



Support Group Leader Manual

Updated 3/2007

Barix Clinics Support Group Leaders' Manual

Dear Support Group Leader,

I am pleased you have agreed to lead a support group in your home area. You have chosen to embark on an exciting journey, guiding people who have had bariatric surgery towards reaching their goals. Since you have had bariatric surgery, and have been successful in your weight loss, we are certain you have much to offer.

Success in adjusting to the emotional and physical changes that accompany weight loss surgery is enhanced through participating in support groups with a positive supportive environment. Whether you are an experienced or novice group leader, we hope that you will find the guidelines, tips, and suggestions in the Manual helpful in providing that positive environment, promoting success for your group members.

Barix Clinics is committed to partnering with you to work towards the success and good health of all our support group members. I look forward to a productive, satisfying, and rewarding relationship working along with you to insure the success of your Barix Clinics Support Group.

Sincerely,

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Corporate Nutritionist
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Barix Clinics

Support Group Mission Statement

The Barix Clinics Support Group mission is to help Barix patients to be successful in achieving their weight loss goals by:

Providing a positive, supportive environment in which ongoing education and mutual support and encouragement can take place and through fostering and facilitating the development of supportive personal relationships between patients.

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Your Role as A Barix Clinics Support Group Leader and Facilitator

As a Barix Clinics Support Group Leader, you will be sharing your time, energy, knowledge, compassion, and skill with others like yourself who are experiencing a new life as a result of weight loss surgery. The Barix Clinics Support Group Leaders' role is to facilitate the meeting allowing healthy discussion among peers to help them adjust to their new life, and achieve their personal goals.

According to the dictionary, facilitation is "the act of making easy or easier". Facilitation is different from public speaking, lecturing, advising, debating, and other forms of communication in different ways:

- A facilitator is a moderator. Your role is to keep the dialogue focused, organized, respectful, and dynamic. However, you should not dominate the conversation, give speeches, provide medical advice, or force particular viewpoints on the group.
- A facilitator models behavior and uses his or her experiences to enrich the discussion and provide more depth to the conversation.

The need for both structure and flexibility make facilitation a bit of a balancing act. On the one hand you need to promote a discussion that is open, interesting, and useful. On the other hand, you have the responsibility to keep the discussion focused, structured, and within certain time constraints.

You're going to make many compromises every time you have a meeting, and each time you'll gain new confidence and be able to do it better. There will be times when the participants could go on talking for another three hours on one topic. It is important, however, that you watch the time and keep the meeting moving so that you can meet all of the objectives for the meeting.

In a Barix Support Group Meeting, successful facilitation will allow the members to learn from their own experiences, and from the experiences of others in the room. The combination of your good facilitation and the members' own knowledge and experience can have a powerful role in bringing about change in the individual support group members and on the group involved.

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Agenda for a Successful Barix Clinics Support Group Meeting

The goal of a successful Barix Clinics Support Group Meeting is to bring support, education, and a sense of belonging to a group of people who have had, or are considering, weight loss surgery with Barix Clinics, and are committed to achieving weight loss maintenance goals. Goals, when set properly, require specific actions be taken to achieve the desired outcome. To make the most of your meeting, we will outline essential elements, along with specific actions, that you can take to make your Barix Support Group Meeting successful:

- I. Opening the Meeting
- II. Educational Content
- III. Sharing Success Segment
- IV. Closing the Meeting

Opening a meeting involves welcoming members, setting the tone of the meeting, and brief introductions. The Educational Content serves to assist members by providing information they need to reach their goals. The Sharing segment is a forum for both exchanging information and member sharing of successes and challenges. Bringing closure to the meeting is very important to reinforce the sense of purpose, and clarification of individual goals for the month.

Before each meeting:

- Make sure the meeting room is clean and the seating is adequate and set up appropriately. A circle format will make interaction and discussion among members easier.
- Try to arrive at the meeting 15-30 minutes early to be available to greet each member. Make sure the Sign-In Sheet and copies of the participation agreement are available.
- The Leader and Co-Leader, if both are in attendance, should not sit next to each other. Across from each other is preferable to encourage interaction between members.

If food and beverages are ever served at a meeting, be sure they are **sugar-free and low fat**. Also, be sure to include foods that someone who has recently had surgery would be able to enjoy.

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I. Opening the meeting

For many Leaders, this can be an awkward part of the meeting. Leaders/Facilitators can be most effective at this point by communicating their own personal vision of what they want to get out of the meeting. Remember to start no more than 5-10 minutes past the scheduled time.

This is your chance to be a cheerleader! If you are nervous, it's okay to share that with the group.

1. *Welcome.*

Begin by thanking people for coming, and reinforce the request for all attendees to sign-in on the sign-in sheet. Introduce yourself at every meeting to the whole group, let them know you are a volunteer, and why you are doing this. They'll respect you for taking the time out of your life to do something that shows you care.

Example:

"Hi everyone!

Welcome to our Barix Clinics support group meeting. Thanks for coming.

My name is Mary, I had my surgery at Barix in July of 1997, and I've lost XX pounds. John is our Co-Leader, he had his surgery a year ago last month.

I've been the volunteer Leader of this group for about a year now, and really enjoy sharing what works for me, and learning from all of you.

If you haven't signed in yet, please do so, and get a nametag so we all get to know one another."

2. *Review the format of the meeting with the members.*

- The first portion will focus on a topic/activity presented in the "On Track With Barix Newsletter", found at www.barixclinicsstore.com/newsletter.html. Encourage all of your SG members to sign up to receive the free newsletter, print it, and bring it to the monthly meeting. You should print a few copies for new members. At this point you can announce the topic for the days' meeting.
- The second portion consists of the sharing of support group members goals, successes, and challenges that they have encountered in the previous month.
Special note: please initiate the sharing segment of the meeting by asking the members who are the furthest post-op to begin the sharing. By starting with the furthest post-op members, we insure that everyone, at every post-op stage, has an opportunity to share maintenance goals. If there are pre-surgery patients

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attending, please remember to defer any of their clinical/medical questions on the surgery itself to a Barix Clinics representative.

Example:

“Just to review, as you may already know, the first portion of the meeting is devoted to the monthly topic from the “Barix Clinics Support Group Guide” where we discuss a specific area related to our weight loss surgery, and share with each other our challenges and successes in that area.

Tonight we’re going to discuss “Walking to Fitness” and perhaps gain some new insights on how beneficial a walking program can be. After that discussion, we’ll share our progress on our individual goals.

3. *The Barix Clinics Participation Agreement.*

Briefly review group etiquette by reading the Barix Clinics participation agreement. Reinforce that following the meeting format and participation rules will help insure a more productive, positive, and satisfying meeting for all involved, and will give everyone an opportunity to be heard. Reviewing with members how the meeting is structured helps to keep everyone goal directed, enthusiastic, and participating.

Example:

*“As you signed in I hope you took the time to read over our meeting participation guidelines, I want to remind you that our focus is on following Barix Clinics guidelines for continued weight loss success. Our goal and purpose in getting together is to help each other **focus on our goals** to achieve long-term weight loss, we’re all in this together here. We believe in **staying positive, respecting confidentiality, and giving everyone a chance to be heard to share his or her challenges and successes with weight loss.**”*

4. *Introductions*

Unless it is a very large group, have members introduce themselves individually by briefly saying their name, and indicating when they had their surgery. Sharing total pounds lost is not mandatory, since individuals lose at varying rates, comparing oneself to another can be counter-productive. You can also vary the routine by asking for brief responses to questions such as:

- What would you like to get out of this meeting?
- After your name, identify one positive trait you have.

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- Briefly share one success, small or large, you've had since the last meeting.

Example:

“Let's get started by having everybody briefly introducing themselves, tell when you had your surgery or where you are in the process.

5. Recap of last month's meeting.

- Discuss any new administrative issues, as needed.
- Remind members of the date of the next meeting.

Example:

John has asked me to remind everyone that if you plan to attend the “Moonlight River Cruise” with the group in two weeks that you see him for details. Much thanks to John for organizing this outing.

II. Educational Topic-“On Track With Barix”

The “On Track With Barix” newsletter published monthly, accessible on the www.barixclinicsstore.com/newsletter.html web site. If you experience any difficulty accessing or printing this newsletter for members, contact Barix Clinics for assistance. The newsletter contain valuable information in areas of Nutrition, Exercise, Social and Emotional Adjustments, and Wellness that relate to success in maintaining optimal health following weight loss surgery at Barix Clinics. Each issue features a main topic, recipes, new product review, and tips for SG members to maintain weight loss. Barix Clinics is committed to providing quality educational material for use in Support Groups to guide members in making positive choices. The educational topics in the “On Track With Barix” newsletter encourage interaction and discussion so that meetings don't become lectures. Learning is best achieved through active participation and interaction; it's also more fun and stimulating to all involved. Review the month's issue before your support group, and highlight points of interest for discussion.

Example:

This months “On Track With Barix” newsletter features information on Weight Loss Plateaus, I've highlighted some points to lead our discussion....

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III. Goal Sharing Segment

This is the time for members to share personal successes and challenges. Encourage SG members to share their progress on personal goals, and how goals have been achieved. By identifying goals within the group, members accept personal accountability for the behavioral lifestyle changes, and gain valuable feedback from supportive peers in the group, many of whom are experiencing similar experiences. **This is a very important part of the meeting, an opportunity for members to feel that sense of acceptance and belonging, and to be supportive of one another.**

Remember, it is *never appropriate* to give out medical advice, if a question or concern arises that requires clarification beyond the information in the manual, have that SG member call the local Group Practice, Nutritionist, or Support Group Services representative so that their question is properly addressed.

Example:

This portion of the meeting is for us to share our progress, and talk about the past months successes and challenges with our weight loss. Many factors influence how well we are able to “stay on track” with the lifestyle changes we need to make. Sharing our goal here gives us an opportunity to clarify and get feedback from each other on how to best achieve our goals. We will start by hearing from the furthest post-surgery people, until we’ve heard from everyone, including those guests we have here today who are considering surgery with Barix Clinics. So let’s hear first from the “veterans”... what is it you’re working on, what’s been a success, what has been a challenge for you this past month?

IV. Closing the meeting

After reviewing the “On Track With Barix” newsletter and sharing individual progress on goals, it’s time to bring the meeting to an end. Meetings should never close with people running out the door before things come to an official end. An effective meeting closure helps the members to remember what was discussed, and how they can apply the knowledge and support they received in the meeting to reach personal weight loss goals. This is a time to clarify what each individual will be working on the next month by having each individual identify his or her personal weight loss maintenance goal for the coming month. By fostering and supporting personal accountability, the support group insures individual as well as group success. See the next page for a suggestion on how to close a meeting that encourages and facilitates group members in identifying a weight loss maintenance goal.

Example:

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“Let’s close the meeting with having everyone share what their goal for the next month is, who would like to start? Remember to keep your goal realistic, and let’s hear how you’re going to go about achieving it”...

after the group members have shared their goals...

“Thanks everyone for coming tonight and showing support, next meeting is on March 15th-see you then!”

Suggestion for a meeting closure:

What? So What? Now What? –a “debriefing” of the meeting

If you find that your members are having some difficulty with identifying personal goals, you can use the following process, a “de-briefing”. Closure can also occur with asking participants to reflect on the experience they just had and to explore how it will assist them throughout the next month in reaching weight loss goals.

Addressing the group at large, instead of individually, and asking a series of questions in 3 stages can accomplish this:

1. Ask participants to share **what** happened to them during the meeting.
 - “*What did you do?*”
 - “*What did you observe, think about?*”
 - “*What feelings did you have during the meeting?*”
2. Next ask participants to ask themselves: “**So what**”
 - “*What benefits did you gain from the meeting?*”
 - “*What did you learn? Relearn?*”
3. Finally, ask participants to consider how they will apply what they’ve learned by asking: “**Now what?**”
 - “*How do you want to do things differently in the future?*”
 - “*How can you extend the meeting experience you had?*”
 - “*What steps can you take to support what you want to accomplish?*”

Make sure that you provide plenty of time between these 3 stages of questions so that group members take advantage of the whole process.

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Participation Agreement/Member Guidelines

In an effort to clarify and define the vision and purpose of the Barix Clinics Support Group, the Participation Agreement has been developed to provide guidance to all for a productive and meaningful support group meeting to occur. We encourage you to review the statements outlined with group members before each meeting to insure understanding. Each support group will be supplied with copies of this agreement to share with members, as well as a sign that can be displayed at the sign-in sheet.

Scheduling the meeting

1. Select a consistent day and time you feel would best accommodate your facilitation of the group (e.g. the third Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m.). In the event of bad weather/driving conditions, and a need arises to cancel a meeting, please post the information on the Updates section of the website. Inform members to look at the Update prior to driving to meetings. It is also a good idea to contact the facility (library, church, community center) to let them know that the meeting is cancelled- they may be willing to display a sign announcing the cancellation.
2. To eliminate any confusion, meetings should be held at the same time and location each month. Preferably obtain a location with adequate parking and barrier-free access. Whenever possible, meetings should be held at locations without a rental fee. Suggestions for meeting locations include:
 - Classrooms in local schools
 - Church meeting rooms
 - Bank meeting rooms
 - Public library meeting rooms
 - Health centers
 - Hospitals
 - Community Center meeting rooms
 - Mall community rooms
3. Once you have located a meeting site, notify Barix (supportgroup@barixclinics.com) of your meeting time and place. We will create a new Support Group Update web page for your group and add your meeting to the Support Group Locator. Please keep us updated as to any changes in dates, time, or location of your meetings.

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Customer Service

To provide for ongoing quality services, and to reinforce a positive supportive environment, we ask that any concerns expressed within a Barix Support Group meeting be addressed through the Customer Concern forms we have made available to you. In the event that a Support Group member expresses dissatisfaction with a Barix Clinics hospital site, Group Practice, or any aspect of customer service, Barix would like to know so that the issue can be resolved promptly. The Customer Concern forms is found in the Support Group Leader area of the website. Please encourage any member who expresses a concern to complete the form and return it to Barix Clinics, call the customer service number (1-877-819-3655), or email customerrelations@barixclinics.com. In the interest of all members attending the group, it is best to not allow concerns to negatively influence the meeting.

Confidentiality

Information shared within each group needs to remain within the group. All members must ask permission of an individual before sharing another members' story. Individual Barix Clinics Support Group member contact information is not to be shared with other support group members, or any other individual, without written consent of the individual member. Barix Support Group Leaders are asked to maintain confidentiality of the sign – in attendance sheets by securing their yellow copy in their possession, while sending the white copy along with the Monthly Meeting Report to the Support Group Services department.

Communication

Let the Barix Clinics staff know of any issues or questions that require follow-up.

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Barix Clinics SGL On-Line Resources

The Barix Clinics Connection website is the primary place to go to communicate with your members, communicate with other leaders and find helpful resources. All leaders and co-leaders will have access to the SG Leaders' password protected area found at www.barixclinicsstore.com/id180.html. If you are unable to access this area, email supportgroup@barixclinics.com. You will be able to access resources, your Support Group Updates, and the SG Leader forum from this password protected area.

- The Support Group Update area provides a way for each support group to communicate with members. People interested in attending your support group or current members can look in this area and find out about the leaders as well as any updates about the meeting times, places, topics or special events. It is a great opportunity for you to create excitement about your group. We can highlight pictures from your group meetings or special events. An example of how this works is found at: www.barixclinicsstore.com/warren.html.
- The Support Group Leader forum is a private place for leaders to share ideas and information. If you have questions, concerns, or great ideas regarding your support group, share with other support group leaders. Just log into the protected Support Group Leader section and click on the Support Group Leader Forum link.
- Helpful resources such as the SG Leader Manual, the Participation Agreement, Community Notice options to advertise your support group in your local newspaper, Customer Service Concern form, Guest Speaker Guidelines, Patient Website Flyers, and more can be found in the Support Group Leader area.
- Every month a new "On Track With Barix" is published. It can be located at www.barixclinicsstore.com/newsletter.html. It is to be used to guide the discussion in your Barix Support Group. SG Leaders and Co-Leaders are asked to review the newsletter, highlighting sections for discussion, and facilitate a discussion based upon the material. These topics are designed to guide the Barix Clinics patient through a successful adaptation after bariatric surgery to make the most of their new life. The topics will address areas of Nutrition, Exercise/Activity, Social/Emotional Adjustments, and Wellness. Ask your members to print the newsletter and bring it with them to the meeting. Leaders should print out a few copies for new members.
- Brochures, *Because I Care* cards, sign-in sheets, name tags, medical alert cards, participation agreement signs, and other materials can be requested by emailing us at supportgroup@barixclinics.com.

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Leadership Skills: Twelve Points to Guide Your Facilitation

1. ***A good facilitator makes it easy or easier for people to express themselves.*** Being at ease with yourself will help others to feel at ease in the group.
2. ***Be empathic. This is the ability to share in another's feelings and emotions.***
Accurate empathy is the ability to understand another's experiences and to communicate that understanding. It is the ability to see the world as another sees it. When a member shares a problem, emotional or otherwise, you can express empathy as strategy by asking three questions:
 - "What do you want to do about it?"
 - "What's stopping you?"
 - "How can we help?"
3. ***Everyone wants to feel that they have been heard and understood.*** It's very difficult for some people to talk in a group situation, and encouraging responses from the facilitator/Leader is very important.
4. ***Pay attention to the entire group process, including the general energy levels, tone, and feeling of the meeting.*** Pay attention to all the group members and to yourself. How you are feeling may not be how the group is feeling. Note who is dominating the discussion, silent participants, and disruptive participants.
5. ***Adopt a non-judgmental attitude.*** We all have judgments. Our goal is not to tell people what to do, but to let them know how to get what they want, which primarily is good health and weight loss maintenance. The participants in your group probably get subjected to lots of judgments outside the meeting. Your job here is to provide a safe place, free from judgment. Don't judge, and don't let others judge.
6. ***Be what you ask your participants to be.*** Be open to different opinions, and don't get defensive. Disclose information about yourself whenever you feel is appropriate, yet don't talk too much. Your role is facilitating, not public speaking. There is a fine line between what is appropriate and what is not. You will get better at determining where this line is with every meeting. Use stories from your own life to catalyze others, telling about your challenges and using yourself as an example can often break the ice for others and give them permission to open up themselves.

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7. ***Maintain control of the group.*** This will require different levels of direct intervention at different times. The ground rules help you do that. Explain the reason they exist, and stick to them. In larger groups, having a prompt sign that you can use when things/discussions may be getting off track can be beneficial in controlling the group. A participant may be enlisted to raise the sign to alert members of the need to focus.
8. ***If conflict emerges, or someone says or does something with which you strongly disagree, turn over the responsibility for the situation back to the group.*** “Joe thinks it is okay to have ice cream on Sundays, what do you all think?” Always act in what you think is in the best interest of the group at large, and always that follow Barix Clinics guidelines for recovery and weight loss maintenance.
9. ***If ever there is a silence, let there be silence.*** This is a judgment call that you will become better at as you gain more experience. Most of us get uncomfortable sitting in a room where nobody is saying anything. Let the silence be, someone will almost always fill it in. By trying to “save” the group, you run the risk of not letting them take the initiative to speak.
10. ***Recognize the diversity of the group.*** You may have people of different ethnic groups, ages, and genders. It is important to give everyone a chance to express his or her thoughts and concerns.
11. ***If you are aware of an issue that is present but not being addressed, summon your courage to do so.*** You may assume that if you feel something brewing, others do also, and it's probably going to be counter-productive to the meeting. If there is a tension or a disagreement, you may want to bring it to the group's attention. If one group member says something that invalidates, judges, or challenges what another has said, but it's not direct or obvious, you need to deal with it. If you don't, it's a sign that risk taking or sharing cannot be protected.
12. ***Keep the meeting structured.*** The meetings can be a social event during breaks and afterwards, but during the meeting itself keep the discussion focused on the topic at hand. This does not mean you have to strictly stick to the schedule, or cut an interesting discussion abruptly just because it is “time to move on”, however, don't let conversations go on too long either, because you will be later forced to rush through other segments of the meeting. A good way to insure the meeting is complete is to begin the meeting no later than 10-15 minutes after the original time scheduled. Let people know when the meeting will end, and get their agreement. Make sure you are finished by the time that you promised. By keeping our commitments, we can assure people that we can be trusted during any future interactions.

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Leadership Skills: Active Listening

By listening carefully, we can learn a lot about a person's ideas, motivations, feelings, and emotions, as well as logic and ways of reasoning. We can then respond in different ways, either with a straight answer, or by seeking clarification through questions or other techniques to better understand the individual. A few of the techniques are:

- ***Paraphrasing and reframing.*** Sometimes feelings don't make sense to us until we state them, and even as we state them, they may still seem muddled. Reframing a member's statement helps them understand what they're going through. This means basically reflecting back to the person our interpretation of their message-what you heard them saying in your own words. For example: "I hear you say that you're pretty angry at yourself for not keeping up with your exercise"...is that right?" Phrases such as "I hear you say," "it sounds like you are," or "I feel you are" may help you paraphrase someone's thought in order to obtain more information, explore the feelings behind the statement, or simply fully understand what the person is saying.
- ***Validating.*** Using phrases such as "It sounds like a difficult situation," or "that happens to a lot of people" may validate the participants' experience and open up the possibility of addressing the feelings associated to specific situations and possible solutions. If you speak to the participants' feelings, and point them out, you can encourage a much more meaningful discussion, and help bring about more dialogue between the group. Sometimes all you need to do is use simpler phrases such as "interesting question," "thanks for taking the risk," and "good point"
- ***Maintaining eye contact and observing body language.*** Note people's body language and expressions. They will help you to know when someone is disinterested, shy, anxious, domineering, bored, angry, or open to discussion. Eye contact is useful in determining their level of support.

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Other Tips:

- If you don't understand what someone has said, don't assume that you know what they mean. Check out what you think you understood.
- Don't leave someone hanging after they talk. If there is dead silence, let the silence go on for longer than you would in polite, everyday conversation. Then you may decide to acknowledge what the speaker has said, or ask him more about it, and encourage others to participate in the discussion. "I know what you mean, has anyone else felt this way?"
- Don't consistently point out someone who is not talking, but instead invite them to participate once in awhile. Many people will sit through the meeting almost totally quiet, but will be getting a lot out of it all the same. Feel free to check in with them, "you look like you have some thoughts about that"
- Ask open-ended questions. Close-ended questions evoke only a yes or no answer, and the discussion could stop there, or turn into a poll. Instead of "Did you enjoy the meeting?", ask, "What did you get out of the meeting?" Also prompt for more detail by simply asking people to give more information..."Tell us about that..." or "Could you elaborate some more?"

We all have different styles in establishing the flow of conversation. If you are not used to using any of the above techniques, try them out so that they become easy, and then decide which ones work most comfortably for you. **Be aware that you want participants to speak to one another, not just you.** If you use active listening techniques too much, they begin looking to you for all the answers. Discover a way to push back the flow of conversation to the group, and encourage them to speak to one another as much as possible.

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Leadership Skills: Summing Up and Moving On

Between sections of the meeting, it is very important to sum up what was just said. Don't move on without making some sense of what was said and leading into the next section. You can even let participants know you are in another area of discussion. This will help participants keep track for themselves as you move the meeting along. You may use statements based on phrases such as "In this section we covered questions relating to all of you who are at least 1 year post-surgery...the main points that I heard you express were...", or, "Now that we have covered post-surgery questions, let's address those questions from our participants who are pre-surgery...". You can also ask if anyone has anything to add before moving on. Given that often the meeting sections will flow from one section to another without any formal break, it is especially important to step in occasionally and state what has been happening and what you expect to happen. In this regard, summing up will be an important tool for you to structure the meeting and maintain a regular flow between sections.

Leadership Skills: Challenging Participants

Problems can come up. You might get a participant or guest who is particularly unruly, or someone else who clearly has needs that cannot be addressed by our meeting. As the Leader, you're empowered to take care of the group's needs as a whole. If the participant is disruptive, you can ask them to please respect the ground rules you've laid out, and if they can't, to please leave. PLEASE CALL BARIX CLINICS THE NEXT DAY to let us know that this has happened; please don't let us hear about a difficult situation from the participant first!

You may encounter people who seem to be undergoing severe emotional distress. This goes beyond breaking into tears, which is a healthy function and can be dealt with by expressing support and giving a tissue and waiting for it to subside. In the event there is someone who is obviously undergoing mental or psychological distress that you judge is beyond the norm, please take a few minutes after the meeting to speak with him or her. Share with them the contact info for a local Community Mental Health Agency, or hotline number. Often times, individuals just need to hear that seeking professional help is a smart thing to do under these circumstances. Let them know that they are welcome to continue to participate in the support group, and that the group will be a valuable asset to maintaining their focus to issues which impact successful weight loss.

If anyone comes to the meeting clearly intoxicated, you should take him or her aside and ask him or her to leave. These are rare situations, but better to be prepared than to get caught completely off guard.

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Leadership Skills: Getting Members Involved

Active learning occurs most often if the individual is involved in responding to the topic being discussed. There are ways to encourage interaction, and they can be very helpful when members are new or not yet fully acquainted with each other. Established members will often enjoy the structure these methods bring to the session.

1. **Open discussion:** This method has been most used in our support groups, and will continue to be used as it offers a straightforward way of presenting material, getting feedback, and encouraging expression of feelings. One way of structuring this in a larger group is to ask beforehand for just 4 or 5 members to share answers to a particular question. You can then go on to a different question and ask 4 or 5 different members for their responses.
2. **Whips:** Go around the room and ask for *short* responses to key questions. Use “whips” when you want to obtain something quickly from each group member. Using what is called a sentence stem (e. g., “one change I would make in my exercise routine would be...”) is useful in getting participation in a non-threatening manner. Members should be allowed to “pass” if they wish. To avoid repetition, ask each member to refrain from giving answers already given when possible.
3. **Response cards:** Pass out index cards and ask for anonymous answers to your questions. Questions may involve a particular topic that has just been covered, or cards filled out prior to the presentation. Collect the cards and review statements to clarify everyone's concerns or understanding of the material discussed. Response cards can also be used to give members an opportunity to raise a sensitive issue, or ask a question they may feel uncomfortable about raising publicly.
4. **Subgroup discussion:** Often times at larger meetings, members break off into subgroups on their own to discuss material. This is often disruptive as it leads to difficulty for others to focus to the topic, as well as placing the leader/presenter in a position of hall monitor. In this technique you pose an issue or question and have members break into small groups to discuss answers to then discuss as a group. Each small group should designate a speaker for their group who participates in the large group discussion when the large group reconvenes.

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5. **Games:** Using fun activities or quizzes helps to stimulate member's knowledge, ideas, and feelings. They are viewed often as non-threatening and fun, and can promote creativity in problem solving on various issues and concerns that members face.
6. **Calling on the next speaker:** Ask members to raise their hands when they want to share their views, and request that the present speaker call on the next speaker (rather than the leader). Use this technique when you're sure there is a lot of interest in the activity or discussion, and you want to promote members to interact.
7. **Fishbowl:** Using the fishbowl technique works best when you want to help bring focus to large-group discussions, as an alternative to going around the room. Ask a portion of the group to form a discussion circle, and have the remaining members form a listening circle around them. Bring new groups to the inner circle to continue the discussion. This can be time consuming, but allows combining the best of both large and small group discussions. You can plan ahead if you believe you will be having a large group by arranging the chairs before members arrive to the meeting. As a variation, you can have members remain seated where they are, and invite different areas or groups to be the discussants as the others listen.

Adapted from 101 Ways to Make Meetings Active. M. Silberman, Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer, San Francisco, Calif.

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Leadership Techniques: Learning Activities

Experiential activities really help to make learning active. It is often far better for group members to experience something rather than to hear it all talked about. Such learning activities typically involve role-playing, games, simulations, visualization, and problem solving tasks. As part of our educational programming, we may include some of these activities for your use in presenting educational information within your support groups. The following steps are recommendations to help make your experiential/learning activities a success.

1. Explain the point of the activity. Members like to know what is going to happen and why.
2. Sell the benefits. Explain why you are doing the activity and how the activity connects with the point or lesson.
3. Speak slowly when giving directions. You might also provide visual backup. Make sure the instructions are understood.
4. Demonstrate the activity if the directions are complicated. Let the members see the activity in action before they do it.
5. If the activity is for a large group, divide the members into the subgroups before giving further directions. If you do not, members may forget the instructions while the subgroups are being formed.
6. Inform members how much time they have. State the time you have allotted for the entire activity and then periodically announce how much time remains.
7. Keep the activity moving. Don't slow things down by endlessly recording your group's contributions on flip charts or blackboards and don't let a discussion drag on for too long.
8. Challenge the members. More energy is created when activities generate a little bit of tension. If tasks are too easy, your members may get bored.
9. Processing involves having the members talk about what they gained from the learning experience. Always discuss the activity. When the activity has ended, invite members to discuss their feelings and to share their insights and learnings.

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Leadership Techniques: Facilitator Prompt Cards

A good meeting should involve active participation from everyone, and occasionally, it can get off course. Facilitator prompt cards are an unusual, yet effective way to get a meeting back on track with a minimum of interruption. The prompt cards can even supply a little comic relief in the process to relieve any tense moments.

You can use the cards to prompt the group without verbally interrupting anyone. Examples of messages for cards can include:

Let's Move On

Good Idea

Agree to Disagree?

More Ideas?

New Participants, Please

The cards should be big enough, with lettering bold enough, that members can read the messages clearly. Share the purpose of these cards with your group members, and explain that you will be silently holding them up as needed during the meeting. You may wish to ask a group member to keep the meeting moving along by giving them the responsibility to raise the cards as needed.

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Barix Clinics Support Group Participation Agreement/Member Guidelines

In an effort to clarify and define the vision and purpose of the Barix Clinics Support Group, the Barix SG Participation Agreement has been developed to provide guidance to all for a productive and meaningful support group meeting to occur. We have found that restricting membership to Barix Clinics patients only insures that everyone attending is in agreement on aftercare guidelines. Sharing the same guidelines and procedures cuts back on confusion and mis-information.

We encourage you to review the statements outlined in the Barix Clinics Support Group participation agreement with group members before each meeting to insure understanding. Each support group will be supplied with copies of this agreement to share with members, as well as a signboard that can be displayed at the sign-in sheet. By reviewing the participation agreement before each meeting, support group members are reminded of basic group courtesies as well as the importance to maintain confidentiality.

By maintaining the SG's exclusively for Barix Clinics patients, we insure that our message is consistent with best practice after surgery. In the event that someone does attend your local Barix SG that has not had surgery with Barix Clinics, please explain to them that your meeting is not a general weight loss surgery group that is open to the public. They may stay for that meeting only as an observer. If they are in need of further explanation regarding our membership policy, please contact us here in the Support Group Services department so that we can contact the individual to address their questions.

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Support Group Participation Agreement

This Support Group...

Is an opportunity for...

Barix Clinics Patients,
People considering Barix Clinics' programs,
And their supportive family members or friends.

To...

Continue to learn to be successful in losing weight and adjusting to a new life through Barix Clinics' program
Provide mutual support and encouragement to one another in this process

You are welcome to participate in this group, if you agree to:

Share with others (as you are comfortable) your successes and failures, your questions and concerns, your lessons learned, your ideas and your feelings.

Listen respectfully to others, not interrupting or dominating the sharing, or speaking when it is someone else's turn.

Maintain confidentiality – personal information shared in the group is not to be shared with anyone else.

Maintain a positive attitude – whenever possible to be encouraging and helpful, refraining from negativity, gossip or complaining.

This group is specifically for people who are participating in Barix Clinics' program. It is not a general weight loss surgery support group.

We hope you find this group experience to be positive and helpful.

Your input and suggestions about the group and future meeting topics are always welcomed!

Please give your input to your Support Group Leader, or email us at supportgroup@barixclinics.com.

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Barix Clinics

Support Group Leader Position Description

Position Title:

Support Group Leader

Position Summary:

The Barix Clinics Support Group Leader is responsible for facilitating the support group meeting and providing accurate information and ongoing education about the Barix program, within a positive supportive environment.

Support Group Leader Tasks/Duties:

1. Conduct monthly Barix Support Group meetings following guidelines in Support Group Leader Manual.
2. Maintain a positive outlook regarding Barix program as evidenced by personally practicing guidelines, and serving as a role model to members of the support group.
3. Maintain records of attendance and prepare a brief summary of each month for submission to Support Group Services Coordinator.
4. Accept responsibility for securing a meeting place that is centrally located, have barrier-free access, and adequate parking.
5. Notify Barix Clinics of any significant developments in the meetings:
 - changes in meeting times
 - changes in location
 - customer service concerns
6. Faithfully attending their support group meeting (not missing more than two consecutive meetings or four meetings within one year).

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Support Group Leader Position Description (cont.)

Qualifications

1. Must have the desire and willingness to help others who have had weight loss surgery in their recovery process.
2. The Barix Clinics Support Group Leader must be a successful, compliant patient of Barix Clinics:
 - Have had bariatric surgery performed by Barix Clinics, and be at least 6 months post-surgery.
 - Shall be experiencing weight loss consistent with surgeon expectations.
 - Shall be free of significant medical complications.
 - Shall have a demonstrated commitment to following nutritional requirements, and program guidelines.
 - Keeping current with office visits and lab tests.
 - Adherence to recommended activity/exercise program.
3. Must have the ability to successfully facilitate a group.
4. Ability to answer questions about Barix Clinics in a positive way, and/or directs them appropriately to Barix Clinics.

Benefits

The effective Support Group Leader gains personal satisfaction and community recognition in their role by delivering quality educational resources, emotional support, and fellowship to Barix Clinics patients, assisting them in finding a new life free of their excess weight.

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Barix Clinics Volunteer Support Group Leader Agreement

Barix Clinics agrees to provide the following:

- Support Group Leader password protected web pages that provide resources and communication avenues with support group members and other Barix Clinics Support Group Leaders.
- Monthly *On Track With Barix* newsletters to be utilized as the education portion of the support group meeting.

As a volunteer Support Group Leader, I agree to do the following:

- Conduct monthly Barix Support Group meetings following guidelines in the Support Group Leader Manual.
- Maintain a positive outlook regarding the Barix Clinics program as evidenced by personally practicing guidelines, and serving as a role model to members of the support group.
- Perform the Support Group Leader tasks/duties outlined in the Support Group Leader position description.

I agree to serve as a Barix Clinics Support Group Leader for _____,
for a period of one year. (location)

Volunteer Support Group Leader

date

Barix Clinics Support Group Services Representative

date