Appendix D – Group Evaluation

Another remedy for the "support-group-gone-stale" is an evaluation that can be in the form of a discussion or, if confidentiality is a concern, a written assessment. The leadership or an ad hoc committee can take on the task of surveying the group members about the effectiveness of the support group. This survey can include both current attendees and members whose attendance has decreased.

The survey should elicit opinions on:

- The group logistics (convenience of time and location).
- The supportive aspect (e.g., facilitation, confidentiality, and productivity).
- Suggestions for improvement.

In reviewing and responding to the results, the administrator(s) of the survey must consider what the group members want their group to be. It is essential that the members have ownership of the support group. It may be necessary for the support group to look beyond their own group and examine the strengths and weaknesses of other support groups in determining how to progress.

An ad hoc committee can consider reading group manuals, meeting with other group leaders, and visiting other support groups to gain information about successful support group functioning. This research will likely show that while support groups are as individual as their membership, there are some common characteristics of successful groups.

Signs of a Strong Support Group

- Consistency in meeting time and place
- A frequency of meetings (at least monthly) that captures interest and maintains gains in participation
- A format focusing on the support group meeting and including a brief amount of time for business
- A coordinator with the ability to delegate responsibility and coordinate activities
- A facilitator with a solid sense of self who is confident and skilled in helping people discuss feelings and resolve conflicts
- A positive, progressive tone encouraging people to move forward
- Cohesion, as evidenced by group members who have something very important in common (brain injury) and who bond through group participation
- Evolution through the loss of regular members and the addition of new members

As a result of acting as a support group leader, leaders will:

- Feel helpful to members.
- Recognize limits of skill to deal with problems faced by persons with brain injury and their families.
- Ask for assistance in working with members.
- Receive help in working with members.
- Learn skills to be more effective leaders.
- As a result of participating in a support group, members will:
- Know how other people deal with their brain injuries.
- Gain support from and give support to other group members.
- Recognize the many ways that brain injury affects people (e.g., deficits, behavior, resulting conditions such as a seizure disorder).
- Know how brain injury affects self, family, and friends.
- See the brain injury as relevant and useful to self.
- Learn and use new adaptive strategies for managing brain injury symptoms.
- Know education and service programs available from BIAC.
- See support group programs as relevant and useful.
- Be given access to other support groups as well as educational opportunities.
- Know about and use community resources learned about in the support group.

Note: Adapted from: Koch, K., (2008). Facilitating self-help groups: A manual for self-help group leaders (p.63-66). National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Support Group Measurement Strategies

To measure the success of your support group, you may want to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of these components: Outputs: Including, but not limited to, number of meetings held and the number of participants served. Outcomes: Describes the difference a program makes in people's lives such as new knowledge gained, changed attitudes or values, or modified behavior.

Outcomes express the expected impact of the program. Examples of methods you may use to measure outcomes are:

- Surveys that measure changes in attitudes, feelings, and self-confidence.
- Surveys of knowledge gained in support group.
- Written program surveys (i.e., questions in which participants indicate the degree to which they agree with the statements in relation to their participation in the group.)
- Focus groups.

BIAC can help your group with evaluations.

Assessment Strategies for Support Group Facilitators

Most l facilitators welcome the opportunity to maximize the effectiveness of their group. Leaders can become aware of the group's needs and areas in which to seek new direction through the measurement process. Group facilitators and members can use the following suggestions to gather information about their group's status:

- Complete the outcome measurement tools and talk about the results as a group.
- Use the "Is My Group Healthy?" questionnaire (at the end of this section).
- Schedule a specified group meeting to talk about how the group is meeting the needs of members and any changes that may need to be made.
- Inform members that BIAC staff and support group leaders are available and open to guide communication about any aspect of the group.

Leaders can also use the following evaluation process:

- Observe the group while the meetings are in session.
- Ask group assessment questions of group members.
- Discuss with the whole group ways to make the group more effective.
- Decide to try a new idea to see if it works and then reevaluate to see if it accomplished what you had hoped.

Group Assessment Questions to Consider Together

- What would you like to see changed in the group? What steps could be taken to make that happen?
- How can group leadership opportunities and responsibilities be shared?
- How can the group's communication and relationship with BIAV and other support groups be improved?

Note: All Support Group Measurement Strategies Adapted from: Koch, K., (2008). Facilitating self-help groups: A manual for self-help group leaders. National Multiple Sclerosis Society

Is My Group Healthy?

	Our group does this well	Our group could use some improvement
People in our group are comfortable talking about themselves.		
Group members talk about how they feel emotionally.		
Members give each other positive feedback.		
Members listen to each other well.		
Members learn ways to deal with feelings.		
Members are encouraged to help themselves.		
Our group welcomes new members.		
Group members include humor and laughter.		
Members feel more informed and empowered when they leave our group.		
Hope is generated within our group.		
Our group functions the way I, as a leader/member/facilitator, would like.		
I leave our group feeling good about it.		
Each person talks or participates in some way.		
I feel comfortable in my role as a group leader/facilitator/member.		
Our group is positive, yet able to deal with problems.		

Note: Adapted from: Koch, K., (2008). Facilitating self-help groups: A manual for self-help group leaders. National Multiple Sclerosis Society.