

B. BEST PRACTICES FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The sessions that you will read about in this manual were the subject of a pilot project in 2016-2017. Afterwards, participants and contributors submitted their comments on how to improve, modify and add to the sessions.

The following best practices were suggested to ensure the success of group meetings:

Accessibility¹

- Determine the needs of participants regarding accessibility, allergies, etc. – to be identified at time of registration (see Appendix A)
- Ensure that the location is wheelchair- and walker accessible (elevator or no steps), fully accessible washrooms, etc.
- Provide comfortable chairs and tables for activities and to go through documents
- Offer transportation or financial compensation to participants who have difficulty getting to the locations:
 - Taxi
 - Carpool
 - Financial compensation (gas, parking) to those using their vehicle to transport other participants
 - Automatic reimbursement so that participants do not have to ask
 - Distribution of funds in advance, when possible
- Keep in mind that written text can pose a challenge to some participants and follow the best practices established for material accessibility:
 - No bolded, underlined, or italicized letters
 - White paper and black ink, etc.
 - At least 12-point Arial font
 - Easy-to-read texts
 - USB keys that contain the documents for those who are visually impaired so that they can change the font or contrast of the text to meet their needs.

¹ Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes has a document on this subject : *Outils vers une accessibilité accrue*, Johanne Ouimette and Pascale Ouellette, 2010.
http://ancien.formationviolence.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/manuel-accessibilite_vf.pdf

Nature of the Group

- A group for personal growth combining therapeutic support with an opportunity for socialization and education.
- A group that allows women to offer each other mutual support that could reduce the harmful effects of stress on health and well-being. There are several ways to offer mutual support: sharing information, discussing ideas, talking about taboo subjects, closeness, emotional support, accomplishing difficult tasks and strength in numbers all represent functions specific to the dynamic of mutual aid (Steinberg, 2008). The contributors may take advantage of the opportunities that arise to encourage mutual support. The women may exchange telephone numbers and offer support outside of the group and after the sessions are over, but it is best to not impose it. This should rather be the result of connections created by the exchanges.
- Number of participants: between six and ten.
- Safe and confidential location.
- A pre-meeting is not necessary since the participants will have already partaken in the first part. If this is not the case, a pre-meeting is necessary to ensure that participation in such a group responds well to the needs of the group of participants.

The Francophone character of the group is very important, and it is essential to maintain a program developed by Francophone women for Francophone women, as well as references to resources, material, and tools in French.

Respect

- Be welcomed with open arms: participants appreciate a warm welcome.
- Discuss the level of formality at the first meeting. Most participants are not offended by informality, but it is best that the group discusses and agrees on the level of formality to be used from the start.

Participants

- Women who have participated in the first part of the program (sessions 1 to 8)

- Registration is not limited² to female victims of violence, as some do not identify as victims of violence or prefer not to be identified as such.
- Recruitment: social media, word of mouth... According to participants, it would be best to avoid recruiting a group whose members all come from the same retirement residence, as it is important to have the opportunity to meet new people.
- Women aged 55 and older can participate.
- The participants would preferably be those who have already taken part in sessions 1 to 8, but new participants may also join the existing group. The contributors will be responsible for facilitating the integration of newcomers.

Facilitation

- The age of the facilitators or co-facilitators is not particularly important. It is important, however, that they have experience facilitating groups.
- The participants indicated that “clear leadership” within the group is necessary and that the facilitators should be well-prepared. The facilitators must efficiently organize the meeting, especially when the participants’ confidence increases to reduce the risk of getting off-topic. The contributors will remind them of the basic strategies for group facilitation (Appendix B) at the end of this manual.
<http://education-sante-patient.edu.umontpellier.fr/files/2011/05/Techniques-danimation.pdf>
- The participants may have the opportunity to present something to the group.

The Material

- Folders to hold the documents
- A place to store material if participants do not want to bring it home
- Gifts: gift cards are much appreciated. Perhaps we can offer the choice of various stores, not just a grocery store.
- Practical promotional items: agendas, notebooks with pens, lip balm, reusable grocery bags, folders or briefcases to hold the material given.

² A registration form can be found in Appendix A.

Proceedings

- 8 sessions, one per week.
- The first part (Sessions 1 to 8 – 2007 document) could be offered in the fall (October-November) and the second (9 to 16) at the end of winter (February-March).
- Schedule: during the week; Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday; no condensed weekend.
- From 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (with break and snack), or from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., which would include a meal – good idea as some women may have financial problems, especially at the end of the month.
- For the snacks, ensure that there is a large quantity of high-quality foods, especially at the end of the month: fruits and vegetables, hummus, cheeses, etc. and provide containers so that the women can bring leftovers home.
- Structure the session in three parts: 30-30-30 + 15 minutes for the assessment, as well as time for a break or one hour for lunch.
- The participants indicated that they liked role-playing exercises.

Challenges

- Present themes from the most general to the most intimate.
- Guests may make presentations on themes of interests for the group: nutrition, health, fraud, managing finances, etc... This would involve two additional meetings.
- The participants like to receive information, learn about existing resources, references, tools.
- The theme of the following week could be announced.