



Starting and running a local No Bully for Me support group.

One of the ambitions we have at No Bully For Me is to provide local peer support groups across the country.

These meetings not only provide support for targets but those running and facilitating the groups also benefit by contributing to the support of others, which is a very commonly expressed desire (symptom?) of targets we hear from.

Both of us (Karen and Stephen) know this to be true.

The core aim of these peer support groups is, by hearing about other peoples situations, emotions and journeys through the workplace bullying experience, everyone realises that it is not just them and they are not alone in their normal reaction to this abnormal behaviour.

Both of us (Karen and Stephen) also know this to be true.

Contact Information

You will need an email address that you are prepared to make public for use in our newsletter and on our website.

To help keep things organized you may wish to set up a new one just for the group.

For reasons of good practice and confidentiality it should not be an email address you share with a partner or anyone else.

We also require a street address and phone number for you, though these details will NOT be made public.

We need this alternative way of contacting you in emergencies or if your email is not working.

We also need an alternative way of contacting you should we find that new members are unable to get in touch via your publicly advertised email.

We will contact you before promoting the new group to ensure you are committed to running it regularly and effectively.

Day and time and frequency of meetings

Which ever day or time you pick there will be some people who claim that this makes it impossible to for them to attend.

This is passive aggressive nonsense.

If it is important enough for them to attend they will do so. If it more important to have an excuse was to why they can't attend they will cling to this.

Our suggestion would be to hold the meetings at a good time for you, the organizer.

Your attendance is the priority.

Some existing groups meet during the week in the evening, others are from say 11 to 1 on a Saturday.

We would suggest that meeting once a month is a good plan.

Perhaps with a gap in August and December for the summer and Christmas holidays.

When we have failed to meet for a couple of months not only do we loose continuity, we also don't have an encouragingly close date to give new contactees, nor a chance to report on attendance, issues discussed and so on, which stimulates newcomers.

Premises/ venue

We would suggest a venue where other events happen. This takes way the fear that some people have about being seen attending a 'bully group'.

So possibilities would include a library, community centre, a hotel which has meeting space, churches and so on.

If at all possible the venue should be served by transit - not everyone drives, has access to a car, can afford to run one or wishes to use one.

Visit the space before you decide to use it.

Ask what other activities are happening at the time you wish to rent the space. (the Tae Kwon Do class in the next room may not be conducive to quiet reflection...)

Washrooms? Water? A coffee vending machine? Whiteboard or blackboard?

What else might you need that you can't bring with you?

Each space will vary but a room to hold say 15 or 20 should be adequate, as you want space enough to break up into small groups yet not so large a space that you are rattling around.

If you have to pay for the meeting space, let attendees know that a donation is requested (\$4 each ?), excluding those in really tight financial situations. You may have to subsidize the fee for the first meetings if only a few turn up - you are committed, right?

Publicity

Well we can help. Our newsletter and website are both available to you to announce meetings and other events.

As the local organizer you will need to provide an email address - it can be one especially created for this group if you wish to keep your inboxes separate.

You can also give out a phone number if you wish, though this is not required.

Other places to announce the group can of course include all the usual meeting and media places - radio, TV, flyers, unions, community centres, libraries and so on.

One word of warning - if you do use general media to publicize your group you might want to give an email contact for dates and locations rather than put this information out there. Possible attendees may be nervous if 'everyone' knows about it; you may feel more confident in getting only legitimate (and rational) attendees if you get to interact with them (even if only by email) before they turn up.

The day of the meeting

Arrive early enough to set up the space and put a sign in the lobby or a window for first timers, so they know they have the right place.

If you are collecting a donation to help pay for the space, bring a container and some change.

Bring some paper and some pens or pencils for those who forget to bring their own.

The meeting style

This is not the place to include a manual for facilitators. (But, thanks to a member there is an appendix below with some suggestions for ice breakers and topics.)

There are some general guidelines which we know work for targets at these meetings.

1./ Personal revelation

If everyone is a little shy, start with your own situation, and your motivation for running the group.

Sum up what the meeting will consist of (see below) ask for first names and welcome each person, and ask if there are any questions before the meeting proper starts.

2./ Humour

We don't mean endless blonde jokes, but a little humour is a great way of relaxing everyone, and creating a friendly atmosphere.

Response to humour is also a surprisingly accurate tool for diagnosing where people are in their response to the bullying experience.

As we mention elsewhere

<http://www.nobullyforme.org/editorials.shtml#februarymarch>

we believe the Kubler Ross model of grieving is appropriate for assessing responses to workplace bullying.

DABDA - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance are the stage of the cycle, sometimes overlapping in repeated or long term bullying.

You will recognize that humour will not penetrate severe versions of the denial, anger, bargaining or depressive stages.

You will learn to pick this up quite quickly.

3./ Divide and conquer

Our first meetings were pretty glum affairs with each meeting taken up with 15 or 20 minute retellings of each situation.

It was relentless, depressing and repetitive - the next meeting would be the same perhaps with a couple of newcomers hearing some tales for the first time.

Otherwise we had heard it all before, and what was the point?

This did not work.

So we now break into groups of three or four for the first part (half?) of the meeting, with the suggestion that everyone gives a five minute summary of their situation, and then each small group discusses some common themes which will always appear.

(A fun way to break into random groups is to write 3 As, 3 Bs, 3 Cs etc on scraps of paper, crumple them into balls and then throw them back and forth at each other for a few minutes. Then with everyone with one piece of paper open the balls and the 3 As form one group, the 3 Bs the next and so on.)

Then we break for five minutes - washroom, coffee perhaps - and then reconvene as a whole group.

We then introduce a topic, either decided in advance or a common theme which appears during the first part of the meeting, for some roundtable discussion.

Ideas could include: what would 'winning' look like? returning to work, why the law won't fix anything - or can it? taking care of yourself, what makes a good workplace/ employer/ co-worker, taking personal responsibility for our workplace's health, what to look for in a good (effective) therapist.

This is discussion time - interaction and debate and sharing.

If one person is hogging the space and time and will not let go of their personal theme, then it is important to gently remind them about sharing space.

4./ Tainting the meeting

You the facilitator, as a peer and therefore as someone who is also going through the various stages mentioned above will bring your own state to the meeting.

If you come over angry or depressed or bargaining then this will affect the tone of the meeting and slant the response you promote.

So by all means bring your own slant or view of bullying, targets and society to the room but be aware that you are influential in setting the required positive tone.

A positive tone does not mean pretending everything is rosy, but does mean looking for progress, movement, changes and solutions rather than blame and scapegoating.

5./ Confidentiality

'What is said in the meeting goes no further' is the line usually used.

Of course this is untrue.....

What is certain is that personal details, names, companies, lawyers and so forth do not leave the room.

Inspiring interactions, revealing insights and 'it's not just me' moments can and should be relayed to partners, friends and supporters, and shared for the succour they can bring.

We all know where the line is between what can and can't be shared.

6./ The next meeting

Always have the date and time and place of the next meeting set before the current meeting is held.

Announce the details of the next meeting at the end of the current meeting.

You can have the details written or printed.

This gives some hope of continuity of attendance.

Report back to No Bully for Me with numbers attended, successes, failures and questions.

We will never give out details of any one person's situation but we may give details of some common themes or radical new ways of approaching the bullying situation.

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Don't want to do this anymore: ending a support group

If you decide for whatever reason that you don't want to continue to running the local peer support group that is fine by us (no shame, no blame) BUT we would request two things.

Firstly that you tell us so we don't offer false hope of local support to our members.

Secondly that instead of simply discontinuing the meetings you consider holding one more meeting where you let everyone know that you are withdrawing.

This allows an important chance to leave properly (something missing from many bullying situations incidentally) and also gives the group a chance to find a volunteer, or two or three, who might step in and take over the organization of the group.

Stephen and Karen

No Bully For Me

Created: July 2006

(We welcome suggestions for improvements or amendments.)

Appendix: Some ice breaking and topic suggestions

Go-round topics (c.30 seconds each)

1/ Say your name and one thing that will make the rest of us think well of you.

e.g my name is Penny and I am a good singer

2/ Say your name and one example of how you acted powerfully on your own behalf this week.

e.g. my name is Penny and I stood up for myself when someone behaved in a judgemental fashion toward me.

3/ Say your name and one example of how you 'took care' of yourself this week. e.g. my name is Penny and I had a massage on Wednesday

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Laugh therapy

Everyone throws their arms up over their heads and laughs. You fake it at first, but in a matter of seconds it becomes real, and everyone's splitting their sides. This is so good for the depression stage.

Co-operative Games

Short co-operative games are a great icebreaker. Here are two quickies, but there are many more, available in books in the library

1/ Everyone get into order shortest to tallest - time it with a stopwatch

2/ Everyone get into alphabetical order - that way you exchange names too

Discussion Topics

What can I do to bully proof myself?

Is there some part of me that allows bullying, and how can I work with that part?

(This is NOT blaming the victim, but taking responsibility for our experience also allows us to take our power back.)

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