

Unexpected Caregiver Support Group

Sample of UCG group script and discussion topic

The **Unexpected Caregiver Support Group** is designed to meet the needs of family caregivers seeking regular support on their caregiving journey. They are run peer-to-peer with revolving peer facilitators. Much like an Alanon meeting, no professional leadership is required. This will work well for some, while others will prefer professional intervention.

I inserted the word 'unexpected' before caregiver, as the combination of words usually elicits a "That's me" comment.

Groups can be set up at colleges, hospitals, senior centers, senior housing, church and community groups, work places, etc. Many communities or businesses would like to offer a support group, but the question a general interest meeting to ascertain interest. Explain the peer-to-peer model, informing them that there is a script to follow, with topics for discussion. No one needs to be a trained facilitator to run this meeting.

Everything you need to begin a support group is included in The Basic Packet of support group materials and is available at unexpectedcaregiver.com—it includes:

- Tip sheet for moderating a successful support group
- Group script to guide each meeting
- 12 Discussion topics with suggested questions

Thanks again and please feel free to contact me at my website.

My best,

Kari Berit

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SAMPLE from Unexpected Caregiver Support Group Welcome Script

[MODERATOR READS SCRIPT AS WRITTEN. This sets the structure for the group]

Welcome to the __(Group name)_ Unexpected Caregiver Support Group. I am _____, the moderator of the group.

We start promptly at _____ and end promptly at _____. If you come late or have to leave early, please do so quietly.

We are a family and informal caregiver support group whose purpose is to provide a safe place for you to vent, ask questions, and seek support from people in similar situations. We provide tools and discussion topics to help you become smarter caregivers, *but our primary goal is that of emotional support.*

Please know that we all come with our own emotional pain, struggles and questions. *This is a safe place.* **Whatever you wish to share with the group stays with the group; that is what we all agree to in attending this Unexpected Caregiver Support group.**

We start each meeting with a brief check in. Everyone has an opportunity to check in or pass. A check in means that you get up to 5 minutes to say where you are at **without interruption or feedback.** Not giving feedback allows....

A few housekeeping details: please turn cell phones off or vibrate. Please refrain from side conversations while someone is checking in or we're discussing a topic.

Let's begin with a check in and go around the room. Remember, this is not a time to comment or discuss, but simply to express how you're feeling at this moment. You can say you want feedback and if....

Also included are moderator tips, as we know that moderators will take turns leading the group.

Unexpected Caregiver Support Group

Discussion Topic

The Love of a Pet

There are numerous good reasons not to have an animal as one ages, or so I've been told. I don't buy it. Whether it be a dog, a cat, a bird, a fish, or any other pet, when I hear older adults trying to convince themselves that they don't want or can't have another animal – they live in a condo that doesn't allow pets, or they travel too much to be bothered, or they simply don't want the responsibility, or they don't think they can deal with the prospect of yet another loss – I can't help asking, Why not?

I understand. Pets need attention. Every day. Whether it's cleaning out their litter boxes, or taking them on walks, or filling their food and water bowls, or just making time for them – typically on their schedule, not yours – pets rely on their owners for their daily needs. To me, that's a good thing.

And it might be equally good for your parents. Their home is empty. Their kids are grown, moved out and wrapped up in their own lives. Their friends are becoming fewer or less accessible. Why rule out having someone in their lives who needs them, responds to them, entertains them, makes demands on them – and loves them unconditionally?

You can just as easily take the reasons not to have a pet and turn them into the very reasons your parents may want – and even need – to have one. Loneliness, isolation, inactivity, obesity, depression, grieving: Each in its own way can be partially, if not fully, alleviated by having a pet.

Kelly Connolly, Issues Specialist with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), made the case this way in the December 2005 issue of Minnesota Monthly magazine:

“Emotionally, pets can bring new meaning and purpose to the life of a senior who is living far away from friends or family. The love and commitment to their owners is almost like free therapy. They can act as friends, entertainers, and warm, fuzzy bundles of joy. Having a pet in an elderly person's life can offer them a sense of well-being, a sense of encouragement, and even a reason for living. Being responsible for another life often gives new meaning to the lives of those who are living alone or far from loved ones. Caring for and providing a loving home to a companion animal also helps elderly people to remain active and stay healthy.”

Suggested Questions:

Do you know how your parent feels about pets? Have you had to find a new home for a pet? If you parents can't have a pet (for whatever reason), can you arrange for one to visit?

How do you describe love from a pet? Do you have stories about special pets? If you were sick, would you want your pet with you?