

## The Role of a Parenting Group Volunteer

Volunteers ideally commit to attending all sessions of the parenting group. They may be student social workers, or professionals from other partner agencies, and can be invited to help out as they gain free experience in Take 3 and in supporting parents.

A volunteer will be a person who has already had some qualifications to work alongside parents or carers. They will learn a lot from this role, and are expected to reflect on how they would have handled situations that might arise in the group. It can be useful to start a waiting list for volunteers to observe groups, and to create an understanding that those who observe/help are seriously interested in working with families in the future.

### Volunteer

Volunteering for a parenting programme is a training role and not paid. Volunteers are expected to attend all of the sessions of a group. He/she may be volunteering as part of their studies (e.g. social care) or may use this as an opportunity to gain experience before undertaking more specific training to facilitate parenting programmes.

### Giving a lot in return

Volunteers play a very valuable role in supporting the group and the facilitators. One key job may be to make the refreshments – this might sound menial, but is very helpful to the facilitators as it leaves them free to concentrate on the group. Facilitators may choose to 'use' the volunteer in other ways, such as asking her/him to:

- sit beside someone who has learning difficulties or who is particularly shy
- 'scribe' for someone who has difficulties in this way
- accompany someone who has become upset and needs to step out
- pair off with a parent to work in a twosome if there's an uneven number in the group
- take a small group at the beginning of each session when parents do a 'download' (feeding back on how they've got on in the week) if the group is very large
- join in at the post-session debriefing: observers are in a good position to notice the reactions of individual parents which the facilitators can't always pick up when they're busy thinking about course content and timing etc. Independent feedback on group members and on the performance of the facilitators can be very useful to the group process and the programme as a whole.

## Being 'in' the group

Volunteers are expected to be group participants to some extent. Our philosophy on self-disclosure by professionals is that it is fine to do it sparingly and appropriately if it's deemed to help a parent's understanding or confidence. It would not be appropriate for a facilitator or volunteer to share sensitive material about their own children if doing so was likely to stir up their own unmanageable feelings. However, at times parents feel more understood and are greatly relieved when they realize that everyone in the group has experienced problems with their own young people and, since an aim of the programme is to model openness and honesty, it is occasionally appropriate to self-disclose. If a volunteer or facilitator feels tempted to do this, they should double check that they're doing it for the good of a parent or all the parents in the group, and not for their own benefit. If they notice that talking about certain parenting situations is stirring up a lot of their own powerful emotions, it's probably a sign that they need to be a group participant at that time, or to be processing those feelings elsewhere.

The volunteer is at an "in-between" state, not running the group, and not being a full participant, and yet joining-in appropriately. They would not be expected to prepare for sessions. It's important that all expectations about this role are discussed and agreed by the facilitators and the volunteer both in advance of the group and on an ongoing basis. This should curtail potential anxiety, confusion, and misunderstandings on both sides.

## Supervision

Volunteers may be invited to attend supervision. There should be two of these group sessions during the lifetime of a parent group. Volunteers attending these sessions would benefit by learning more, and would also contribute to the programme by making their observations about the group, but of course attendance isn't compulsory.