Caregiver Conversations

Summary and Sample

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THE BAKER CENTER
FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

PPAL
Parent/Professional Advocacy League

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OVERVIEW

Caregiver Conversations is a faith-based, community-led support program for parents and caregivers of children and teens. There are 4 Caregiver Conversations agendas that cover the following topics: effective advocacy, strengthening communication, relationship building, and caregiver wellness. Groups are 90-minutes. The series is designed as an open group where members can attend as many sessions as they would like at any point in time. This means that group members are welcome to repeat topics and attend more than 4 sessions. The group agendas are designed to be flexible. Each agenda covers a few teaching points and includes related discussion questions. Parents/caregivers are encouraged to reflect on this content and how it relates to their current parenting practices. At the end of each session, parents/caregivers are asked to identify one step they can take toward reaching their personal parenting goals.

NOTES:

GROUP TOPICS



Effective Advocacy

This guide creates a space for parents/caregivers to discuss challenges that they have experienced when trying to advocate for their child in different settings. It also provides practical strategies and resources to advocate for services and supports for children and teens.

Strengthening Communication

This guide provides new strategies for strengthening communication skills between parents/caregivers and their children/teens. Parents/caregivers will be able to practice new communication skills, ask questions, and learn from one another in a safe and honest way.





Relationship Building

This guide introduces parents/caregivers to special activities to do with their child/teen (i.e., quality time), and ways to talk to their child teen that show love and engagement (e.g., praise). Parents/caregivers are also invited to reflect on their childhood experience with their own parents and on their parenting values.

Caregiver Wellness

This guide explores the importance of engaging in activities that support parent/caregiver wellness. In doing so, it creates a space for parents/caregivers to identify their own wellness needs and plan for small ways to incorporate wellness activities into their lives.



SESSION FORMAT

1. Group Objectives

Each session guide will open with a brief set of objectives for the group. These goals highlight the key take-aways for that topic to help facilitators guide the conversation.

2. Materials

A list of required materials will be included at the beginning of each guide.

3. Opening Prayer

Each group will open with a prayer. Facilitators will first ask if any group member would like to lead the group in this opening prayer. Inviting group members to participate in this way increases engagement. If no one is comfortable taking on this role, the facilitator can lead the group in their own prayer, or use the prayer included in the guide.



4. Introductions

The facilitator will begin by introducing themselves, including their name, role in the church, experience caring for children/teens, experience serving the community, etc. The facilitator will then provide some basic information about the group.

Next, the facilitator will ask each group member to introduce themselves, including their name, the ages of the child(ren) in their care, and one thing they hope to get out of this group. There is a section on each guide to take notes on each member and their goals.

5. Group Rules

At the beginning of each group, the facilitator will read the list of rules to the group. It is important to set expectations for safe and respectful participation. If difficult dynamics occur later in the session, the facilitator can refer the group back to these rules. It may also be helpful to have these rules printed and displayed in group. After reading the rules, the facilitator should invite members to add anything they feel is important. Note, however, that this whole process should take no more than 5 minutes.

6. Welcome Question

Each session will begin with an opening discussion question called the Welcome Question. The goal of this question is to ease members into conversation and allow them to begin reflecting on that day's topic. This discussion should last 10 minutes.

7. Pray

Selected passages from the Bible will be included to introduce each topic. Facilitators should read these passages to the group and connect them to the goals for that session.

8. Ask

Next, more targeted reflection questions will be introduced to help group members think more critically about the session topic.

9. Teach

The Teach sections of each guide include the key teaching points for the topic and related discussion questions. Keep in mind that this group is not intended to feel like a class. The goal is to introduce some new information and then invite group members to consider how this information applies to them and their families. Greater emphasis should be placed on discussion than on teaching.

10. Discussion

Once all the teaching content has been introduced, the facilitator will introduce some more general discussion questions for the group to think more broadly about the topic.

The final discussion questions invite group members to reflect on the key take-aways from the group and identify the specific steps they will take to apply those take-aways with their family.

11. Wrap-Up

Each group will close with a closing prayer. As with the opening prayer, the facilitator will first invite a group member to lead the closing prayer. If no one volunteers, the group facilitator can offer their own closing prayer or use the prayer included in the session guide.

12. Facilitator Tips

Throughout each guide, there are boxes with tips for facilitators to keep the group running smoothly. Facilitators are also welcome to refer back to this Facilitation Guide as needed.

13. Additional Information and Resources

Some guides will also include a section with additional information and resources for facilitators. For example, the Relationship Building guide includes common questions or concerns and provides suggestions on how to respond to them.

Sample Excerpt from Group Agenda

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

25 minutes

OPENING PRAYER (2 mins)

Ask:

Would someone like to lead us in an opening prayer?



Optional opening prayer if needed:

> *Dear God, You are so awesome and amazing. You are such a loving, kind, and caring Father. We thank you so much for being such a gracious and giving God. Thank you, God, especially for giving us the Holy Spirit as an advocate. As You have left us with an advocate, please give every person present in this group the skills and tools to advocate effectively for the children that we love and care for in Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

NOTES

WELCOME QUESTION (10 mins)

Say:
We will start each group with a welcome question. The welcome question is a way for the group to engage and connect immediately to set the tone for our time together.

Ask:
Who is someone who has advocated for you? What did they do? What effect did it have?

FACILITATOR TIPS!

- If someone did not have an advocate as a child/teen, you can ask:
  - What supports they would have liked someone to help you advocate for?
  - What is an example of advocacy you saw for someone else (sibling, classmate, friend, etc.)?
- In the **Notes** section, write down key points and challenges to bring into later conversation.

NOTES

ADVOCACY TIPS

57 minutes



PRAY (3 mins)

(Scripture: Proverbs 31:9) "Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice. Speak out for justice! Stand up for the poor and destitute!" Amen.

Say:
Remember that no matter how old or young the children you love are, they will need you to defend, advocate, and fight for them in every space until they have built the skills to do it for themselves. You are their primary advocate and must do so with diligence.

ASK (7 mins)

What has been the biggest barrier you have faced to effectively advocating for your child?

FACILITATOR TIPS!

- Remember to normalize group members' challenges and celebrate their successes.

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THE NETWORKS WE BUILD (10 mins)

Say:
Even after taking the rights steps and saying the right things, sometimes there is only so much you can do alone! When you are struggling to navigate your child's educational, social services, or DCF case journey, you can use the following strategies to **A.I.M** for success! Please follow along on your **Effective Advocacy handout**.

A Ask for help

Asking for help is hard and requires humility, but there is always someone willing and available to support you.

- Utilize the support available to you, including social workers, guidance counselors, family liaisons, DCF workers, pastors, and your church community.
- Needing help does not make you "less than." None of us is perfect and we are all more successful with a community of people who want us to be successful.
- Be honest and vulnerable so that those around you know exactly what you need.

✝ *(Gal 6:2) "Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law."*

I Be Involved

Whether you join a parent community in school, the local community, or church, find a space to connect with trusted people who will support you and who you will support. There is strength in numbers. No man is an island.

- Attend groups that lend support in areas where you need help the most.
- Find ways to be involved in parent committees at your child's school/school district.
- Connect with church Bible studies or small groups to build your spiritual strength and faith community.

✝ *(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12) "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."*

M Make strides continuously

Consistent movement, no matter how small, always takes you one step closer to your goals.

- Take advantage of free local workshops and trainings that will give you the skills needed to navigate education and social systems.
- Consider the benefits of individual and family therapy to identify and address root concerns and traumas.
- Be open to out of the home supports like community centers, mentoring agencies, and parenting classes.

✝ *(1 Corinthians 15:58) "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."*

Ask:

- Who are the supports in your community?
- In what ways are you involved in groups that support you?
- What are areas where you would like more support?
  - How can you find that support?

NOTES

GROUP PLANNING GUIDE

USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO BEGIN PLANNING YOUR CAREGIVER CONVERSATIONS GROUPS

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01 WHAT TIME OF DAY WILL I HOLD GROUPS?

NIGHTS ☐ WEEKENDS ☐ OTHER ☐

---

02 HOW OFTEN WILL I RUN GROUPS?

WEEKLY ☐ BIWEEKLY ☐ MONTHLY ☐

---

03 HOW WILL I REMIND MEMBERS OF UPCOMING GROUPS?

_____

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04 PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING FOR YOUR FIRST 4 GROUPS:

DATE: _____ TIME: _____ TOPIC: _____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____ TOPIC: _____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____ TOPIC: _____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____ TOPIC: _____

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05 HOW WILL PEOPLE REGISTER?

☐ **EMAIL ME**

How will I keep track of registrants? _____

☐ **SIGN-UP LINK**

How will I set up the link (e.g., Google Forms)? _____

☐ **OTHER** _____

06 HOW WILL I HOLD GROUPS?

☐ **VIRTUALLY**

WHAT PLATFORM WILL I USE (E.G., GOOGLE MEET, ZOOM, TEAMS, ETC.)?

_____

HOW WILL I MAKE SURE PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO USE THE PLATFORM (E.G., HOLD AN INFO SESSION, RECORD A HOW TO VIDEO, ETC.)?

_____

HOW WILL I MAKE SURE MEMBERS ARE JOINING FROM A PRIVATE SPACE?

_____

HOW WILL TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES BE HANDLED DURING GROUP?

_____

☐ **IN PERSON**

WHAT SPACE WILL I USE?

_____

	YES	NO
IS IT PRIVATE?	☐	☐
IS THERE ENOUGH SEATING?	☐	☐
IS IT ACCESSIBLE (TRANSPORTATION, HANDICAP ACCESS)?	☐	☐
DO I NEED TO RESERVE IT IN ADVANCE?	☐	☐

If yes, who do I contact? Name: _____

Contact: _____

	YES	NO
WILL I PROVIDE DRINKS/FOOD?	☐	☐

WHO DO I CONTACT FOR BUILDING-RELATED CONCERNS (E.G., LOCKED DOOR)? _____

07 WE RECOMMEND GROUPS OF **3-8 MEMBERS**. HOW WILL I RECRUIT FOR MY GROUPS?

PEOPLE I KNOW WHO MIGHT ATTEND:

PEOPLE I KNOW WHO CAN HELP ME RECRUIT:

PLACES I CAN ADVERTISE (E.G., LISTSERVS, EMAIL, SOCIAL MEDIA, CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS, PAPER FLYERS, SUNDAY SCHOOL, MINISTRIES WITHIN CHURCH, SCHOOL, LIBRARY, ETC.)

WHAT I WILL SAY TO RECRUIT GROUP MEMBERS:

EXAMPLE SCRIPT: We are starting a new group for parents and caregivers of children and teens. The goal is to have a safe place for parents/caregivers to talk about their parenting experiences and learn new strategies to strengthen their families. The group will cover topics like strategies for advocating for your family, ways to strengthen communication, how to build your relationship with your child/teen, and tips for wellness. We know raising children is a journey and you are not in it alone! Our first group is: _____ (date/location). Would you be interested in joining us?

08

WHAT ARE SOME BARRIERS THAT MIGHT MAKE RECRUITMENT DIFFICULT (E.G., SCHEDULING, TIME COMMITMENT, CHILDCARE, TRANSPORTATION)? HOW CAN I PLAN AROUND THESE BARRIERS?

Potential barrier:	Solution:

09

WILL I HAVE A CO-FACILITATOR?

☐ YES

WHO: _____

CONTACT INFO: _____

MEETING TIME: _____

☐ NO

WHO IS MY EMERGENCY BACK-UP: _____

CONTACT INFO: _____

10

HOW WILL I CHECK IN ON MY STRESS AND WELL-BEING WHILE FACILITATING GROUPS?

_____

_____

WHAT WILL I DO TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF WHILE RUNNING GROUPS?

_____

_____

Sample Group Recruitment Flyer

Caregiver Conversations

Are you looking for a safe place to connect with others on the parenting journey?

[DATE] 2023





Join us for a free, 90-minute faith-based session for parents and caregivers of children and teens to share their parenting experiences, support one another, and learn targeted strategies in the following topics:

- ☑ Growing your relationship with your child
- ☑ Taking care of your wellness as a caregiver
- ☑ Advocating for supports for your child
- ☑ Strengthening communication with your child

To Register:

[REGISTRATION]

[TIME]

[LOCATION]

For more information, contact: [CONTACT INFO]