

QUICK START GUIDE:
PREPARATION AND PLANNING
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If this is the first time you have offered a Group AR program, there are a number of things you should think about in advance. For example:
Where should you hold your program?

- How will you let people know about your program?
- How many participants would you like to attend?
- How much, if anything, will you charge for people to attend?
- What topics will you present at the sessions?

It is also important to prepare handouts for each of the sessions in advance. For example, you may want to consider creating handouts for some of the activities and topics.

As you prepare, remember that it is best that the facilitator aim to do no more than 30% of the talking during the sessions. This gives room for the group to share experiences, insights and suggestions on how to cope with issues related to their hearing difficulties.

Publicize Your Program

It is important to get the word out about your program in your community. Here are a few suggestions.

- Hand out brochures to your patients.
- Post an announcement on a free, online message board like Craigslist.
- Find out if your local community newspaper has a free "community events" calendar. If so, send them information about your program.
- Participate in your area's health care forums and bring brochures to hand out to attendees.
- Find out if there is a Speakers Bureau in your area that has a list of speakers on various topics. Civic organizations are often seeking speakers, and you can offer to speak about hearing loss and treatment at a variety of different venues: elderly centers, libraries, etc. You can inform your audience that you offer group support programs for people with hearing loss.

Icebreaker Introductions

Regardless of whether you want to do a 2 or 8 session program, it is important for group participants to feel comfortable. You can help create a positive environment by helping participants get to know each other and provide them with some basic ground rules.

One of the most important topics for the first session is getting to know each other. You can assume that for many attendees, this will be their first time at a group support program.

One way to help people become comfortable with each other is to use an Icebreaker exercise. You can begin by having everyone (including you) briefly answer the following questions.

- What is your name?
- Name three places where you have lived?
- What hobbies do you have?
- If you weren't here right now, where would you be?
- If you weren't here right now, where do you wish you could be.

This technique helps everyone get to know each other and find things in common.

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Ground Rules for Participants

It is equally important to give group participants guidelines on how they can all contribute to making the program a success. You may want to consider creating a hand-out so that participants can remember the ground rules throughout the program. Some suggestions for ground rules include:

- Get to know others in the group. A friendly interest in other group members may make everyone's group experience more enjoyable.
- Try to learn people's names. And, don't be afraid to ask if you forget. It also helps to have easy-to-see name tags ready for attendees.
- Make sure you are clear about the group's purpose and ground rules.
- Contribute to group discussions. Much can be learned from one another.
- Freely share your thoughts, feelings and experiences. Open up. This will add to the richness of the group.
- Listen carefully to other group members.
- Speak concisely and to the point. Try not to ramble on for too long so that everyone can have a chance to contribute.
- If you find your attention wandering, remind yourself gently that you need to come back to the present.
- If you don't understand something or miss something that is said, please admit it. Everyone in the group may miss something said now and then, so don't feel embarrassed about asking for repetition or clarification.
- Follow the ground rules and encourage others to keep to them. When someone violates a ground rule, gently remind them of the rules.
- Try to go to all the group meetings and do your assigned homework.

(Adapted from Hunter, D, Bailey, A, & Taylor, B (1995). The Zen of Groups, Tucson AZ: Fisher Books)