



Dealing with Sensitive Issues in Support Groups

Running support groups specifically for families formed through permanent care and adoption provides a valuable and much needed service. It offers families the opportunity to make social connections with others who have similar lived experiences; and offers parents an avenue for receiving understanding and support. Often with common lived experience comes a sense of connectedness and comfortability in sharing personal information.

Having a discussion with your group and thinking through strategies on how to handle some of the potentially sensitive situations can be very worthwhile.

Some situations to get the group thinking:

- Children cannot be expected to understand confidentiality and may innocently repeat information at inopportune times. When discussing sensitive information or emotive topics that involve others, be aware that children may be listening.
- Parenting children can at times be overwhelming, frustrating and even isolating. A support/playgroup can offer empathy and understanding for parents and is often one of the best benefits of attending the group. There may be times when parents require more support or assistance than the group can offer. For these situations, it could be useful to have a list of appropriate professional services with contact details to offer as suggestions. Also remember that Permanent Care and Adoptive Families has a range of resources and information that could be helpful (see our website www.pcfamilies.org.au).
- In any group situation, it is unavoidable that at times children's behaviour will impact on other children in different ways. Similarly, parents can interpret and respond to these situations in different ways. Your group can develop strategies to minimise misunderstandings and improve communication, such as having clear group guidelines.
- Families have different approaches to disciplining their children and not everyone will agree with other parents' methods. Discussions and sharing around different parenting strategies could be a positive way to support and learn from each other. Consider using the PCA Families Fact Sheet on parenting tips, "Time-in versus Time-out" as a helpful resource. This is available on the PCA Families website.

Remember that the staff at PCA Families are here to support you. We are happy to talk with you about any issues facing your group and offer suggestions or resources that could help.

Confidentiality

Support groups can provide a safe place for parents to share their concerns, sensitive issues and experiences, so they need to feel that information will be kept confidential. This is particularly pertinent for families negotiating the complexities that often come with family formation through permanent care and adoption. An environment of trust and safety allows group members to share more openly with others, and confidentiality is an essential component.

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Confidentiality generally is defined as never discussing, without direct consent, the circumstances of another group member. However, peoples' ideas about what it means to keep confidences can be quite different. It can be helpful and important to talk about confidentiality as a whole group and write up what you have agreed to. New members also need to be informed about confidentiality, and agree to the statement.

Here are some ideas around confidentiality to consider:

- Each person will have a different view of how public or private their individual family story, and their children's individual stories, should be.
- Confidentiality can be compromised sometimes even without intention. In any small local community, and indeed in the community of permanent care and adoption, it is often very easy to identify individuals even when names are not used.
- All group members' personal information (address, phone number, email) is to be respected and not to be given out to anyone for any reason, without permission from the member concerned.
- A confidentiality statement could greatly assist in dealing with many sensitive issues, and in maintaining a safe and respectful environment in the group.

Additional Resources

PCA Families has a range of resources and services available which have been carefully selected to address the specific needs of families formed through permanent care and adoption:

- Fact sheets, articles and other resources available on line at www.pcafamilies.org.au
- Online bookstore which offers relevant books to purchase, and can be accessed at <http://shop.pcafamilies.org.au/>
- PCA Families has a specialist referral database of professionals who have been identified as qualified, responsive and experienced in dealing with the issues facing permanent care and adoptive families.

To contact PCA Families ring (03) 9020 1833, or email info@pcafamilies.org.au