids.org) to inquire about system-specific capacity building.



# AdoptUSKids

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