

Leadership for a Successful IPSV Support Group

Jennifer Y. Levy-Peck

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

Jennifer@wcsap.org

No matter what your formal position, you can be a leader in advocating for services to address Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV). Often, it takes just one dedicated individual to initiate these much-needed services.

- 1. Do your homework.** Even if you are a very experienced advocate, it is crucial to educate yourself thoroughly on Intimate Partner Sexual Violence. Two great starting places: the book *Real Rape, Real Pain* by Patricia Eastal and Louise McOrmond-Plummer, and the [free online course](#) offered by the National Judicial Education Program. Also, the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (WCSAP) has compiled multiple resources on this topic at www.wcsap.org/ipsv.htm, including the downloadable manual [Facilitating IPSV Support Groups: A Guide to Psychoeducational Support Groups for Survivors of Intimate Partner Sexual Violence](#).
- 2. Assess community needs.** Is there enough need for a stand-alone IPSV support group, or would it be more realistic to incorporate some of the IPSV curriculum into existing domestic violence or sexual assault support groups? Would it be best to target a specific segment of IPSV survivors, such as teens, elders, survivors of abusive same-sex relationships, or those in a specific ethnic community?
- 3. Be sure your co-workers are on the same page.** Offer inservice training, raise the topic of IPSV at staff meetings, and highlight the issue when discussing client services.
- 4. Build awareness and community support.** What community partnerships do you need to develop in order to support this group? How can you and your program incorporate awareness of IPSV into existing outreach and training efforts in your community? For example, if you are considering a teen IPSV group, mention it when you provide prevention programming to teens and ask for their input on how to reach and serve other teens.

5. Select a co-facilitator with whom you can work effectively, and seek supervision or consultation. The quality of your co-facilitation relationship will determine the quality of the group. Be sure you have the time to get to know your co-facilitator if you have not worked together extensively. It's generally helpful to have another professional to supervise or consult with you as co-facilitators, particularly if you are not highly experienced in support group work.

6. Review all the general issues for support groups. WCSAP's *Circle of Hope: A Guide to Conducting Psychoeducational Support Groups* is a general guide to this type of group, and is available online at www.wcsap.org/advocacy. You and your co-facilitator may find it helpful to review it together so you can discuss all the issues that pertain to your group.

7. Reach out to your community partners and your sister agencies for potential participants. Practice a two-minute "elevator speech" (what you would say to someone who asked you a question in the elevator) to explain IPSV and why you think this group will be helpful. Mention it whenever you possibly can. Have attractive flyers with clear information for potential participants available to give to other professionals, or consider having inexpensive postcards or business cards with the group information printed for potential clients who can take them safely.

8. Be sure to include BOTH domestic violence and sexual assault perspectives and resources. If you work exclusively with domestic violence or sexual assault clients, it would be great to have a co-facilitator from "the other side," if practical. If not, be sure you are cross-trained on all the resources and information your IPSV clients will need. For example, if you are a sexual assault advocate, talk to domestic violence staff about safety planning and housing referrals. Similarly, if you are a domestic violence advocate, be sure you are comfortable talking about sexual issues and refresh your knowledge about the impact of sexual assault. You don't need to be an expert on everything, but you need to be very knowledgeable about available resources and referral information.

9. Become highly familiar with the group curriculum, and customize it for your population. If you decide to use the WCSAP curriculum, *Facilitating IPSV Support Groups*, work with your co-facilitator to study it carefully and to determine how to use and adapt it for your potential clients. For example, if you are working with survivors of same-sex IPSV, you may want to change the language of some of the activities and add some content specific to the intersection of oppressions experienced by these survivors. If you are extracting activities or lessons to insert into domestic violence or sexual assault support groups, be sure that they flow well with the curriculum you are using, and that there is some way to incorporate the experiences of all the survivors in the group.

10. Build in evaluation from the beginning of your group planning, and use your data to refine and improve the group. [*Circle of Hope*](#), WCSAP's general support group guide, offers some information about evaluation for psychoeducational support groups. The feedback from your group members will be the most powerful education for you.

11. Have patience and maintain your conviction about the need for this work. It can be discouraging to try to assemble a group – you may not be able to gather a “critical mass” of willing participants simultaneously, especially in rural areas. Just keep trying and building community support for your group. Identify and address barriers (such as lack of transportation or child care) on an ongoing basis. Consider starting with a workshop or a module within an existing support group if you are unable to get a group underway immediately. You may be more successful if you consider offering the group at a community location, with appropriate safety planning. Stay in touch with in touch with others who are committed to serving IPSV survivors to keep your motivation strong.

“It only takes one person to stand beside you and say, ‘No, this is not acceptable!’”

--Survivor, from [Partner Rape DVD](#), *Women's Health Australia*

For information and resources:

www.wcsap.org/ipsv.htm