



Sample Support Group Meeting Formats

Support groups can take many shapes depending on the needs of your members. Some meetings focus on discussion, some on learning, and others on simply connecting with one another.

Below are several meeting formats facilitators can rotate throughout the year to keep meetings engaging, informative, and supportive.

Each format also includes time for community and group announcements, allowing facilitators and members to share information about upcoming events, helpful resources, or personal updates with the group.

1. Open Discussion Format

Best for: Encouraging peer connection and sharing lived experiences.

This flexible format allows members to talk about what is currently on their minds. It works well for groups that are comfortable sharing and benefit from hearing different perspectives.

Suggested Structure

Welcome and Check-In (10 minutes)

Begin by welcoming attendees and briefly introducing yourself.

Example opening:

“Welcome everyone. We're glad you're here today. Our support group is a place where we can share experiences, learn from one another, and remind each other that no one has to navigate Parkinson's alone.”

Invite a brief check-in.

Participants may share:

- Name

- How things have been going recently
- One small success or challenge

Facilitators may also choose to occasionally **replace the standard update with a lighthearted question** to help members get to know one another in a different way. These small prompts can help create connection and make the group feel more relaxed and personal.

Examples include:

- What is your favorite place in Wisconsin?
- Do you prefer coffee or tea?
- What is a hobby you enjoy?
- What music do you like to listen to?
- What is a favorite season or outdoor activity?

These simple questions can encourage participation and help members learn about one another's interests and preferences.

Group Discussion (30–35 minutes)

Invite open conversation.

Helpful prompts:

- What has been going well recently?
- What has been challenging lately?
- Has anyone discovered something helpful they would like to share?

Facilitator tip:

Encourage participation but allow people to pass if they prefer just to listen.

Community and Group Announcements (5–10 minutes)

Share any upcoming opportunities or invite members to share announcements.

Examples may include:

- Upcoming WPA programs or events
- Local exercise or wellness opportunities

- Educational programs or conferences
- Volunteer opportunities
- Personal milestones or community news

Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

End with appreciation and encouragement.

Example closing:

“Thank you all for sharing today. Every story shared here helps someone else feel understood. We look forward to seeing you again next month.”

2. Topic-Focused Discussion Format

Best for: Exploring specific Parkinson’s topics in a conversational way.

Choose one topic that is relevant to the group.

Examples:

- Sleep challenges
- Medication timing
- Staying active with Parkinson’s
- Balance and fall prevention
- Care partner stress and support

Suggested Structure

Welcome and Brief Check-In (10 minutes)

Invite participants to share their name and a short update.

Topic Introduction (5 minutes)

Introduce the topic.

Example:

“Today we’re going to talk about sleep challenges and Parkinson’s. Many people experience changes in sleep patterns, and sharing strategies can often help.”

Group Discussion (30–35 minutes)

Prompt discussion with questions:

- What challenges have you experienced related to this topic?
- What strategies have helped you?
- Is there something you wish you had known earlier?

Community and Group Announcements (5–10 minutes)

Provide time for:

- WPA announcements
- Upcoming events or programs
- Community resources
- Member updates or opportunities

Closing (5 minutes)

Summarize key insights from the conversation and thank participants for contributing.

3. Educational Meeting Format

Best for: Groups that want to learn practical information.

These meetings may include:

- Guest speakers
- Educational videos
- Printed resources
- Facilitator-led teaching

Suggested Structure

Welcome and Check-In (10 minutes)

Brief introductions or updates.

Educational Presentation (20–30 minutes)

Examples include:

- Guest speaker (physical therapist, neurologist, speech therapist)

- Viewing an educational video
- Facilitator sharing prepared educational content

Discussion and Questions (15–20 minutes)

Invite participants to share reflections or ask questions.

Helpful prompts:

- What stood out to you from today's information?
- Has anyone tried something similar?
- What questions do you still have?

Community and Group Announcements (5–10 minutes)

Share information about:

- WPA programs and educational opportunities
- Local Parkinson's events
- Exercise classes or wellness programs
- Clinical trial opportunities or community resources

Closing (5 minutes)

Encourage participants to take one helpful idea from the meeting into their week.

4. Peer Problem-Solving Format

Best for: Practical challenges where group wisdom can help.

This format allows members to bring real-life challenges to the group and benefit from the shared experiences of others.

Suggested Structure

Welcome and Check-In (10 minutes)

Brief introductions.

Challenge Discussion (30–35 minutes)

Invite one or two members to share a challenge they are facing.

Example prompts:

- “What is something you are currently trying to figure out?”
- “Is there a daily activity that has become more difficult?”
- “What strategies have others found helpful?”

Facilitator reminder:

This is a space for sharing lived experience rather than giving medical advice.

Community and Group Announcements (5–10 minutes)

Invite members to share helpful resources, programs, or upcoming opportunities.

Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

Ask participants:

- Did anyone hear an idea they might want to try?
 - What felt helpful from today’s discussion?
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5. Social Connection Format

Best for: Strengthening relationships and community.

These meetings focus on connection rather than structured discussion.

Ideas include:

- Coffee and conversation
- Holiday gatherings
- Celebrating milestones
- Sharing hobbies or interests
- Guest demonstrations (exercise, art, music)

Suggested Structure

Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)

Social Activity or Conversation (35–40 minutes)

Encourage relaxed conversation.

Facilitator prompt:

“Today is a chance to simply connect with one another. Community is one of the most powerful supports on the Parkinson’s journey.”

Community and Group Announcements (10 minutes)

Share updates about:

- WPA programs and resources
- Local events
- Support services
- Group member announcements

Closing (5 minutes)

Thank participants and remind them of the next meeting date.

Facilitator Reminder

Every support group develops its own personality over time. Some meetings may follow a structured format, while others may flow more naturally based on the needs of attendees.

What matters most is creating a welcoming space where participants feel safe to share, listen, and support one another.

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