



NATIONAL SPASMODIC DYSPHONIA ASSOCIATION

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NSDA Support Group Tips

Meeting the needs of the membership is one obvious goal of a Support Group. However, there is no single cookbook approach to operating a successful support group. There are a number of steps which groups have found effective and they are mentioned below. You may select some or all of them as you see fit.

Some groups meet a few times a year and all the members find that satisfactory. Other groups meet every month. The majority of groups meet between every other month or quarterly. Some people's lives are just too busy for monthly meetings unless there is a very active leader(s) working to put together meeting programs, not just chat sessions.

It's great that you have linkage with the medical community because that can be very helpful. A medical professional would act in an advisory capacity and not be a member. Nor would they solicit the membership for business; they would basically be volunteers doing a good cause. This is a role that speech pathologists might be attracted to. A doctor would be wonderful but highly impractical because nearly all have too many time constraints.

Having guest speakers frequently helps attendance in most groups. An otolaryngologist, neurologist, speech therapist, acupuncturist, chiropractor and even massage therapist can all be valuable to attract members to meetings *provided they can address SD*.

It is best to recruit guest speakers well in advance. Some groups line up all their speakers for the entire year by the fourth quarter of the previous year. This is particularly important for doctors who have many demands on their time.

It is best to have meeting schedules firmly lined up for the year and known by all. That way, everyone can plan well in advance and it helps members remember when meetings are going to be held, i.e. the 3rd Saturday of every month.

Members should receive a meeting reminder at the beginning of the month that a meeting will be held. Ideally it should be followed up by a telephone call reminder early in the week that the meeting will be

held. If possible, it should be done by someone the support group leader can delegate. Having one or more assistants empowers them and gives relief to the support group leader.

Many people work or cannot/will not drive at night. Best time for a meeting may be Saturday morning around 10:00 a.m. or on Sunday afternoons.

Best places for a meeting are: a hospital community service meeting room; church meeting room; meeting room in a medical clinic / doctor's office; meeting room on a university/hospital campus. Restaurants can work but put pressure on people to buy something and the fear of not being able to be heard in a (loud) restaurant can keep people away.

Strongly encourage people to bring their spouses, best friend or significant others to every meeting.

At the meeting, everyone who wishes to, should have an opportunity to speak. Go around the room and give everyone the chance to talk. The leader must be a diplomatic facilitator and ensure that no one person dominates the conversation, including themselves.

Every meeting should have a theme. It could revolve around a guest speaker. It could be the discussion of a book someone read; viewing a pertinent DVD such as the NSDA DVD. It might be a discussion on coping skills of how to reduce stress, survive a job interview, speak on the phone, dealing with SD in the workplace, etc.

Try to arrange the meeting place seats in a circle if possible, so people speaking can be viewed by everyone.

Try to share your responsibilities, delegating jobs to others. This gives you relief and gives others more of a sense of commitment.

Once or twice a year, social outings, such as a picnic or barbeque, are good. Everyone should be encouraged to bring their family and just have fun together.

This list was compiled by Mel Dubovick, NSDA Regional Representative, Eastern US