Successful Peer Leadership of Parent Support Groups

October 24, 2019

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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.

• 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
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.
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

• 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
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.
Contact information

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Contact consultation@adoptuskids.org to inquire about system-specific capacity building.
AdoptUSKids is operated by the Adoption Exchange Association and is made possible by grant number 90CO1133 from the Children’s Bureau. The contents of this presentation are solely the responsibility of the Adoption Exchange Association and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children’s Bureau, ACYF, ACF, or HHS.