

Begin a TRIAD Support Group! Make a Difference!

9-09-2013

Who can become a TRIAD support group founder and facilitator?

Anyone who has been a part of the TRIAD experience, such as adult adoptee, birth parent or adoptive parent can begin a support group. A facilitator must have a genuine desire and a strong commitment to bring people together with a common cause. A facilitator must be a “good listener and communicate well” as well as be able to keep the members on track with the topic of conversation. Also, a facilitator informs the group that there will be one person speaking at a time, so that everyone can hear the speaker’s points of view.

Adult adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents have lived the journey of post adoption and have their personal experience to share. Many people have probably never been able to share their thoughts, feelings and emotions with anyone, so attending a support group may be their first experience in sharing their “reality” and their true feelings. Talk therapy provides different perspectives and different ways of viewing the complex subject of adoption. Adult adoptees come to share their individual experiences as adoptee, who also have biological histories. Adoptive parents have an opportunity to express their feelings and emotions and have an opportunity to learn about their child’s thoughts and life experience through other adoptees. They, too, will learn about the birth parents experience from birth of their child through to the time their child is of adult age. Birth parents have their own experience... a story that needs to be shared with adoptees and adoptive parents. All can learn and grow from their personal perspective and shared experiences, Everyone learns something about the very complex post adoption journey.

Everyone that participates in a support group can learn a great deal about themselves; can better understand the adoptee, birth parent/family and adoptive parent/family experiences; and everyone gains the opportunity to understand the importance of openness and honesty in the post adoption arena.

What can a person do to prepare to facilitate a support group?

Anyone who desires to lead a support group needs to be well informed. Therefore, it is suggested to read every post adoption book that a person can get their hands on. Most libraries do not carry “post adoption” books. However, a person can purchase books by ordering the titles at a book store, or purchase “used books” on various internet sites, such as amazon.com – some books cost only 50 cents to one dollar. Read anything and everything about the experiences of all sides of the adoption TRIAD. Go to another support group in your state to get pointers or contact other facilitators.

A new facilitator needs to attend other “types” of support groups.

Inquire about other support groups in your state and make arrangements to attend. There are several different types of groups at hospitals, churches and other local

meeting places. Call to inquire about a group meeting to see how it is structured so that you can get a feel for how groups operate.

Steps to set up your Support Group.

1. **What type of Support Group?** A TRIAD Support Group (comprised of adult adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents, as well as spouses, significant others, extended family members and friends) offers the most awareness and education for each member of the TRIAD. Each person will learn about the lifelong journey of adoption from other people's perspective, as well as learn about the deeply emotional aspects from everyone who participates in the group. Other groups can be for adult adoptees only, or for birth parents only, or for adoptive parents only; however, I think the TRIAD support group brings the most education and awareness that is critical to our lives now and in the future.
2. **Name your Support Group:** Decide on a meaningful name for your group – one that will catch the eye of someone who has been touched by an adoption experience. Circle of Hope uses “TRIAD post adoption support” to identify the type of support offered.
3. **Meeting Date & Time:** Establish a uniform date and time for your monthly support group meeting, such as the 1st Tuesday of the month, or 3rd Thursday of the month at a time that has been established, such as 7:00 p.m.
4. **Meeting Place:** Find a central location for your support group; (if you feel comfortable having your meetings in your home, that is what works in the beginning), otherwise inquire at churches, hospitals, community centers, senior centers, etc. to find a location suitable for your group meetings. (Prepare a flyer to offer a potential meeting place, so they can understand the type of group you will be promoting.) I contacted an adoption agency in a quest to find a meeting place... and this agency offered a room for our support group evenings FREE of charge! (Thus, no financial support is required from the membership!)
5. **Advertising (free):** Call all area newspapers for **free** local advertising; sometimes, the newspapers will have a “Community Calendar” or a “Support Group Listing”. Explain the value of having a local support listing in their newspaper that will prove to be a vital resource for their readers – tell them about various types of support groups that could gather together in your city. If you cannot find any free local advertising, decide what you could afford to pay for a month of advertising. In the past, I have gathered the names, contacts and phone numbers of various support groups and compiled a “Support Group Directory” that included heart, cancer, and other medical associations and support groups, AA and Al-Anon Groups, a variety... and offer the “Directory” to newspapers in my area. (Place your support group under “A” - Adoption: Post Adoption Support Group, date, time & meeting place; and in the manner you want to promote your group. People will see it first under “A”, rather than under “P” - Post Adoption area.)

6. **Other Ways to Advertise:** Prepare a flyer that will state the following:
- A. Support Group name
 - B. Day, numerical date and time (Monday, August 15, 2013)
 - C. Location of the meeting (central location)
 - D. Directions to the location of the meeting
 - E. Short description of the purpose of your support group
 - F. Contact information
 - G. RSVP would be helpful, if you want to know who plans to attend.

Flyer Information – be creative so that your flyer will be noticed!

Places to post your flyers on bulletin boards, to name a few:

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| 1. Libraries | 4. Churches | 7. Adoption Agencies |
| 2. Laundromats | 5. Colleges | 8. Therapist Offices |
| 3. Grocery Stores | 6. Social Services | 9. Doctors Offices |

7. **Notification of Support Group Members:** Email provides a simple method of notifying members. It also eliminates the cost factors for paper, envelopes, stamps, and eliminates a LOT of work! Prepare a template with the important information about your support group; then, cut and paste it with new information each month!
8. **Support Group Fees:** Because there are so many costs and so much money spent in adoption, it is suggested that the support group be a “free” group. When there is no money involved, the membership grows and does not get intimidated by the fact that money is collected - - everyone is happier. (If the support group decides to do fundraising, etc. and provide special activities, then you have to keep accurate records, especially if the 501 (3) C designation is desired.)
9. **First Support Group Meeting:** Gather members around a table or in a circle of chairs. Facilitator shares the purpose of the support group and inquires what the members would like to gain from the meetings. Ask each person ... BRIEFLY... to share who they are, what part of the TRIAD they have experienced (adult adoptee, birth parent, adoptive parents, spouse, or other family/friend), and a few thoughts about their adoption experience. (Keep the introductions moving, or they will get bogged down.)
10. **Future Meetings:** After the group has met a few times, and has had the opportunity to get to know each other, and no new members are in attendance, then the group can begin to discuss special subjects after the introductions. Different subjects, just to name a few... could include:

- *Discuss the seven (7) core issues of post adoption core issues for all.
- *Adoptee’s feelings & emotions when they find out they are adopted
- *Adoptee’s thinking about their birth family, wanting to search for them
- *Adoptee’s wanting their Original Birth Certificate (OBC)
- *Birthmother’s emotional experience in having to relinquish her baby
- *Birthmother’s experience in trying to “go on with their life”
- *Birthparents decision to search for child relinquished

- *Adoptive parents raising a child(ren) without any biological information
- *Adoptive parents wondering about their adult child's experiences
- *Adoptive parents being honest with adoptee and being supportive
- *Discuss searching and reunion possibilities and how this will affect you and your family.
- *Searching: discuss the issues, ideas and processes for searching
- *Finding: what to do upon finding, how to proceed, HELP!!
- *First Contact – What type of contact – phone, email, person to person?
- *Share experiences regarding searching, finding, and making first contact... talk about what to expect in the adjustment phase?

Note: Each group can be as creative as they wish to be... have monthly subjects to discuss; decide special projects, such as hold a "Registration Day" at a book store to educate and bring awareness about adoption; plan a picnic for the group on a holiday or celebrating a reunion; make quilt squares to sew together to make a quilt regarding post adoption; set up a speaker's bureau to speak at functions, or schedule an informational meeting with your Mental Health Association of your county to educate and bring awareness about post adoption to those who are not aware of the impacts of relinquishment and adoption issues at all stages of life, etc.

Helpful Tips:

- A. Membership Profile Form: When people call, jot notes on a "Membership Profile Form" (request form from Sondi Hill at circle92@juno.com). This form will keep you informed about the new members and their experience; it is easy to forget when your support group grows with a lot members. The profile form will provide all the information at your fingertips, and is a very helpful tool, especially if a member calls you for support and assistance. Keep them in a 3 ring binder for easy access... in alphabetical order. The facilitator can retrieve the profile form to be able to offer assistance.
- B. Articles of Interest: Gather interesting articles about personal post adoption experiences of adult adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents, regarding their search, finding and reuniting to share with the members at the meetings.
- C. Post Adoption Information: Provide any adoption information, such as International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR) Forms, American Adoption Congress (AAC) membership forms; state registry information (can be obtained from internet sites) that you can find in your area or that you can gather at other seminars, conferences, or meetings.
- D. Post Adoption Web Sites: Provide a list of web sites with post adoption information for adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents, such as:
www.americanadoptioncongress.org and
www.adoptivefamilies.org, etc.

- E. Post Adoption Book List: Provide a book list of post adoption books that are available, or share the books you have read that would be of value to your group. (Can obtain a comprehensive book list from: circle92@juno.com)

For further information or assistance:

Contact Circle of Hope, FL TRIAD Post Adoption Support Group
circle92@juno.com Call 561-967-7079 – Southeast Florida.