

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LEADERS

This set of instructions is meant for church leaders who may have sensed a calling to serve in ministry of Mood Disorders Sharing and Praying Support Groups. As it has been successful for Grace Baptist Church of Bowie, we pray that it may be blessed with success in your church.

NATURE OF THE MINISTRY

Care receivers and care givers do not have a choice about the length of time they will deal with the mood disorders affecting them. Mood disorders are often permanent, but by God's grace, they are manageable. From the beginning, the Lord put in our hearts to make this ministry a permanent, weekly, throughout the year, with exceptions on Christmas day, and other holidays when they fall on the day when we meet.

FOCUS ON SHARING AND PRAYING

The meetings revolve around sharing of weekly experiences related to the mood disorders that those attending are willing to share. The meetings close with prayer and praises related to the experiences we have shared. Sometimes we pray as one group, and sometimes divide into 3 or 4 smaller groups.

MEETINGS

The Mood Disorders Share and Prayer Support Group of Grace Baptist Church of Bowie currently meets on Tuesday evenings. The leaders get together at 6:30 PM to prepare for the evening. This usually consists of praying, printing and folding handouts, laying them out on the outside table, laying out a snacks table, and bringing each other up to date with ministry-relevant news. The rest of the group starts to come at 6:55 PM and we wrap up around 8:30 PM. The snacks are an important part of the ministry, because they help people to feel more "at home", gives them a sense that someone cares, and it is just plain fun. The next few paragraphs describe what we do on our regular meetings and the focus of each section of our meeting.

6:55 to 7:10 – REFRESHMENTS and Connections – This part of our meetings is a light, social part, allowing people to come, relax, and eat a snack. This approach also allows the group to have a good number before starting the next part. The snack table is open during the entire meeting and all are welcomed to grab a snack and just talk.

7:10 to 7:15 – Prayer, welcome, sharing of first names – In this section we open our meeting in prayer. After one minute of praying we prepare the group as a whole. We always share our first names with those attending. Whenever there is a first-time attendee, we read the “Pillars and Expectations” document so they understand what the group is all about.

7:15 to 8:00 – Sharing time. This is the core of the ministry and is very important to enter in a thoughtful, Christian-like, open-minded, non-critical way. When possible and appropriate, the appointed leader reads one of the “Calls to Share” excerpts. The “Calls to Share” statements are carefully worded paragraphs designed to help people’s hearts prepare for sharing. We emphasize the care giver’s perspective along with the perspective of the care receiver, as they cope together with mood-related struggles. Care givers and care receivers struggle together to cope with their mood disorders as a team. This approach appears to meet the needs other care givers and care receivers who have come to the group looking for help. We encourage people to write down praises and prayer requests during this time, because it is very practical. The back of the handouts have space for people to write down prayer requests and reasons for praise.

8:00 to 8:20 – Devotional time. We have utilized two different ways to share scripture. We may use our organically-developed materials, or the “Thrive” book, published by the Grace Alliance (Padilla & Stanford, 2012).

The first approach is to use materials we have written. These resources are available for free at our website. When using our materials, we print them, fold them, and lay them out on our outside table. Attendees serve themselves to the handouts as they come, and we also keep some with us to hand out. We read the Biblical references to incorporate Christian principles to our ministry. We read the questions to the group and open the floor for sharing. The focus of this sections is to integrate biblical principles to our struggling with mood disorders as care givers and care receivers.

The second approach has been to utilize a published curriculum. In our first year we used the “Thrive” material developed as a one-on-one coaching curriculum for people struggling with a mental health condition. It consists of 4 main divisions (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) and twenty sections in all. The Mental Health Alliance developed and published this resource. This organization publishes resources for support groups.

8:20 – 8:30 - In this part of our meeting we give opportunity to bring up last-minute prayer requests and praises. If we have enough time and our group is large, we break up the group into groups of 4 or 5 people. By this time, everybody has developed their own list of prayer requests and praises. Ideally, everyone in each group will have opportunity to pray. When the initial group is small (less than ten) or if we have run short of time, we let one person pray for the group.

POST-MEETING NETWORKING

8:30 - ? – We have found that, after praying, while closing for the meeting for the evening, some social networking of significant value takes place. There is no structured guide to this part of the meeting, and should not be under-estimated.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

We encourage anybody in the community interested in getting help to cope with mood disorders to attend our meetings. While we do not discourage anyone from attending our meetings, we are not apologetic about the fact that we incorporate our Christian, Bible-based faith into this ministry. We have been blessed that people in the Bowie community, including people of other faiths, and people not subscribing to our Christian beliefs have been attending our meetings.