



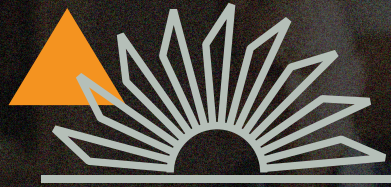
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Men's Groups Toolkit

A guide to start your own or learn
how to join a pre-existing Men's group

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Starting A Men's Group

A men's group doesn't have to look like the stereotypes we see on television or in the movies. They don't necessarily involve bare-chested men drumming in a circle or flannel-clad men sobbing into their chai but they can be a valuable tool in helping to navigate the ups and downs of modern life and masculinity. Unless religious-

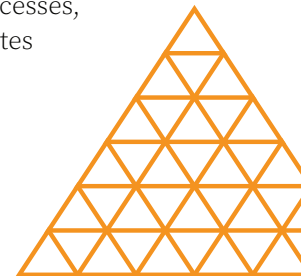
ly-based, they are typically not spiritual, although spiritual things can take place. They are not designed to be 'group therapy' although they can be therapeutic. They are not 'self-help' although they can help you to help yourself. They do allow men to heal their broken parts and become wiser, more well-rounded human beings

Healthy & Helpful Men's Groups

What does a “healthy” - and helpful - men's group look like?

A men's group is a space where men can come together to share their successes and failures and support each other in evolving into the best version of themselves. A men's group can help you to feel seen and supported by others – especially if you're moving through a rough patch

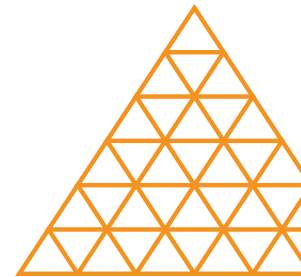
It can help you heal wounds from past life experiences and help you feel connected to other people. Modern life can be very isolating and men have historically been conditioned to be strong, silent types who don't need other people. Being part of a men's group lets you see that you are not alone and others have experienced many of the same challenges, and successes, that you have. Sharing these lived experiences with others creates community and makes you feel less alone.



Healthy & Helpful Men's Groups

Some of the issues a men's group could help you to navigate include: What does it mean to be a man? What sort of relationships do you have with your family of origin – father, mother, siblings – and how does that affect you today? How do you handle problems and how can you improve? How do you feel about your role as a partner, spouse, parent?

While some men's groups are simply a group of like-minded men supporting each other through life's ups and downs, other groups are designed for specific purposes. They may be based on 12-step programming to help men overcome addictions to substances, sex, work or pornography. Others are designed to provide support for working through trauma – veterans, grieving parents, widowers, cancer survivors, etc.





**Should You Start Your Own
Or Join A Pre-existing Group?**

Why

If you can find an existing group to join, that is often the easier way to get the benefits of a group without having to do all the legwork. But if you've decided to start your own group, here are some of the things you should consider.

The first thing you need to decide before starting a group is your **“Why?”** What is the reason for your group's existence? Do you have a purpose? A mission? Goals? How will you differentiate your group from any other groups out there?

It is easier to recruit new members if you can outline a specific purpose for your group. There is a difference between focusing on newly divorced fathers or young widowers or building something solely business-oriented. Being very clear on your “why” will help you move through all the next steps in getting your men's group going.



Who

Ideally, a men's group should be fairly small in size - about 8-15 members - so that everyone can get to know everyone else and feel comfortable opening up. While you can start your group by asking your existing friends to join you, you may not have enough interested friends, which means you will likely have to recruit members.

Some things to consider prior to searching for additional members include: Do you want everyone to be the same "type" of person? Or do you want a variety of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, ages, or sexual orientations?

What sort of 'vetting process' will you have in place? Someone who is the wrong fit for the group can have a dramatic effect on the group's culture. It is easier to take care with who you encourage to join than to ask someone to leave. Recommendations from existing members is the simplest way to 'vet' someone but if that's not possible, having an alternate means of vetting - whether a questionnaire or a trial meeting or two might be helpful. You want to find men who are open to feedback, who are contributors, helpers and supporters and who are consistent and reliable.

If you choose to 'advertise' the group, consider where like-minded men are likely to be and post flyers in retreat centres, yoga studios, natural food stores, community groups, etc. Attending a workshop related to wellness, healing, men's work, etc., may also help you find men interested in joining.



When & Where

Logistics can be one of the trickiest pieces to starting a group. Finding a consistent time and place that works for everyone is a challenge.

You will want to first decide what sort of time commitment will work best for the group. Some groups may find it beneficial to meet weekly, particularly those dealing with divorce or cancer or grief where changes are frequent and more regular discussion might be beneficial. Other groups, such as ones centered on business, may find monthly or bi-weekly meetings are sufficient.

In the post-Covid era you will also need to consider whether you want to be in-person, virtual or some combination of both. If you want to be in-person, you will need to find a suitable venue. The location needs to be private so your local pub may not be the best place to meet up unless it has a separate, private meeting space. You don't want members to be reluctant to open up and be vulnerable because someone outside the group may overhear. Virtual meetings are another possibility. You will need to ensure you have the right technology to manage such a meeting, if you are the host.

What

Commitment is a key component of building a men's group. Every member – particularly yourself if you are starting the group – needs to be committed to the group and to each other. You need to be prepared to attend all meetings and everyone needs to be willing to be open and vulnerable.

Hand in hand with commitment are confidentiality and courage. What is shared in the group, must stay in the group. It takes courage to share your own stories and to challenge others to do better and be better. It is easier to achieve open and honest communication when everyone knows that everyone else has their back.

Members need to be able to challenge and be challenged. A good men's group needs to move beyond simply being a regular bitch session and be based in forward motion. Week after week of “woe is me” is not the objective – accepting the need to make changes and then making them is the goal. The group should also strive to avoid a “coaching” mentality where one person is making suggestions and trying to guide everyone else. A group discussion is best when each individual can share their different, yet similar, experiences while also avoiding telling others what they should do.

It is vital to remember that everyone has something to contribute to the group – whether they are extroverted or introverted or 24 years old or 62. No one member knows it all and no one member knows nothing.





**You've Started A Men's Group,
Now What?**

The Meeting Structure



.....
Your meeting could look something like this
.....



Outline the rules and purpose for the meeting

Particularly when establishing a new group, a brief rundown of the basics or a general code of conduct at the first few meetings will help to set the tone.

Create a simple opening ritual to gather everyone together

This does not need to be complicated. Some simple deep breathing, push-ups or jumping jacks, or something else that signifies that the meeting is officially starting. This helps to focus everyone on being present.

Introductions

Who you are and why you are here. Every participant can take a minute or two to introduce themselves and share why they're attending and what they hope to achieve.

The Meeting Structure

Discussion

This is the main part of the meeting. Everyone who has a specific issue they are looking for feedback on can be given the opportunity to share.

Some groups use something like a ‘talking stick’ to ensure that whoever is talking has everyone’s attention.

In order to ensure everyone who wants to share has the time to, you could implement the use of timers. This could involve guidelines for how long each member can take to discuss a particular issue based on the number of attendees and the amount of time the meeting is scheduled. For example, if everyone wishing to share an issue is allotted 15 minutes, an individual could take 15 minutes to discuss that issue without feedback or they could take five minutes to bring up an issue and ten minutes to receive feedback. Allow each speaker to determine if they want empathy, advice, help solving a problem or just the chance to vent.

The Meeting Structure

Group exercises

Some groups incorporate specific group exercises into their meetings. This would depend on the type of group and the skillsets of the members but could include mini-sessions on goal setting or other learning topics.

Gratitude and closing

At the close of the meeting, allow some time for people to share what they're taking away from the meeting or something they particularly appreciated.

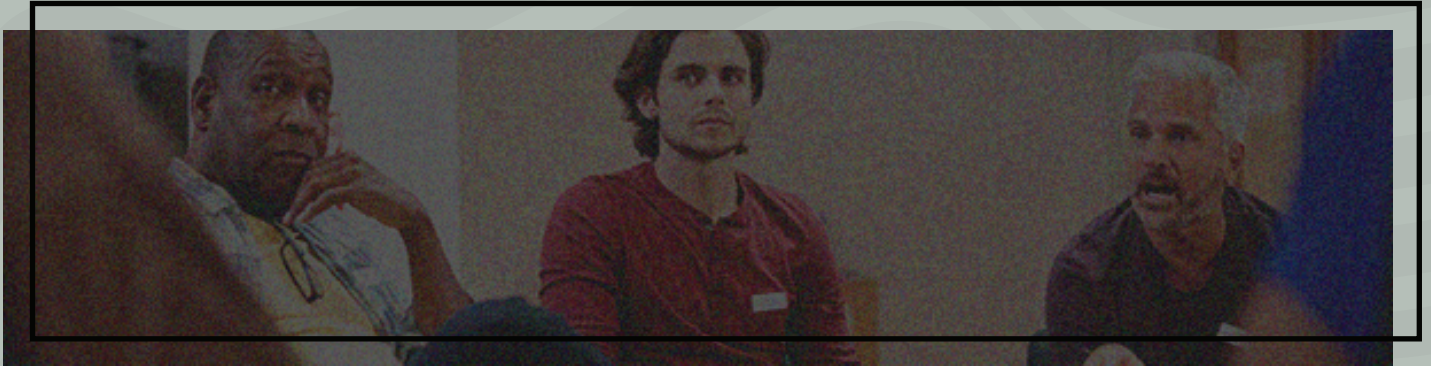
The wrap-up could also include some sort of ritual closing. More deep breathing, some yoga stretching, or something else that suits the group.

Social time

Some groups incorporate specific group exercises into their meetings. This would depend on the type of group and the skillsets of the members but could include mini-sessions on goal setting or other learning topics.



“Rules” We Should Be Guided By



Every group will define their own rules but here are some basic ones most well-functioning groups will consider:

The moderator/facilitator is king. They have the authority to keep members on task and following time constraints.

Don't interrupt others. Allow each member to speak without interruption until they have finished and desire feedback. You can establish a method that allows members to indicate their desire to speak next, a raised hand or a talking stick, for example.

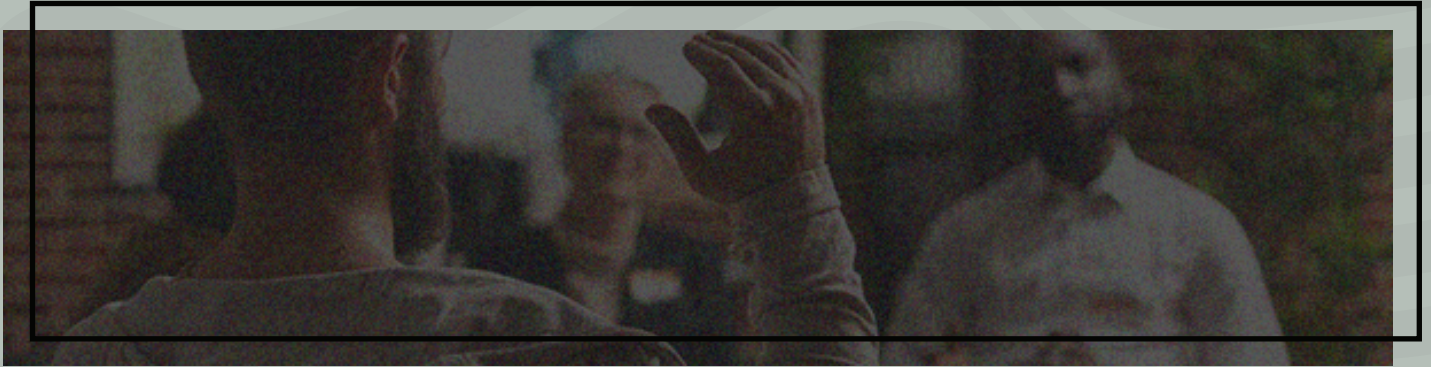




Don't ramble and avoid repeating feedback. Everyone should have the opportunity to speak if they want to, but they should strive to not keep making the same points over and over.

Don't tell people what to do. This is not a forum to tell people what they should be doing. Take the opportunity to share your experiences without judgement. Don't show up only when you have an issue you want to discuss. Everyone needs to be committed to showing up even when they don't have something specific they want to talk about. Some nights you may gain more by being able to help someone else with an issue than being helped yourself.

Miss too many meetings and you're out of the group. Regular attendance is key to making the group somewhere you can feel comfortable opening up and being vulnerable.



What do we talk about?

The best groups are organic. You don't need set discussion topics but allow the group to be driven by what members want to talk about at any given meeting. There are some common themes in the topics that are likely to come up in any men's group. These include: divorce, purpose/career/work, conflicts with loved ones or colleagues, communication, personal finances, emotions/emotional intelligence, aging, and stress/anxiety/overwhelm/paralysis/depression. Don't shy away from the heavy topics, this is where truth comes out.

How do we deal with conflict or judgement?

It is wise to have some guidelines or a code of conduct for how to deal with those sorts of issues before they come up. Mutual respect for all participants will help to reduce conflict. If everyone is invested in hearing out other people, conflicts can be discussed and resolved.



Do we need a facilitator?

Even if your group doesn't have defined leadership, you may discover that having someone facilitate the meeting is helpful. Facilitation is a learned skill. A facilitator is not the focal point, they are not 'in charge' but are there to help things move along. They need to be aware of the energy of the room and work to keep the mood 'light' but not 'comedic'. A facilitator can ensure those with the biggest, most timely issues, get a chance to speak. They can help people to open up – whether with a direct question or a redirection or a follow-up.

Should you charge a fee?

While many successful men's groups are free for their attendees, you may also find you get more commitment with a nominal fee. We tend to value what we pay for. If you do decide to charge a fee, decide upfront where the money should go – paying to rent a private space, supplying coffee and snacks at the meeting, paying a facilitator, etc.

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Resources

For more information on how to create your own men's group here are some resources:

Men's Group Manual

How to Start and Maintain a Successful Men's Group



Jordan Gray Consulting

How to Start and Run a Men's Group Successfully

Sandpoint Men's Group

Get Started



MensGroup

How to Start a Men's Group and Make it Thrive?



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