

A Healthy Lifestyle Works!

Self Guided Groups

Start a group of your own with your friends and family to support one another in taking action and making lasting lifestyle changes using the book *Inspired to Feel Good*.

Start a Group

Select one primary focus for the group

- The person who starts the group is generally recognized as the facilitator of the group.
- You can focus on a specific goal that everyone shares or goals that each individual creates for themselves.
- It is best for each person or the group to pick one main change (such as regular exercise, healthy eating or reducing stress) you all want to make, instead of getting overwhelmed trying to change your eating, exercise and self care behaviors. Start small for early success, and later you can add other areas.
- The group can be local and meet in person or it can be with people who are anywhere in the country that meets in a teleconference call.

Determine who to invite

- Groups can be very small and just two people or they can be larger and up to seven or eight individuals. Larger groups are more challenging, because it becomes more difficult to give each person enough time to speak and get the help they may need.
- If you want to post your group on our site to get additional members, please notify Alice Greene.
- Think about what type of people you want in your group and list the characteristics you seek, so that you can use these to look for them when talking with new potential group members.
- Invite those that will commit to meeting on a weekly basis for 12 weeks or longer. It takes at least 12 weeks for new lifestyle habits to become easier to maintain and up to a year for them to be a part of your life, even during times of disruptions.

Commit to weekly sessions

- Meeting on a consistent weekly basis is what works for providing accountability and continuity. Select a day of the week and a time of day that the group can commit to, so that everyone knows when the meeting will be.
- Agree as a group how many weeks you will meet at a minimum. The sessions can always be extended if you want to start off with 12 weeks and then decide if you want to continue meeting and how often you want to meet. Ideally you will stick together for at least one year and move from weekly to either bi-monthly or monthly sessions, so everyone has the accountability they need to integrated their new changes into their lifestyle.

Set session length

- Weekly sessions of 60 and 90 minutes are best between to have a group discussion and give everyone the time they need to check in, set goals and be supported.
 - If you only have up to five people, you may find 60 minutes is enough time.
 - If you have seven or eight people, you will likely want 90 minutes.

If Sessions are in person

- Determine a meeting place that everyone can most easily get to on a weekly basis. If you wish to rotate meeting at each person's home or offices than be sure everyone is clear week to week where the next meeting will be held.

If Sessions are by phone

- For those holding teleconference groups, you can get a free bridgeline (these are not toll-free, but they provide a clear connection to many people at once) at www.freeconference.com or www.instantconference.com. Simply sign up for a free number that you can use anytime. Most of them also offer free recording services, so if one of the members has to miss a session they can listen to it during the week. When you have your next session, the recording will be replaced by the new session recording.

Facilitator Guidelines

Getting prepared

- Before the group starts, read the entire section in *Inspired to Feel Good* that you will be covering with the group. If you are focusing on eating healthier, read pages 129-208. If you are supporting each other in getting fit and regularly active, read pages 73-125.
- The book gives you topics to talk about, coaching questions to ask yourself and one another, how to set goals and how to create strategies to address your challenges. You can use some or all of these.
- Ask the group members to read the entire book before the group starts, giving them a month to do that if possible. OR, assign pages of the book, starting with your main goal in Part III and then going back and assigning pages from the Introduction and Parts 1 and 2. Use these assignments as discussion topics for the next meeting.
- Download the journal pages you need from www.inspiredtofeelgood.com/journals or www.aHealthyLifestyleWorks.com/resources

Establish session format

- There are many ways to format a group session. Here is just one suggestion. Some of the group members may want to offer another approach for the group to consider.
 - 10 minutes: Time for hellos, catching up, chit chat and waiting for everyone to arrive
 - 20-50 minutes: Check in by each member (5-10 minutes depending on number of members)
 - Always start with what went well during the week

- Then talk about any challenges and the associated ah-has that were learned and how can these be applied when facing similar situations again

Ask for feedback, specific assistance or support

Stated intentions and any specific goals for the upcoming week

- 20 minutes Relevant topic and discussion from the book, a blog post Alice has written, an article someone read, a book someone is reading, or any other source.
- 10 minutes Open up to anyone that wants more help with something or specific assistance

Facilitation & Group Etiquette

- **Confidentiality is necessary** to create a safe environment for the group members to participate and share. Obtain agreements from each member that they will not discuss what is said in the group with anyone outside of the group. Some members may not even want it known they are in a group of this kind, so check to see what level of confidentiality the group wants to establish.
- **Equal time for each person** is important so that no one person dominates the session or the group. You can use a stop watch, assign someone to be the time keeper or even set an alarm.
- **Stay on topic and focused** about the reason why you are meeting as a group. It is easy to get caught up in other topics, but that will cause the group to lose its meaning and its members.
- **Eliminate judgment, criticism** or trying to tell a member what they should do. There is no place for “shoulds”, unsolicited input or assuming that another member’s beliefs and solutions are best for someone else. Reframe from offering solutions unless specifically asked for them.
- **Acknowledge what each member is sharing** without offering an opinion, unless you are asked for that opinion and then avoid using the word “should”, “must”, “only” or “never”. You are there to listen, help one another with accountability, be a support structure and ask questions so they can get their own ah-has and answers. What is best for one person is seldom best or right for another.
- **Encourage honesty with yourself and each other**, knowing this is a non-judgmental safe environment and that challenges you face don’t make you wrong or bad. Also encourage members to speak freely and honestly if there are issues in the group that any member feels needs to be addressed.
- **During feedback, don’t be the expert or focus on what isn’t working.** Paraphrase or summarize what you heard and ask questions, primarily starting with the word “what”, “how” or even “where”

For example:

- What did go well?
- What was a success?
- How does that feel?
- What else went well?

What did you learn from ...
What could you do differently now that you ...
What do you need right now?
What will be your first step?
What is this costing you?
What else ...

How does that serve you?
How does that make you feel?
How can you change the situation?
How can you turn that into a positive?

Where is that coming from?
Where can you find a little more time?

Let the member who wants feedback to solve their own dilemmas and find their own answers. Each member has to find their own answers and often they can when given a new perspective.

- **Talk for yourself.** Be careful not to presume that others feel as you do or share your experiences. Say “I” instead of “you” and share what is true for you. In other words, speak for yourself.
- **Offer accountability through incentives.** Celebrate one another’s successes and provide incentives that will keep each member motivated on a weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual basis. You may want to make successes visible for the entire group to see. You can use a board where each member posts their goals and actual progress. Provide ways for those that are dealing with challenges to feel good about their accomplishments – even if small or infrequent, and these may be for having ah-ha insights.

The goal is to encourage progress, not judge or admonish the difficulties. No two people will progress at the same pace, nor should they be expected to. Everyone should have their own goals and be allowed to adjust them up or down each week. This is not a group competition. This is a support group and seeing more visibly that one person is struggling to reach their goals, for example, may lead to more support for that person.

Facilitation ownership

- It is not necessary that the person who started the group facilitate each session or be the facilitator for the long term. Decide as a group how to divvy up facilitation amongst the members.
- If there are any expenses associated with facilitation, also decide as a group how the cost will be shared.

I wish you all great success together!

