

Taking Care of Yourself as a Support Group Facilitator

Being a facilitator of a stroke support group can be tough. A facilitator is busy attending to the individuals in the group while keeping the group as a whole in mind. Facilitators are responsible for setting the tone of the group: this is a safe place for people who are dealing with the challenges of recovery to come for support. Facilitators are responsible for keeping the group on track. They must overcome the feeling that they must have all the answers for everyone in the group who has a problem. It can be overwhelming for a new group facilitator.

So, how do you take care of yourself?

- 1. Understand what your role in the group is.** To facilitate is not to fix. Facilitation means removing barriers so that members of the group can find their own answers.
- 2. Identify a person whom you can talk to** who will let you talk, who will not try to fix you, and who can help you gain perspective. Choose this support person wisely. Make sure he or she is aware of what you want when you need to let off steam.
- 3. Avoid being caught up in members' negative emotions.** Yes, circumstances can fall into the "ain't it awful" category, but they are not your circumstances. The group members are ultimately responsible for taking action when it comes to their individual stroke recovery journeys.
- 4. Be patient with yourself.** Human beings make mistakes. Knowing how to improve your skills as a facilitator is half the battle. Seek professional help if needed.
- 5. Identify your own stress reduction techniques.** What gives you pleasure? A book? A walk in the park? Coffee with a friend? Exercise? Know what works for you to release stress and use it often.
- 6. Delegate group tasks.** Don't be a "do-it-all" facilitator. Ask for help from group members. After all, they really own the group; you just help eliminate those barriers to good communication.