



# **PEER-LED SUPPORT GROUP MANUAL**

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## Welcome!

Dear Peer-led Support Group Host,

Thank you for offering your time and support to RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association as a peer-led support group host. As a non-profit organization, we depend upon volunteers like you to advance our mission. Peer-led support groups (PLSG) are a critical component of the services we offer. When an individual joins a support group it is often the first time they make a public acknowledgment about their infertility, so your support is vital in assuring participants that they are not alone, and that help is available.

This manual was developed for you to use when running your group. Please review each section and become familiar with its contents. Should you have any questions about the material, do not hesitate to call and ask questions.

This manual is the property of RESOLVE. Please do not forward its contents to others without consulting your RESOLVE staff contact. Where noted, you can forward portions of this manual to your PLSG participants.

Thank you for volunteering your time and energy to represent RESOLVE as a peer-led support group host. We appreciate your support!

Sincerely,



*Barbara Collura*  
**President/CEO**

# Submitting New Support Group Information

## Submit Your Support Group Information

Your support group information will be publicly available through [RESOLVE Support Group Directory](#). You will be provided the opportunity to select how you want your name and contact information to be listed\*.

Once we receive your group information, it will take 3-5 business days to add it to the Directory. RESOLVE staff will contact you when the group has been listed. If you have questions about your listing, please contact us at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).

**[Submit your support group information here.](#)**\*

\*Existing PLSG Hosts interested in starting another group can also submit their information via the group information form. Please notify the Volunteer Coordinator at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org) about your new group or update existing support group information.

# Prepare to Start Your Peer-Led Support Group (PLSG)

## What are Peer-Led Support Groups?

PLSGs are groups of people who gather to share common problems and experiences associated with a particular problem, condition, illness, or personal circumstance. In a support group, people are able to talk with other people who are like themselves - people who truly understand what they're going through and can share the type of practical insights that can only come from firsthand experience.

Some of the common characteristics of support groups include:

- They are made up of peers - people who are all directly affected by a particular issue, illness, or circumstance
- They have a volunteer discussion leader or host
- They tend to be fairly small in size, to better allow everyone a chance to talk
- Attendance is voluntary

## Why start a support group?

There are many benefits to peer support groups:

- When someone doesn't know many - or any - other people who are going through what he is coping with, he can feel isolated and stigmatized. Support groups help people with a problem or illness feel less alone and more understood.
- Support groups don't cost much to run - advertising for the group and maybe some refreshments are all you'll probably need to pay for. Another cost might be meeting space, but you can usually get someone to donate it.
- Support groups empower people to work to solve their own problems.
- Members can share information, keeping one another up to date on news of interest to them.
- Among people who are experiencing similar problems, there is a unique emotional identification that is different from the type of support that can be gotten from professionals.
- Members act as role models for each other. Seeing others who are contending with the same adversity and making progress in their lives is inspiring and encouraging.
- A support group is a safe place for someone who needs to talk about intensely personal issues, experiences, struggles, and thoughts.
- Talking to a counselor or doctor can be very intimidating for some people because those relationships tend to place more power with the professional. In a support group, members are equals; this can make people feel much more comfortable opening up about their problems.
- Talking to others in support groups reduces anxiety, improves self-esteem, and helps members' sense of well-being overall.

## Checklist for PLSG Hosts

- You know what a peer support group is
- You know why to create a peer support group
- You know who your peer support group can serve

*You've followed the steps to creating a peer support group:*

- Informed prospective group members of the confidential sign-up form that is located in your groups Directory listing
- Decided on your purpose
- Researched other groups your group could be involved with
- Decided on a length of time for your group to meet
- Set a time and place for your group to meet
- Decided on the remaining details
- Recruited members using:
  - Flyers/business cards
  - Referrals
  - The media (local newspaper, local news, etc.)
  - Personal invitations/word-of-mouth

*In facilitating a peer support group, you have:*

- Prepared yourself
- Prepared the room (For in-person groups)
- Started the meeting on time and in a friendly manner
- Given preliminary introductions/information
- Closed the meeting by:
  - Making a summary statement
  - Asking for comments/questions
  - Reminding members of next meeting
  - Requesting volunteers, if necessary
  - Giving a final greeting
  - Making final notes
- [Logged in to your online volunteer account](#) to submit your volunteer hours and a meeting feedback report

# PLSG Policies & Procedures

## Tracking Hours & Meeting Reports

Navigating RESOLVE's online volunteer platform, [Better Impact](#) is an important part of your volunteer commitment. Please submit your volunteer hours along with the feedback questions to assess how meetings are going. This can be done within your Impact account after every support group meeting. Once you add your hours, you will not be able to submit until you complete the feedback questions. The feedback is an important way RESOLVE tracks your impact on the organization and collects statistical information for RESOLVE sponsors or others who ask for this information.

[WATCH THIS SHORT VIDEO TUTORIAL OF BETTER IMPACT](#)

## Updates to the [PLSG directory](#)

Ensuring your support group listing in the directory is up-to-date is an important part of your volunteer commitment to RESOLVE and the community. It can be disheartening for individuals who are looking for support to reach out to groups that seem like a good fit and do not receive any response. Please contact RESOLVE at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org) to update us if you discontinue, are on a break, or need to update any information in your directory listing. Thank you for your help in this important effort!

## Volunteer Retirement/Taking a Break Procedures

- **Retiring** - If you decide to discontinue as a RESOLVE peer host, please notify RESOLVE staff by emailing [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org). When discontinuing a support group, we recommend the following steps are taken:
  - Notify group members that the group will be discontinued and provide a specific end date.
  - Ask group members if anyone would be open to taking over as peer host for the group. They can contact RESOLVE directly to complete a volunteer onboarding at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
  - Provide alternative support options: RESOLVE [support group directory](#) includes many virtual support group options.
- **Taking a break** - If you are taking a temporary but extended break from your support group, please notify RESOLVE staff by emailing [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org). In addition, we recommend [setting up an automated email](#) that current and prospective group members receive upon emailing you – [Here is a guide on how to set up auto-generated emails through a Gmail account](#). If you are able to we recommend the following steps:
  - Notify group members that the group is on a break and provide a specific end date.

- Ask group members if anyone would be open to becoming a co-host to facilitate the group in your absence. They can contact RESOLVE directly to complete a volunteer onboarding at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
- Provide alternative support options: RESOLVE [support group directory](#) includes many virtual support group options.
- **Transitioning to a new host for an existing PLSG** – It's important for new volunteers to be connected to RESOLVE to receive important communications about procedures and other updates. New hosts must reach out to RESOLVE to complete a volunteer agreement and participate in a volunteer onboarding with staff. Please email [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org) and we will organize the transition.



# Volunteer Code of Conduct

## Volunteer Code of Conduct

- Keep it positive & productive: No bad-mouthing others, medical facilities, and professionals (more detail - page 39)
- Speak with respect and transparency
- Establish appropriate boundaries in peer support relationships (more detail - page 24)
- No sales, promotions, and students (more detail - page 41)
- No trading or selling medications
- No medical/ treatment consultations

Volunteers need to be aware of any conflicts between personal and support group values and deal with them responsibly by:

- Contacting and informing RESOLVE staff if a reasonable resolution of the conflict does not appear possible, volunteers shall seek appropriate consultation before making a decision
- Reserving the right to take a step back from duties by updating RESOLVE staff promptly
- Acknowledging their personal triggers and creating boundaries that put their well-being first

Read more about **Conflict Resolution, Crisis Intervention, Incident Escalation Policy** on page 15.

# Preparing Participants to Join a Support Group

## Important Updates: New PLSG Participant Sign Up Form

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association



[Watch this video](#) or keep reading to understand procedures for group participation.

### **NEW: Confidential Peer-Led Support Group (PLSG) Participant Sign-Up Form.**

RESOLVE has lifted our temporary hold on in-person support groups with a new confidential PLSG participant sign-up form in your group's Directory listing. The form includes a waiver to protect RESOLVE and RESOLVE affiliated Peer-Led Support Group Hosts, [support group participation guidelines](#), and Covid-19 safety protocols. We want to empower you in facilitating support groups that are a safe space for everyone involved by ensuring the appropriate structure and guidance are in place.

**All current and new support group members must complete the sign-up form once before attending any RESOLVE affiliated Peer-Led Support Group.** Upon completing the form, current/prospective group members will be instructed to forward an auto-generated RESOLVE email confirmation to PLSG Hosts before they can continue participation in support groups. The confirmation will:

1. Confirm that they have agreed to the terms for support group participation, and
2. Instruct them to reach out to Peer Hosts to RSVP for their virtual or in-person support group.

To better facilitate your role as a RESOLVE PLSG Host, it is important to track which participants have provided you with confirmation before they can move forward with group participation. **I recommend you take the following steps if you have not already:**

1. **Create an email account specifically for support group communications** (Gmail is recommended; sample email addresses: [resolveakron@gmail.com](mailto:resolveakron@gmail.com), [hamptonroadsadoption@gmail.com](mailto:hamptonroadsadoption@gmail.com)). Inform RESOLVE if you change your support group contact information so that we can apply the change to the [Support Group Directory](#).

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2. **Set up an automated email** that current and prospective group members receive upon emailing you - [Here's a guide on how to set up auto-generated emails through a Gmail account](#). The email can include a reminder to forward their confirmation emails and any applicable next steps for participation in your group.

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**Optional sample text:** “Hello, thank you for reaching out regarding participation in **[INSERT YOUR SUPPORT GROUP NAME]**! I/We look forward to welcoming you to the group as a new or returning member. Please be advised, as of **May 2022**, RESOLVE requires all participants to complete a one-time Participant Sign-Up Form [\[insert link to form\]](#). Please complete the form and forward me the submission confirmation email. Once I have received the confirmation, I will connect with you to provide more details about the group location/virtual meeting information. I/We look forward to meeting you! **[Insert your name, RESOLVE Peer-Led Support Group Leader]**”

3. **Start a tracking document:** Many Hosts have a system for tracking their group members for emailing communications related to activities, updates, schedule changes, etc. Tracking can be a sustainable way to organize your group members' information. You can track confirmation status, email addresses, quick reference notes, etc. Use [Google Sheets](#), Excel, or other platforms of your choice. [Here are some resources on securing information in Google Sheets](#).

## Group Participation

There is no fee for individuals to participate in a peer-led support group. New participants must make contact with the PLSG host prior to attending the first meeting. However, some first-time attendees may “drop-in.” In this case, the PLSG host should ask the participant to complete the online confidentiality form, talk with the attendee at the conclusion of the meeting to ascertain that person’s interest, and give them more information about the group and RESOLVE, including providing them with RESOLVE materials. If you have concerns about a new member joining the group, please contact RESOLVE at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org) about how to evaluate specific situations.

## PLSG Participant Surveys

Periodically, RESOLVE may survey PLSG participants to gather anonymous feedback. The purpose of the survey may be to ascertain the effectiveness of the group, ensure the group is meeting participant expectations, and quickly identify any potential issues or problems. All PLSG hosts must complete a feedback form within our online volunteer platform, Better Impact. Failure to provide feedback forms may result in the group being removed from the RESOLVE PLSG active group list.

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

RESOLVE is a nationwide, grassroots organization that provides education and support to people struggling to build their families. The majority of our local programs and services, such as support groups, are made possible by volunteers who may have been personally touched by infertility. If your group members express an interest in volunteering, please ask them to read about opportunities on our website, [www.resolve.org](http://www.resolve.org), and request their permission to share their contact information with RESOLVE staff at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).

## Better Impact - Your Online Volunteer Account

Better Impact is a secure, web-based volunteer platform designed to enhance your volunteer experience and improve program efficiency for our community. Your account is where you can track and report volunteer hours, submit feedback reports, complete volunteer training, and find volunteer resources. This software comes with added privacy and security measures for all your records.

- 1. Sign up for RESOLVE volunteer opportunities:** Sign up for volunteer roles under the "Opportunities" tab. On the top navigation find "Opportunities", and select "Opportunity List" in the drop-down menu. Scroll down to the "Support Volunteers" section and find "Peer-Led Support Group Host" to confirm the role. I have automatically assigned you as a host so you should not have to sign up. But for future reference, this is how you sign up for any volunteer opportunities with RESOLVE.
- 2. IMPORTANT! Track your hours & submitting group feedback forms:** Start adding your volunteer hours under the "Hours" tab. As part of submitting your hours, you will be prompted to complete feedback questions. Completing the feedback questions is an important part of your volunteer commitment. For existing peer hosts: The feedback forms in your Impact account replace meeting reports.

### Recommended

- [Bookmark this login page](#) in your browser so that you can easily find it when it's time to track your volunteer hours and complete your feedback questions.
- **Add a profile picture:** Please consider uploading a profile picture to your account that clearly shows your face. We would love to put a face to your name!
- **Contact Tab:** You can contact your RESOLVE volunteer manager directly from your Impact account in the contact tab.
- **Your schedule:** On the top navigation find the "Schedule" tab. You can view your assigned volunteer roles and remove yourself from roles. If you would like to discontinue your support group or your role as host, it's essential to update RESOLVE via [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
- [WATCH THIS SHORT VIDEO TUTORIAL OF BETTER IMPACT.](#)

## Explore your Volunteer Dashboard

In the "My Profile" tab, look through the drop-down menu options.

- Contact Information: Keep your contact information up to date.
- Additional Information: Keep this information up to date when applicable. You can add and change your support group information in this tab. RESOLVE staff will get a notification to approve the group information to keep us aware of any changes that need to be made to your listing in the directory.
- Qualifications: Find your volunteer recognitions, completed training, etc.
- Training: Find a list of required training.
- Badges: Find badges you have earned as part of your volunteer achievements with RESOLVE.
- Change password: Change as needed.
- Organizations: Contact information for RESOLVE. If you use Better Impact as a volunteer with other organizations, they would be listed there as well.
- Goals: An optional feature to set personal volunteer hour goals.
- Interests: Select volunteer programs that are of interest to you. You will have to contact RESOLVE to get more information about some volunteer roles.
- Availability: Update your general availability. Staff occasionally reference your availability for some volunteer roles.
- Timeclock QR code: We are not using this feature at this time.
- Files: This is a central place to find volunteer resources, including a volunteer user guide to navigate your volunteer account and more.
- Merge Profile: Only applicable if you have more than one Better Impact account and volunteer with multiple organizations.

# Conflict Resolution, Crisis Intervention, Incident Escalation Policy

## Conflict Resolution

### Best Practices:

- Listen and learn about the group member's concerns or explanation of behavior. Then, paraphrase it and repeat it back to them to demonstrate that you've heard and understood the concern.
- Put yourself in the member's shoes: Take a moment to consider things from the member's point of view. If you were them, what resolution would make you happy?
- Manage group member expectations of the support group:
  - PLSG Hosts/Helpline volunteers are not mental health or medical professionals. Remind your members that you can guide them towards RESOLVE resources, but you cannot consult for them.
  - It's ok to acknowledge that you don't have all the answers. Your role as a support volunteer is to guide them to the best of your ability or let them know you will connect them with RESOLVE staff or get back to them with an answer.

If you are not able to resolve conflict independently, please contact your RESOLVE Volunteer Coordinator at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).

## Crisis Intervention

If a group member is in crisis and expresses suicidal ideation, please reach out to the group member separately from the group. Refer the group member to our [suicide prevention resources](#) and ask them if they would like RESOLVE staff to reach out to them to help them navigate mental health options.

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PLSG hosts should be willing to offer support to individual members or be able to provide a list of professional resources available in their area. It is reassuring to speak of your own strong emotions about infertility and have someone else say, "I understand how you feel." People in the crisis of infertility need to know they are not alone and that the way they are feeling is a normal reaction to the stress of infertility.

## Incident Escalation Policy

**Incident escalation** is what happens when a volunteer has determined a critical issue has arisen and they are not able to resolve an incident themselves and need to hand off the situation to RESOLVE staff at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).

**A critical issue** is a set of circumstances if left unresolved could create controversy, debate, problem, or concern that will adversely affect the success of the support group.

**Escalation Process:** This procedure promotes visibility of arising critical issues in a group to maintain a record of issues that occurred for future reference. RESOLVE's Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for documenting and providing the appropriate next steps for each incident that has been identified as a critical issue.

- Will this incident cause controversy, debate, problems, or concern that impacts the group's ability to successfully move forward? If yes, contact RESOLVE's Volunteer Coordinator at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
- Have group members complained about this incident? If yes, contact RESOLVE's Volunteer Coordinator at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
- Does this incident go against one or more of RESOLVE's Participant Guidelines? If yes, have you sufficiently informed the group member of the guidelines? If incidents/behavior continues after the group member has been sufficiently informed, contact RESOLVE's Volunteer Coordinator at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
- Does confronting the incident cause the PLSG Host/HelpLine volunteer significant distress? If yes, contact RESOLVE's Volunteer Coordinator at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
- If the Volunteer Coordinator is not available, Simmy Bookal, RESOLVE's Senior Manager, Communications and Programs is also available through [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
- Track and evaluate: Once an incident report is received it will be tracked and monitored to resolution by RESOLVE's Volunteer Coordinator at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).



## Organizing a PLSG

A peer support group's "success" is not dependent on the same participants staying together indefinitely. A successful peer group remains effective even as participants come and go and the group's chemistry and dynamic change.

### Support Group Guidelines & Confidentiality Disclaimer

The peer host is responsible for reading the RESOLVE PLSG Introduction at the beginning of each meeting. The introduction should include the [guidelines](#) for participation in RESOLVE support groups.

Please review the [Guidelines for Participation in RESOLVE Support Groups](#).  
End of Meeting Closure Statement (Page 19)

### Group topic

A PLSG may focus on all infertility issues or may be formed around a specific topical area. While this list is not all-inclusive, some examples of topic-oriented groups are: General Infertility, Childless/Childfree Not by Choice, Waiting to Adopt, Third Party Reproduction (Donor Sperm, Donor Egg and Surrogacy), Considering Adoption, LGBTQ+ Family Building, Single Parenting Issues, Miscarriage, Men's issues, Pregnancy After Infertility and Parenting After Infertility. The choice of the group focus area is at the discretion of the host but RESOLVE staff will provide guidance about the needs and interests of the community.

If you are concerned about not getting enough group members, a non-specific, general infertility group might be best. As the group expands you can diversify if needed.

### Location/Ambience

Based on those who might participate, explore locations at which the group can meet. Think about accessibility, privacy, parking, and how someone might perceive the building they are entering.

RESOLVE PLSGs must maintain complete impartiality at all times. Groups should not pay for meeting space and participants should not be required to pay for parking. However, if the group meets in a location where there is a facility or parking fee, all prospective participants must be made aware of the fees in advance.

All meetings should be held in a public place. Contact your local YMCA, library, city hall, hospitals, community centers, and places of worship. Even some shopping malls have free community meeting rooms. If the group is meeting in the evening, PLSG hosts must take extra care to ensure that the area is safe for participants.

Some participants may not feel comfortable in infertility clinics, adoption agencies, the offices of mental health professionals, or any other professional office that serves the infertility community. Holding PLSG meetings in these locations not only makes some

group members uncomfortable but also gives the appearance that the professional is either supporting or running the group.

Although not recommended for a variety of reasons including personal privacy, PLSG meetings can be held in someone's home as long as the participants feel comfortable meeting there.

**Examples of great locations include:**

- conference rooms in community building
- hospitals
- city halls
- libraries

**Meeting in places of worship:** We do allow it if it's open to everyone. If the group is faith-based or limited only to people who belong to that church or have the same faith, then it cannot be a RESOLVE support group.

**Ambiance** of the meeting location includes lighting, size of the room, the comfort of the furniture, room temperature, and layout. Arrange chairs around a table or at least in an open circle to promote sharing. The goal is to make a comfortable, intimate setting that puts the participants at ease to share. Do not underestimate the importance of the atmosphere of the meeting room and location. Do not meet in places where there is no private place to talk (i.e., restaurants, activity areas in facilities, etc.)

### Frequency

Generally speaking, holding the group monthly is best. However, as the group expands you can add in additional dates if you have the capacity to host more frequent groups.

### Time of Day

PLSG meetings should be scheduled on the same day and time each month that is not only convenient for the host but also meets the needs of the community. For example, if traffic is particularly bad in an area, it may not be a good idea to hold the meeting during rush hour. Groups can meet any day of the week and at any time, however, consistency is the key. Choose the same day of the month and time (i.e., the second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM) and stick with the schedule. It is confusing for participants and those professionals who desire to refer people to your group if the date, time, and location are constantly changing.

### Length of meeting

Determine how long the meeting will last. We recommend that support groups should not last more than 90 minutes. The size of the group can affect this. A very small group

of 4 or 5 people may be able to complete the work of supporting one another in one hour. A group of 10 to 12 will likely require 90 minutes. It is important to start and stop the meeting on time. Encourage anyone who wants to remain and visit (if possible, at the facility you meet at) to do so. Otherwise, they can continue their discussion outside or share contact information to communicate outside of the group if they choose.

### **End of Meeting/Closure Statement**

The PLSG host is responsible for providing a "closure statement," signifying the end of the meeting.

At the conclusion of each meeting the PLSG host should briefly summarize the conversations that took place during the meeting, how the participants felt about where they are in their journeys, while reinforcing the positive steps and feelings expressed by those in attendance. The statement should be brief and also include a reminder that what is said during the meeting is not to be repeated outside the group in order to preserve each member's confidence that the group itself is indeed a safe place for them to share their feelings.

This is also a good time to thank those visiting the group for attending and invite them to come back and join the group at the next month's meeting, and to remind everyone of any upcoming local or virtual events.

### **Size**

The size of the group will affect how successful it is. An ideal group is between five and ten people. If your group consistently exceeds 10 participants, you will want to consider starting a second group by encouraging some members to transfer to the new group. When a group is too large there is not enough time for everyone to be heard or to wrestle with some of the difficult issues that come up. When just starting out, your group may be very small. Do not become discouraged by this. It may take several months to build a good-sized group. Hosts may determine the appropriate group minimum at their own discretion.

# Marketing your Support Group

## Marketing your group

Promoting the support group is an important step lead by hosts. Remember that it may take three to four meetings to establish a core of members and to function as a support group ought to. Media notices and flyers will help promote attendance. Be sure to provide a brief description to give someone a basic idea of the purpose of your group. Don't assume everyone knows what to expect when participating in a support group.

Examples of where to place notices & flyers:

- community calendar of the local newspaper
- local public access channel
- newsletters
- beauty and barber shops
- laundromats
- restaurants
- grocery stores
- exercise centers
- libraries
- pharmacies
- clinics and hospitals (if they approve)

**Draft a letter or provide a flyer** to health care providers can include in their welcome packets to caregivers. This is an invitation letter to the patients that details information about your support group.

**Important things to include in marketing materials:**

- Support group name
- Group Description
- Meeting location
- Recurring meeting date and time
- "For more information contact (Host's name, email and/or phone number)"
- "Free and open to the public"

**Volunteer Highlight Submissions:** Share a testimonial and information about your group that you would like RESOLVE to share with the public via social media or in an email. Reach out to RESOLVE staff at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).

# Group Comfort Agreement

## Comfort Agreement

Members can also participate in identifying guidelines they feel would benefit the group. A comfort agreement is a clear set of guidelines on how your group will handle discussions, meetings, and sensitive information raised in the group setting. This agreement is unique to your group and should be in addition to [RESOLVE's participant guidelines](#). Whether you meet informally for coffee or for structured meetings, a comfort agreement is an important foundation that acknowledges each individual member's right to respectful treatment.

Some points you may consider including in your group agreement are:

### When someone in the group becomes pregnant

**Group Inclusion:** A mutual group decision should be established along with the group boundaries in the event a member becomes pregnant. Each group may determine its own process. If pregnant members are asked to withdraw from the group, they should be referred to other resources including but not limited to support groups for pregnancy after infertility or local mental health professionals. The RESOLVE mental health professional or RESOLVE staff can assist the host in identifying resources prior to the group meeting to have this information in place.

Here are some tips from your fellow peer-led support group hosts:

- "I have always organized it so that members who become pregnant can attend for up to 12 weeks. That gives time for support through the first trimester and had them leaving before they are usually visibly pregnant. Once you get more established consider having a co-host lead a "graduate" group for those who are pregnant or parenting after Infertility."
- "You are allowed to stay in our group up until 12 weeks or whenever they start showing. They must also disclose that they are pregnant before attending the meeting so that no one is caught off guard."
- Institute a group rule that "You have to give the Host two days' notice if you have an announcement."
- "I had multiple miscarriages (before 12 weeks) and I appreciated a grace period before changing groups during this time since it was a painful and emotional time. I know everyone doesn't agree on this, but I think it's healthy to watch peers overcome infertility and let them exit gracefully."

The host should communicate with the group to determine what works best for the group members.

### Transitioning to another family building option

Communicate with the group member separately and express that you would like to match them with a peer group that better fits their current or transitioning family building

journey. Re-grouping should be normalized and is an option that is included in [RESOLVE participant guidelines](#). Always provide new group options or try reaching out to the hosts in the [private Facebook group](#) to see if anyone has a group that would be a good fit. You can also reach out to RESOLVE staff at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org) to ask about options to provide to the member. The host should communicate with the group to determine what works best for the group members.

## Pregnancy announcements

How do I handle pregnancy announcements in Peer-Led Support Groups?  
Here are some tips from your fellow peer-led support group hosts.

### Email:

- "Send an email, separate from the meeting reminders, with the subject "Sensitive Update."
- "I also only sent it to members who had attended recently and knew the person's current status. The feedback I've received has been positive."

### Provide an opt-out option:

- "I send one pregnancy-specific email per month (where that is the only topic - no other news, announcements, etc.) and give members the opportunity to opt out of that particular email."

### Consider starting a separate Pregnancy and Parenting After Infertility Support Group:

- "I give time for support through the first trimester. Once you get more established consider having a volunteer lead a supplemental group for those who are pregnant or parenting after Infertility."

## Trigger warnings

A trigger warning is a statement made prior to sharing potentially disturbing content. That content might include graphic references to topics that can be especially triggering for those with infertility and trying to build their families, such as miscarriage, pregnancy announcements, or discussions of pregnancy.

- If you share sensitive information via email or in a private online group preface the email or post with TW: <INSERT TOPIC> or CW:>INSERT TOPIC<.&ul>  - TW: Trigger Warning
  - CW: Content Warning
- Having a trigger warning delivered at the last moment is very difficult because:
  - people may be distressed by the sudden need to switch to self-preservation mode
  - people may be unable to escape from the triggering situation due to, e.g., being seated in the middle of a row

- people may have a negative reaction to the warning in the moment that they didn't want to have in a room full of people
- If at all possible, trigger warnings should be delivered well in advance of any triggering stories, displays, or demonstrations.
  - present in writing and distributed to members in advance of the support group meeting, so that people can react to the information privately and have time to make decisions and self-care arrangements.
  - take extra care to create a rule where people may leave a group at any time for any reason and will not be shamed for it, nor asked for their reasons at all.
  - don't do a surprise announcement during the group. Don't assume how others will react to "good news" about another member's family building updates.
  - when triggering content is being discussed, check in with your members from time to time: ask them how they are doing, whether they need a break, and so on. Let them know that you are aware that the material in question is emotionally challenging.
  - unless indicated very clearly in advance that an entire session is trigger warned, ask people to deliver warnings when they are aware that they are about to say or do something triggering.
  - after the warning, give people adequate time to leave and do not ask them to simply close their eyes or similar.

## PLSG Host Self Care

### PLSG Host Self Care

Remember that you will need to renew and relax as well as find your own support system. Model this behavior for your group members who also need to find ways to recharge. Find a substitute host or replacement and do something that fulfills and renews you.

- **If applicable: Join as a participant of another RESOLVE support group.** RESOLVE offers virtual support groups in the Support Group Directory. Or try reaching out to the hosts in the [private Facebook group](#) to see if anyone has a group that would be a good fit for you. The hosts get it and are there to support you too!
- [The Self-Care Wheel, created by Olqa Phoenix](#), is an affirming and positive tool that hosts can use to manage stress and increase life satisfaction. The self-care exercises and healing modalities provided in the Self-Care Wheel afford hosts a simple and effective starting point to develop an individual self-care plan that is personalized, preventative, and sustainable.

Each dimension of the wheel represents an area of your life that, ideally, deserves daily attention. The first sheet contains a suggested list of topics, placed between the spokes of the wheel below the relevant dimension. Each item is an inspiration or a prompt to take an action that promotes nurture in that area. The second wheel is left blank for personalization. Select a prompt for each area that best fits your lifestyle, interest, and/or needs.

### Setting Boundaries

Here are some tips for setting boundaries:

- **Set boundaries regarding outreach outside of the scheduled support group.** Be honest and express that you are in treatment or have a busy home life and are not able to provide support outside the confines of the group. Provide support groups that meet on a different schedule then so that they can supplement their support options. Reach out to the Hosts in the [private Facebook group](#) to ask if they offer active topic-specific support groups as supplemental support options. If needed, reach out to RESOLVE to help you provide additional support options for your group members.
- **Don't take on the pressure of knowing everything.** Use this as an opportunity to remind group members that you are a peer host. Let the group member(s) know that you will find a resource or an answer to their question and touch base with them via email or in the next meeting. Reach out to RESOLVE if the information is needed that is not included in this manual.



- **Coming prepared for the meeting**, with responsibilities delegated and/or a topic or reading material ready. This sets the tone for a healthy meeting and sends the message that “this is important” and “you are valuable.” When others feel valued, crossing boundaries can often be avoided. Remember, everything flows from the leader downward.
- It’s easier to set boundaries (such as 5-minute time limits for sharing) at the beginning of the meeting than to try to reel someone in 10 minutes into their story.

### Co-Facilitation

Facilitating a support group works best with two people, however, it is not a requirement for starting a support group. Recruiting a Co-Host allows for shared group responsibilities so that Hosts do not burn out. In addition, having two people facilitate often provides variety in the personalities of the individuals and the way they relate to people and can strengthen the group.

### Leadership

Members look to the support group Host as a leader. Hosts serve as a model of appropriate group behavior and as a resource for the group. Unfortunately, some members may become dependent on the Host. To reduce the dependency, Hosts can delineate tasks to individual group members. Since being the Host is a leadership position, it is important to remember that accentuating and emphasizing group members’ individual abilities and strengths will increase their own leadership skills and help them take more initiative for themselves.

### Self-Reflection – “We reserve the right to improve”

Every good host knows there is always room for improvement. This requires hosts to:

- Be open to group reviews and suggestions from other hosts, as well as organization leadership (if applicable).
- Be aware of when they need to step aside from primary group facilitation. If the host is not well or too upset, it will hinder their ability to be effective and will likely impact the members also. At this point, it is best to have a co-host step in, pause the group, or discontinue the group.
- Embrace mistakes. A host’s willingness to look at and admit their mistakes will strengthen the group’s trust in them while also providing a model of resiliency.
- Support and learn from each other. Hosts should view reflection as a learning opportunity and should communicate this attitude to the group. This means that Hosts themselves remain open to learning from others and that everyone’s

contributions are treated as credible and educational. This serves to validate group members and helps to avoid arguments between them.

- Keep a realistic perspective. Don't idealize the support group. There may sometimes be people that your group won't be able to help; this doesn't mean your efforts are futile. Also, when members leave, it doesn't mean you've failed them. Usually, it means that they have used the group as much as they think is useful and moved on with their lives.

Complete the feedback questions from the group in Better Impact to facilitate this progress and advancement of the group toward its goals.

Sources:

- <https://www.addictionhope.com/blog/boundaries-in-support-groups/>
- [https://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection\\_manual/facilitating.html](https://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/facilitating.html)

## Facilitating a PLSG

### Facilitating

PLSG Hosts assist groups as they work together toward achieving group goals, and in most instances *do not interject their own personal opinions or agenda*. By expressing their opinions to the group, Hosts risk discouraging others with differing opinions from speaking. They remain alert to group dynamics and encourage challenging reflection while maintaining respect and safety within the group. Although facilitators may help guide a discussion, they also recognize and *foster the group's own ability to lead itself*. Thus unlike authoritative leaders, good facilitators relinquish control to the group and promote open, democratic dialogue among group members.

Maintain a formal agenda except perhaps celebrating once a year by lunching together, having a potluck, or holiday party. Utilize the group as a source for planning topics, speakers, and other resources.

It is important that you are comfortable with silence. Because it may take someone time to compose their thoughts to ask a question or give a response, please refrain from jumping in to keep the conversation going. Silences can be a result of someone being shy, a need to reflect, or a way the group expresses empathy for the one who has just revealed something very personal.

### Meeting format

The following are two formats for use in leading a RESOLVE PLSG. It is the responsibility of the host to determine which option best suits them.

#### Option One:

- Introductions and welcome new members
- Read RESOLVE *PLSG Introduction* statement (page 31) including the ground rules for meeting participation. [\(See Meeting Participation Guidelines\)](#)
- Inform participants of RESOLVE news (volunteer needs in the area, upcoming educational and other events)
- Introduce the topic for the evening's discussion and make opening remarks (sharing your reactions to or experience in this topic) in order to get the discussion going
- Ask for reactions. Do they agree or disagree? Have they had similar experiences? What is upsetting about the topic and why? What is validating and why?
- Read closing statement and provide next meeting information

#### Option Two:

- Introductions and welcome new members
- Read RESOLVE *PLSG Introduction* statement including the ground rules for meeting participation. [\(See Meeting Participation Guidelines\)](#)

- Inform participants of RESOLVE news (volunteer needs in the area, upcoming educational and other events)
- Identify where you are in your family building journey
- Identify where you are emotionally at that moment in the meeting on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being terrible and 5 being terrific
- Identify the issues/concerns that you and the members want to discuss tonight (capture these on a whiteboard or poster board if possible)
- Discuss those topics that were identified by members (carefully assign the order of topic discussion, and timeframes for each item)
- Read closing statement and provide next meeting information

For either of these format options, the PLSG leader needs to:

- Make clear the fact that these are peer discussions and that none present are operating as professional counselors and that attendance at the PLSG meeting should not be a substitute for professional advice or counseling
- Be prepared to generate more discussion if there are long silences or people are reluctant to speak out
- Set an example for others in the group by being open and forthcoming about your own experiences with infertility and/or adoption
- Direct the discussion to ensure that one person does not completely dominate the discussion or that the discussion does not stray too far from the topic of the evening
- Be prepared for strong emotions. For many people, these kinds of peer discussion groups are the only places where they feel they can talk about their family building journey experience openly and expect others to understand. Let people who seem to be in a crisis know that these peer discussion groups must not be used in place of professional counseling. RESOLVE maintains a current list of RESOLVE members who are mental health professionals on its website, [www.resolve.org](http://www.resolve.org), under "Get Help" and "[Find A Professional](#)" in the drop-down menu.

## Ice Breakers

### QUESTIONS TO FACILITATE DISCUSSION:

- To open up the discussion:
  - What do you think about this situation?
  - What has your experience been in dealing with this issue?
  - Would anyone care to offer suggestions or facts to help us better understand this issue?
- To broaden the discussion:
  - Now that we have heard from some of you, would others who have not spoken like to share any ideas?
  - How do the ideas that have been presented so far sound to those of you who have been thinking about them?
  - What other aspects of this issue should we explore?

- To limit participation:
  - You have made some good statements, and I am wondering if someone else might like to share a comment?
  - Since all the members have not yet had the opportunity to speak, I wonder if you would hold your comments until later.
  - We appreciate your contributions. However, it might be useful to hear from some of the others. Would some of you who have not spoken care to add any ideas to those already discussed?
- To focus discussion:
  - Where are we now in relation to the topic of our discussion?
  - Would you like me to review my understanding of the things we have said and the ideas we have come up with in this discussion?

### Help Members Solve Problems

While solving problems shouldn't be the only goal of a support group, it is something that many members hope for and expect. All members should take part in the problem-solving process so that no single person is seen as the solution to their difficulties. It's the facilitator's job to help members learn how to help each other with problem-solving.

Here are the steps to problem-solving:

- **Clarifying the problem:** Make sure everyone fully understands the problem. If you aren't sure what the problem is, ask questions to get more information.
- **Talking about the alternatives:** Bring up possible solutions to the problem, but be very careful to word them in a way that doesn't give advice. For example, instead of "You should do this," a better wording could be "I wonder what it would be like for you to try this" or "Maybe you could do this." **Telling people what to do is not the purpose or responsibility of a support group.** It takes away a person's feeling that he can handle his own problems and can make people feel attacked and uncomfortable. Try asking members to tell what's worked well for them in similar situations. You can also ask the person with the problem what he thinks might work.
- **Choosing which option(s) to take:** Have the group discuss the pros and cons of each suggestion. You can then let the person with the problem come to a decision, or he may want to take some time on his own to consider the possibilities. Let him know that the group cares and wants to know how things turn out.
- **Offering help:** Sometimes members may offer to assist each other. For example, if the problem being discussed is a member's problem with transportation to the meetings, other members might offer to give that person a ride.

### Communicating with your group members

- **Start an email list (recommended):** In addition to tracking your group member completing the confidential sign-up form that is located in your groups Directory listing, it can be beneficial to create an email list by including email addresses,

quick reference notes, etc. in a tracking sheet. Use [Google Sheets](#), Excel, or other platforms of your choice. [Here are some resources on securing information in Google Sheets.](#)

- Start a supplemental Facebook group (optional): Hosting a private Facebook group or a public page can be a great way to update your group members.

### RESOLVE Resources

Have some of [RESOLVE's flyers](#) on hand to distribute to people as a further source of information. Provide members with RESOLVE's website: [www.resolve.org](http://www.resolve.org), and toll-free [Helpline](#) phone number: **866.NOT.ALONE (866.668.2566)**.

For group members who might want more frequent contact than your group's meeting schedule provides, be sure to tell them about RESOLVE's online forum through Inspire, the support group directory to explore virtual support group options throughout the country, and RESOLVE's social media accounts. Providing these resources offer an opportunity for Hosts to exchange contact information with their members for future communications.

Source: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/enhancing-support/peer-support-groups/main>

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## Sample: PLSG Group Meeting Introduction

### PEER-LED SUPPORT GROUP MEETING INTRODUCTION

To be read at the beginning of each group meeting.

Hello, everyone. My name is: \_\_\_\_\_ and I want to welcome you to the (location and type of group, e.g., Long Island Pre-Adoption) Peer-led Support Group meeting.

This group meets under the auspices of RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association, a national, non-profit, volunteer consumer organization dedicated to providing education, advocacy, and emotional support for those struggling to build their families.

The purpose of this meeting is to provide an open forum for discussion, networking, and support around the subject of (type of group, e.g., Pre-Adoption). We generally meet on the (day/week, e.g., 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday) of the month from \_\_\_ (AM or PM) to \_\_\_\_\_ (AM or PM).

This group is led by peers and not by mental health professionals and is not intended to be a replacement for private counseling or a professionally-led support group. If you would like a list of local mental health professionals who are professional members of RESOLVE who have experience working with infertility patients, please let me know or call our HelpLine at 866-NOT-ALONE (866-668-2566). Opinions expressed in this group are personal opinions, and not necessarily the opinions or policies of RESOLVE.

This group is for you to use in whatever way you find helpful. No long-term commitment is required.

Please be mindful that we may have people from all sorts of infertility backgrounds. Throughout the meeting, please respect others' opinions, emotions, and experiences.

Remember to share the floor. Allow others to speak and share their experiences. As the Host, I may have to redirect the conversation in order to ensure that everyone who wants to, has the opportunity to speak and be heard.

If you have children and need to be attentive to them, please do so; however, please mute and turn off your video camera in an effort to be sensitive towards all who are still on their family building journey.

Lastly, confidentiality is critical for creating a safe environment where people can feel comfortable sharing personal information. Members should not describe anything discussed in a group with others outside of the group. And taking photos or recording this meeting is prohibited.

Before we start, I want to let you know about the following upcoming opportunities and events sponsored by RESOLVE: (talk about current volunteer openings, upcoming events, etc).

## Effective Communication Skills

- **Reflecting back words, thoughts and feelings** – The host reflects back the words, thoughts and feelings of the group, while subtly emphasizing their own words (e.g. “It sounds as if you’re saying you want to change the way you’ve been handling this issue.?” or “You sound like you are very disappointed.”)
- **Respond with affirmations** – Validate the speaker by responding with affirmations. Not only does this boost the speaker’s self-esteem, but it also helps them feel understood and stay positive. (e.g. “It seems like you handled that well.” or “It sounds like you were affectively assertive. I remember you’ve previously said that was something you found difficult.”)
- **Clarification** – Help the speaker clarify their thoughts and messages by reiterating what they said and asking clarifying questions using their own words. (e.g. “I think you mentioned earlier that you ‘don’t want to work in this field anymore’, now you have said that you are ‘hoping to take on more responsibilities at work’. Which most accurately reflects your current wishes?”)
- **Summarizing** – Every so often, hosts should paraphrase what the speaker has said to ensure there is a clear understanding of their message. This also helps other members of the group follow along.
- **Positive facial expressions** – Judgmental expressions like head shaking and frowning need to be avoided. Instead, encouraging and empathetic facial expressions like smiling and looks of empathy should be given. These are positive ways of responding naturally to the group.

Source: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/enhancing-support/peer-support-groups/main>

### Challenging Situations & Personalities

Support group hosts must utilize a balanced combination of control and benevolence. This assertive compassion involves keeping the focus on the disruption itself, instead of the member(s) causing the disruption. It allows the host to directly address problems with the group without insulting or offending members. Initially, hosts may want to simply pose the correction to the entire group without singling out specific members. Referring to the group’s [pre-established guidelines](#) and Comfort Agreement (page 21) can be helpful.

For example:

- When a member is often late to meetings, casually remind the group how important punctuality is to maximize the benefit of the group for every member.
- When a member is monopolizing the discussion or frequently interrupts others, give the floor back to the original speaker.

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(e.g. "I'd like to go back to Sue for a minute. I don't think she was finished talking. We want everyone to have equal opportunity to share.")

- When subjects that are someone brings up inappropriate offensive in nature or otherwise incendiary.  
(e.g. "It doesn't seem like this is an appropriate discussion for this group, so we are going to move on. For those who would like to continue this conversation, feel free to do so after the meeting.")
- When triggering language is being used.  
(e.g. "I recognize this is a meaningful topic for people to be able to talk about and I am also sensitive to the fact that it may pose a trigger to some. Please be considerate when choosing your words and avoid being overly detailed in your descriptions. It is our guideline of respecting one another.")
- When a member continuously part of digresses to irrelevant topics, redirect the focus to the purpose of the meeting.  
(e.g. "How does that relate to infertility and/or family building and what we've been talking about today?")

Hosts must be able to determine if disruptions can effectively be addressed to the entire group or if speaking privately outside of the meeting is better.

### **Someone who is not appropriate for the group**

Occasionally you may have an individual come to the group who is not appropriate. For instance, someone looking for adoption support in a newly diagnosed support group. Or a couple seeking support in a women's only group. In these cases, let your Co-Host take over to privately address the individual to explain this group is not a good fit for the individual and provide other group recommendations or put them in contact with RESOLVE's Volunteer Coordinator at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org). Sometimes students, researchers, or other professionals will come just to do some marketing. Explain that is not the purpose of the group and they are not welcome to market there.

### **Managing Disruptive Members**

- **Dominator:** One person dominates the discussion or continually interrupts it.

Use activities that require everyone's participation, i.e., gathering questions and ideas. If a person consistently talks for long periods of time, without singling out that person specifies that you would like everyone to be brief.

If someone continually interrupts, don't become defensive or ignore him or her, Instead, acknowledge the value of their input. Point out that in the interest of the group, interruptions should be kept to a minimum. Offer to speak to them at length at the break or after the session.

Keep track of people who wish to speak by "stacking" (verbally list names/or note on a piece of paper the people who have raised their hands, indicating the order in which people will speak).

- **Argumentative, negative, hostile:** If anyone makes an offensive comment, expect conflict. Your role is to control the processing of what happened and allow the group to continue. You can ask people to vent but without argument.
- **Withdrawn, quiet or passive members:** If some people refuse to participate in the large group, you might try dividing the group into pairs, threes, or fours. People who will not speak up in front of the full group will sometimes feel more comfortable sharing in a small group.

Distribute index cards and ask participants to respond to a question on the card. This is more comfortable for those who are shy in groups; you can shuffle the cards and have each person read someone else's response. In this way, everyone participates, but no one has to know who wrote what.

- **The group becomes distracted and loses its focus.**  
In refocusing a group it sometimes means interrupting someone or interrupting a two-way argument that is going nowhere. Although you may be hesitant about this, remind the participants of the original topic and put the tangent on hold, at least until the first topic is resolved.
- **Someone verbally attacks your leadership and completely throws you off.**  
Usually, they are very upset and are to blame. DO NOT TAKE THE ATTACK PERSONALLY. Explain your rationale. Discuss it with the person privately during a break. If you were at fault, apologize and continue.
- **Someone presents inaccurate information or strays away from the focus of the discussion.**  
Allow participants to point this out and/or reject the comment. You should invite other participants to correct the misinformation; if they don't, correct it yourself. If you don't know the answer, acknowledge it and commit to looking into it. Don't leave the group with any misinformation.
- **Group participant states: "It's all hopeless anyway; you can't change people's attitudes. Why even try?"**  
Acknowledge their feelings. Point out the hopelessness, without buying into it yourself. Don't get into a debate about whether the support group makes a difference - you wouldn't be doing it if it didn't.
- **You find yourself disliking a participant.**  
Remember that you are a human being and entitled to your own personal likes and dislikes. However, you must also keep in mind that as a host, your neutrality is essential to the success of a support group. Unless the behavior affects the group, acknowledge your feelings to yourself, and move on.

Sources: [https://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection\\_manual/facilitating.html](https://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/facilitating.html)

# Self-Disclosure

## Tips on Self-Disclosure

People who struggle with infertility often experience insensitive responses from the people to whom they have turned for support. The tendency to want to share our stories and feelings with each other is powerful and, essentially, healthy. This drive often continues when we find ourselves in leadership or "helper" positions, such as a PLSG host. The mutual benefits of sharing between people with more and less experience of infertility are real, but there are potential challenges.

It is important to be careful and thoughtful when self-disclosing as a RESOLVE peer-led support group host. Here are some important guidelines to shape your thinking:

- The power of sharing feelings, experiences and strategies is the backbone of this organization. Personal sharing via self-disclosure lets people know that not only are these intense feelings well within normal limits, but that people can survive and even grow through this experience.
- It's important to note that although we share a common struggle, we are all different people. We must find our own paths, our own meanings, our own solutions. That diversity and the challenge of getting comfort and strength from others, while traveling a highly personal journey, provides richness to the RESOLVE community. Staying focused on feelings, rather than individual choices and decisions that you made will help you share your wisdom and strength more effectively.
- As a PLSG host you have a special role. Your job is to help others gain the benefits of mutual sharing. Participants at this meeting benefit from expressing difficult feelings, supporting others while they share hard times and offering wisdom or positive coping strategies. Your job is to help that happen. The tendency for many people will be to look to you for emotional support and wisdom/coping. They have forgotten how much strength they carry inside. Helping them rediscover that they do have something to give to others is a tremendous gift. As much as possible, try to keep the sharing and supporting flowing between participants.
- There are times when self-disclosing or personal sharing can be particularly helpful. Your focus in sharing should be "How will they benefit from hearing this?"
- **REMEMBER: THIS IS NOT A MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP; YOU HAVE A VERY SPECIAL ROLE AND MAY HAVE PROFOUND INFLUENCE ON THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM YOU SPEAK. THE KEY HERE IS SIMPLE: KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE GROUP PARTICIPANT.**

By focusing on their feelings, needs, and concerns you can stay grounded in what is helpful for them.

Here are examples of why self-disclosure can be very useful:

- It normalizes or makes acceptable feelings that a participant may be having
- It shows that it is okay to talk about these things in this setting
- It gives people information or strategies
- It can impart hope that feelings change as we move through the infertility experience
- It can provide a role-model or a different approach to a common problem
- It can impart a sense of credibility or build confidence in your group hosting qualifications

### **Before talking about yourself, consider the following:**

- One risk is that you may inadvertently limit sharing between group participants and yourself. People first learning to talk about this painful topic may get distracted by your story or stay focused on you or the option that you chose (such as adoption) rather than their own feelings. It's important to emphasize that your story is just one story; there are many different resolutions and pathways. It's trickier when we're talking about feelings, but it's still important. "I felt sad for a long time and it helped to talk, but that doesn't work for everyone. What have you folks experienced?"
- In small groups and in one-on-one discussions, it is important to emphasize that although we share this experience and many of the feelings associated with it, we are each unique.
- Stay focused on the group members. In this world of high-tech medical treatment options, it is easy for someone with infertility to start thinking about that option way before it is necessary. This is particularly important if the member has asked you what you did and you shared the fact that you used some or all high-tech options.

In these cases, help the person stay more focused on their current situation. You might say, "I know you are wondering about IVF. It's hard not to wonder about what may lie ahead for you. However, it's important to conserve your energy and stay focused on this stage—what you are doing right now and how you're feeling about it."

- You may be asked direct questions about yourself. People may need reassurance that it is okay to ask, even when you feel that it's not helpful to answer. If you decide not to answer, give direct acceptance of the question, and then give your reasons for not answering. It's important to remember that even simple questions such as, "Do you have infertility?" may become more complicated in the ensuing conversation. As the conversation develops, you may find yourself discussing material that feels too private or otherwise not particularly helpful for the other person. Try to be aware of where certain questions may lead

and label your caution and concern early in the discussion. For example, "Yes, we did have infertility and I am willing to talk about it, but I want to make sure you get what you need from this conversation. Let's stay focused on your particular situation." This allows you to answer particular questions as they arise. If you are concerned that this has put someone off, you can offer pertinent pieces of your experience yourself by saying something like, "Boy! I remember that feeling! Sometimes it was hard just to walk into that office."

**Some other examples of what you might say:**

- "That's an interesting question. I think it would be better to wait on my answer to see if other people in this group have something to say about it." This type of answer defuses your influence and redirects the question back to the group. After others have talked, you can share pertinent parts of your story.
- In more individual conversations, you might say, "Let's look at your thoughts and feelings first."
- "You know, that's an important question, but it's a hard one for me. I'm still working on it and may not be the best person to ask. This is what other people have said to me about it..."
- **IT IS IMPORTANT TO ACCEPT THAT YOU ARE PROBABLY STILL WORKING ON SOME ASPECTS OF YOUR INFERTILITY. YOU CANNOT EXPECT YOURSELF TO BE 'RESOLVED' ABOUT EVERYTHING. HOWEVER, YOU PROBABLY SHOULD ONLY SHARE THE PARTS OF YOUR STORY ABOUT WHICH YOU HAVE DEVELOPED SOME COMFORT.** This type of answer points out that although infertility affects us for the rest of our lives and that as we move through the process, we develop ways to integrate the experience into a positive rather than negative. It also emphasizes that we all cope in our own special ways.
- "That's a good question. I'm sorry, but I can't answer it. My husband and I feel that we need to keep some of this information just for ourselves and have decided to keep that part of our story private. People seem to vary in what they feel comfortable sharing. This is what I've heard or read about that situation...."
- It is especially important to validate a question when you are not going to answer it directly, and it is absolutely crucial that you not share material that is too private for you. Not directly answering the question can effectively provide an example of individual differences and personal acceptance of one's own limits and feelings and can also give people a way to directly respond to questions that they may not want to answer.
- If you have adopted a child or chosen to remain childfree and a person asks about how you created your family, it is important to know that they may not be

ready to hear about either adoption or the childfree lifestyle. This may heighten their anxiety about the effectiveness of treatment, or they may be feeling, “I could never adopt or even consider living childfree” and feel uncomfortable discussing those negative feelings (which most adoptive parents and those choosing to live childfree had at one time!) with you. It’s important at these times to answer questions in such a way that you leave room for their doubts or concerns: “We did eventually adopt and that has worked well for us, but it was frightening—what are your concerns and fears about adoption?” or “After seriously considering both the pros and cons of the choices presented to us, we decided to remain a family of two and have done so quite happily. It wasn’t an easy decision, but one we have been comfortable living. What are your concerns and fears about living childfree?”

- When people question you about particular medical procedures or treatments (Did it hurt?), it is helpful to answer briefly about your experience but to stress that each person’s body is different.
- People may seek your personal medical advice or suggestions about where to go for treatment. With such questions as, “Where is the best place?” or “Where did you go?” **It is critical that you remain neutral and emphasize the importance of finding the best fit between a person and their treatment provider.** “You know, we’re all unique and it really is important to find the best doctor for your particular medical situation.”

# Dealing with Complaints about a Specific Doctor, Clinic or Professional

## Tips for Dealing with Complaints about a Specific Doctor, Clinic or Professional

As an unbiased consumer organization, RESOLVE does not screen professional members, and therefore does not endorse or recommend the services of any individual provider or organization.

While many PLSG participants find the group environment an ideal place to discuss the quality of different providers, including those that provide medical, legal, adoption, mental health and complementary treatment services, it is important to note that RESOLVE does not encourage or condone “bashing” any fertility service provider regardless of their professional membership status with RESOLVE. Likewise, RESOLVE does not have a “complaint” procedure and cannot respond to or address complaints against RESOLVE professional members or other members of the family building professions. Conversely, hosts should take care not to “promote” specific professionals to their group members.

While the PLSG host should not deter sharing, the following guidelines should be followed to ensure the RESOLVE PLSG is free of negative or promotional discussion of specific service providers:

- If a person is in a group medical practice and is dissatisfied with their doctor, suggest that they make an appointment with another doctor in the practice.
- If they seem confused about their treatment, suggest that they write up what they understand about the medical plan and discuss it with their physician.
- If their anger or frustration seems very general (i.e., “I hate that practice”) ask them to summarize one or two specific areas that have been problematic.
- Keep in mind that someone else in the group may be going to the same professional and may like the service provided. It helps to remind the group members that:
  - Some people will automatically “click” or feel comfortable with a provider while others may not
  - Sometimes “bedside manner” is lacking, while the quality of care is still good
- Ask the group for suggestions (i.e., “How do you think Susan might improve the relationship she has with her provider?”)
- Remind them that second opinions are always an excellent option, insurance or personal finances permitting.
- If possible, have the group agree to refrain from sharing the specific name of their provider, and use terms such as “my doctor” or “my attorney.” Some groups have found this very beneficial, especially when other PLSG members are using the same provider and are not experiencing any difficulty.

- Group members must understand that a certain amount of sharing is encouraged, but group members should be redirected or asked to refrain from sharing if they continue to only share negative perspectives on their providers. The host can ask a group member to leave the group if the member's continued negative discussion of a provider's service is dominating the conversation or upsetting the other group members.
- If a group participant feels extremely dissatisfied with their provider, encourage them to seek a second opinion or another provider. Steps to take would include:
  - Drafting a complaint letter to the provider, requesting a meeting to address the problems or a specific course of action
  - Contacting the local Better Business Bureau and filing a complaint
  - Contacting any state agency that licenses the provider



## Inviting Guest Speakers

### Invite a guest speaker (Optional)

Start the meeting with a guest speaker and allow questions from the group members afterward.

Being a guest speaker at a meeting is one of the most important ways in which professionals can support self-help groups. Many different types of groups hold regular meetings where professionals address topics of interest. Doctors, therapists, and other professionals are often willing to offer their time and expertise free of charge. Below is sample language that might be used to approach a potential guest speaker about presenting to your group:

*“Our support group for people with infertility and trying to build their family is interested in hearing about (fill in your topic). We understand that you have some experience in this area and we wonder if you would be willing to come to talk to our group about this at one of the following meeting times: (provide two or three choices for dates/times in the future for them to consider). Please feel free to contact me with any questions at (fill in your phone number and/or e-mail address). We’re really looking forward to hearing back from you!”*

Guest speakers can add an educational component to a group. They provide an opportunity for people to learn more about a medical condition, related medications, therapies, medical advances, and treatments. But as a support group host, it is important that you help group members remember that the guest is not present to diagnose or treat. The professional is there to offer general information about a specific topic.

In preparation for a guest speaker, try to invite the speakers at least two months in advance of a meeting. This will allow enough lead-time for the guest speaker to block out the time and will allow you enough time to announce the planned guest to support group members. Sometimes it is easier for Support Group Hosts to schedule several months’ worth of speakers at the same time. As the meeting approaches, contact the speakers to confirm that they know the online conference information or the location, date, and time of the meeting.

Have a back-up plan in case a planned guest speaker cancels at the last minute. This will reduce the stress for the support group host and may also help minimize the degree of disappointment that members experience as a result of having organized their energy for the day, with the meeting in mind.

### No sales or promotions, no researchers, no students

RESOLVE has a policy against professionals or researchers contacting our PLSG hosts to gain access to their group members. Specifically, we do not wish for our hosts to be harassed or to be put in the role of evaluating requests which may or may not be

legitimate.

Please follow these procedures if you are contacted:

- Professionals or researchers who wish to visit or attend your group: The PLSG meetings are not open to visitors, as we must protect the privacy of our members. If you are interested in reaching out to the RESOLVE community to share your message, please contact RESOLVE at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).
- Infertility research studies can be submitted to [RESOLVE via an application on our website](#).

Please understand that we have this policy in order to protect both our members and volunteers. While we want to encourage research into infertility and share opportunities with our members, we feel we are in a better position to evaluate the credibility of these requests and do not want our volunteers to assume any liability by passing on the information within their role with RESOLVE.

Many RESOLVE PLSGs do choose to invite local professionals or former patients to come to speak to the group members and this is definitely an option available to you. There are several factors to consider, however, such as not giving the appearance of favoritism, and ensuring time for the group to share in private.

## Keeping a Support Group Going

- **Keep track of your group's progress.** From time to time, ask members for their feedback on how the group is going. Find out how useful they find it, how comfortable they feel, and their likes and dislikes about the group. Use this information to make adjustments.
- **Share responsibility for the group.** Letting others take leadership roles helps them feel more committed to and invested in the group. Make sure members know their help is appreciated. Since you may find it's often easier to do things yourself, asking others in the group to take over some responsibilities can be trying. However, no one person should have to do everything, and sharing responsibilities will help you avoid burnout.
- **Be sure everyone has a chance to talk.** Some people are naturally more talkative than others. Asking questions to get quiet members to speak up is important. It's also crucial to keep the more vocal members on-topic and gently remind them to let others have a turn at times.
- **Emphasize the importance of confidentiality.** In order for your members to feel safe enough in your support group to self-disclose and work through problems, they need to feel sure that nobody is going to be telling people outside of the group about the group's discussions. Make sure this is well understood by everyone.
- **Encourage outside contact among members.** Members can offer support to each other outside of meetings. The "buddy" system, used by groups like AA, encourages members to take interest in one another's well-being and form relationships outside the group.
- **Keep recruiting.** If you have an open group, make sure you continue to get the word out. Groups can stagnate when the membership remains the same all the time, and if members who leave are never replaced your group will not survive.
- **Share rewards and failures.** Let members know that you appreciate their contributions. When people make mistakes, don't place blame. Don't heap all of the praise when something goes well on any one person - or all of the guilt when things go badly.
- **Keep a realistic perspective.** Don't idealize the support group. There may sometimes be people that your group won't be able to help; this doesn't mean your efforts are futile. Also, when members leave, it doesn't mean you've failed them. Usually, it means that they have used the group as much as they think is useful and moved on with their lives.

- **Remember that this is a support group.** The dynamics of a group may change over time - for example, it could become more social in function, or it could change focus in terms of topic. No matter how the group changes, your group's primary purpose is to provide support and understanding to its individual members.

Source: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/enhancing-support/peer-support-groups/main>

## About RESOLVE

### Our Mission:

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association, established in 1974, is dedicated to ensuring that all people challenged in their family building journey reach resolution through being empowered by knowledge, supported by community, united by advocacy, and inspired to act.

### RESOLVE exists to provide:

- ◇ Access to Care
- ◇ Advocacy for Coverage
- ◇ Access to Support & Community
- ◇ Access to Education
- ◇ Awareness of All Family Building Options

### RESOLVE's Board of Directors, Staff and Volunteers operate with:

- ◇ Care and compassion
- ◇ Integrity and without bias
- ◇ Respect for all resolutions
- ◇ Credibility and authority
- ◇ A strong sense of community
- ◇ The goal to drive positive change
- ◇ A passionate belief that everyone deserves the right of family

## About RESOLVE

**Current Memberships:** RESOLVE is a member of the National Coalition for Oversight of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (NCOART), the [National Health Council](#) and is a founding member of the International Federation of Infertility Patient Associations (IFIPA).

**Non-discrimination Statement:** RESOLVE will not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other classification protected by applicable state or federal law.

**Nonprofit Status:** RESOLVE is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization certified under the [National Health Council Standards of Excellence](#). The National Health Council demands the highest standards of accountability and ethical practice from its patient advocacy group members to assure the public that these organizations are worthy of support.

RESOLVE's [Annual Reports and organizational 990s](#) are posted on the RESOLVE website. The [RESOLVE Board of Directors](#) contracts a management company, [MCI USA](#), to provide staffing and administrative support. Approximately 83% of all funding for RESOLVE is directed to programs and services in support of our mission.

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**History.** Founded in 1974 in Belmont, MA by Barbara Eck, a nurse experiencing her own struggle with infertility, RESOLVE hosted support groups and a way for people to connect with others. For many years RESOLVE had chapters in cities and states throughout the U.S.

**Support Groups.** A [RESOLVE support group](#) can help participants feel less isolated, empower them with knowledge and validate their emotional response to the life crisis of infertility. The freedom to express negative feelings and to identify with one another helps participants realize that they are not alone.

**Social Media.** RESOLVE provides community through its extensive social media presence on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Pinterest](#), [Flickr](#), [Inspire](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

**Advocacy.** RESOLVE advocates on the [state and national level](#) for health care coverage for infertility, medical research, adoption benefits, and access to all family building options. RESOLVE hosts the only federal [Advocacy Day](#) in Washington, D.C. for the family building community and has been at the forefront of fighting state legislation that would harm access to any family building option.

**Grassroots Volunteers.** RESOLVE mobilizes and trains an extensive network of [grassroots advocates](#) on the state level who engage in all levels of advocacy from sending emails, researching and tracking bills, to meeting with and educating state legislators about infertility.

**Speakers' Bureau.** RESOLVE has a network of spokespeople ready to address questions from the media and available for interview. Contact Andy Schwarz for more information at [Andy.Schwarz@resolve.org](mailto:Andy.Schwarz@resolve.org).

**Funding.** RESOLVE is a charitable organization supported by [tax-deductible contributions](#) from concerned individuals, foundations and corporations.

**National Infertility Awareness Week® (NIAW).** Founded by RESOLVE in 1989, NIAW is the only federally recognized health observance for infertility. [Learn more about NIAW on the official website.](#)

**Hope Awards.** Each year RESOLVE recognizes leaders in the family building community who have made a significant difference in the lives of all people struggling to build their family. The Hope Awards are awarded at the [Night of Hope](#) held in New York City.

**Corporate Council.** Corporate leaders in the field support RESOLVE's mission by participation on [RESOLVE's Corporate Council](#).

**Resources:**

- [RESOLVE Board of Directors](#)

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- [RESOLVE Staff](#)
- [RESOLVE Sponsors](#)
- [Our Financials](#)
- [Our Impact](#)
- [Press Releases](#)
- [HelpLine](#)
- [Position and Policy Statements](#)
- [RESOLVE in the News](#)
- [RESOLVE Media Relations](#)

**Participate in a RESOLVE Special Event:**

- [Advocacy Day](#)
- [DIY Walk of Hope](#)
- [National Infertility Awareness Week®](#)
- [Night of Hope](#)

**[Learn more about RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association](#)**

## RESOLVE Staff Contacts

For questions, concerns, updates to the Support Group Directory:

**Volunteer Coordinator**

1600 International Drive, Suite 300 | McLean, VA 22102

t: 571.685.8012 | f: 703.506.3266

[supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org)

OR

**Simeonne Bookal | Senior Manager, Communications and Programs**

1600 International Drive, Suite 300 | McLean, VA 22102

t: 703.506.3273 | f: 703.506.3266

e: [simeonne.bookal@resolve.org](mailto:simeonne.bookal@resolve.org) or [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org)

If we are out of the office or delayed in responding, please contact [info@resolve.org](mailto:info@resolve.org) if you have an urgent support group question or request.



## Promotional Materials

- Sample [new support group flyer](#)
- Personalized [PLSG business card](#)
- To provide a volunteer testimonial & promote your support group. Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator for more information at [supportgroups@resolve.org](mailto:supportgroups@resolve.org).

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## Quick Links & Resources

### Online Volunteer Portal – Better Impact

- **Better Impact** – [Bookmark this login page](#) in your browser so that you can easily access your online volunteer account when it's time to track your volunteer hours and complete your feedback reports. [WATCH THIS SHORT VIDEO TUTORIAL OF BETTER IMPACT](#)
  - **Please use the portal to:**
    - Track your volunteer hours and submit support group feedback reports after each meeting.
    - Find important RESOLVE and volunteer updates on your “Home” dashboard.

### Resources for PLSG Hosts

RESOLVE has a network of PLSG hosts nationwide. We offer several resources for you to connect with, learn and get support from other volunteers and staff.

- [Peer-Led Support Group Manual](#): Bookmark or download this manual for easy access.
- [Support Volunteer Private Facebook Group](#): Share ideas and resources with other RESOLVE support groups and HelpLine volunteers. To join, please request membership.
- RESOLVE RoundUp: RESOLVE sends a bi-monthly informational email about programs and services, available to individuals struggling to build their families. Support group hosts will start to receive these emails if opted to receive RESOLVE emails.
- PLSG Host Virtual Town Halls: RESOLVE offers annual townhall style virtual meetings with RESOLVE's President and CEO, Barbara Collura, and your volunteer manager to provide RESOLVE updates, address specific topics of interest to our volunteer hosts, and an opportunity for Q&A. Watch your email for invitations to these exclusive meetings.

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### Forms & Guidelines

- Confidential Peer-Led Support Group Participant Sign Up Form: All in-person and virtual group members must complete this sign-up form once before participating in RESOLVE affiliated peer-led support groups.
- [PLSG Participant Guidelines](#): To keep the support group comfortable, safe, and inviting for all, we require participants to abide by our meeting guidelines. You can use the a PowerPoint slide to show during a screen share in meetings or [verbally read the guidelines](#).

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## Helpful Website Links

- [RESOLVE HelpLine](#): Call 866.NOT.ALONE (866.668.2566)
- [Professional Directory](#): This directory includes more than 600 professionals including reproductive endocrinologists, urologists, mental health therapists and other family building professionals.
- [Support Group Directory](#)
- [Covid-19 Vaccinations and Fertility](#)
- [Resources in Spanish](#)
- [Personal Stories](#)
- [Become an Advocate](#)
- [RESOLVE'S Policies and Positions](#)
- [Partner with RESOLVE](#)
- [Infertility Research Studies](#)
- [Financing Options & Grants and Scholarships](#)
- [Getting Insurance: RESOLVE's Coverage at Work program For Military Personnel and Infertility](#)
- [Ways to Give](#)
- [The Intersection Between Religion and Infertility](#)
  - [Infertility Support in Faith Based Communities](#)
  - [Assisted Fertility Resource for Pastoral Caregivers](#)

## RESOLVE Resources related to diversity and inclusion:

- [LGBTQ+ family building](#)
  - [What you don't know about LGBTQ+ family making](#)
  - [LGBTQ+ Legislative Initiatives](#)
  - [Reciprocal IVF](#)
- Cultural considerations
  - [Myths about African Americans and Infertility](#)
- Our [Kitchen Table Conversation](#) series also explore many topics related to diversity and inclusion.
  - Including:
    - [Sharing Our Story – A Conversation About Infertility in the Black Community](#)
    - [Family Building and Access to Care for the LGBTQ+ Community](#)

# Crisis & Suicide Intervention Resources

## Suicide Prevention Resources:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals. Call 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or visit <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> for support in Spanish and Deaf & Hard of Hearing.
- General Crisis Text Line: Text "SUPPORT" to 741-741 (24/7, Free).
- The Trevor Project: Call 1-866-488-7386 (24/7)  
Live Chat - <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/chat> (Fridays 4:00 PM to 5:00 PM EST)
- Red Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio: Call (Llame) 1-800-786-2929 (24/7)
- Veterans Crisis Line: Call 1-800-273-9255, option 1
- TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline: Call 1-800-959-TAPS (1-800-959-8277)
- [Black Mental Health](#)
- [Help in Spanish \(Ayuda En Español\)](#)
- [Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Hearing Loss](#)
- [LGBTQ+](#)
- [Maternal Mental Health](#)

