

Study Group Set Up and Sample Agreement Tip Sheet: *The Loving Parent Guidebook* (LPG)

Study groups are small to mid-sized groups that meet regularly to work through ACA literature. Closed study groups follow ACA principles and The Twelve Traditions. They are not registered on the ACA WSO website (www.adultchildren.org) because 12-Step meetings must be open to those who qualify and are interested. Instead, study groups often close attendance after the first several meetings to support emotional safety and build trust.

From the ACA Solution on page 590 of the BRB:

- “The Solution is to become your own loving parent.”
- “This is the action and work that heals us: we use the Steps; we use the meetings; we use the telephone.”

The ACA 12 Steps and reparenting work together to help us recover. Closed LPG study groups are considered a supplement, and not a replacement, for regular ACA meeting attendance.

Setting Up a Study Group

Study groups can be profound places of healing, but they can also bring up unresolved childhood patterns and pain. Control and The Laundry List and The Other Laundry List traits can also arise. This is to be expected, and working in a study group can be an opportunity to learn to cope with triggers with others working on the same issues. Establishing clear guidelines together as the group forms can smooth the process. A sample script is provided on the LPG Bonus Resources page at <http://lpg.adultchildren.org>.

This tip sheet provides some points to consider when setting up a closed study group. No format will fit every study group’s preferences, so each group is empowered and encouraged to set up their group as best suits their needs using group conscience. While written for *The Loving Parent Guidebook* (LPG), these tips can serve other ACA study groups.

Some groups have an introductory meeting before beginning the process so potential members can learn more.

Membership & Participation

It’s recommended that, at a minimum, all participants will have attended at least six consecutive ACA meetings and read and completed LPG Appendix A.

- What size group will work best for us? Most groups range from 4 to 12 members. It is not unusual for the group size to decrease over time.
- What is the minimum ACA experience needed to join this group? Completing the ACA 12 Steps (or up to and including Step 5) in the *Twelve Steps of Adult Children Steps Workbook* (the Yellowbook)? Three months or another mutually agreed-upon length of weekly ACA meeting attendance?
- Do we ask that we all have or develop an ACA support network beyond the study group? (Recommended). If we have a conflict with another group member, getting support from

a person outside the group (rather than with another group member) can help protect group safety and can support us in addressing problems head-on.

- After how many weeks will we close attendance?
- How do we want to be notified when one of us needs to miss a meeting?
- What do we ask when one of us takes a planned absence or vacation and misses more than one meeting? Will the member reach out to another member to hear about what they missed?
- After how many weeks of continuous absence will we need to step out of the group or recommit to regular attendance? How will we let a group member know when this is the case? (Inconsistent meeting attendance can reduce group safety and trust.)
- What does full participation look like?
- Healthy endings are important. If one of us decides to leave the group, how will that person notify everyone? How will our group address departures? (Have a final meeting with the departing member so everyone can share their feelings, say goodbye, etc.)

Organization

- How often will we meet (Once a week, once every two weeks)?
- For what length of time (60, 90, 120 minutes)?
- On what day and at what time will we meet? In-person, online, or by phone?
- How long are we prepared to meet in this study group? Do we want to meet for a specific period or leave it open-ended? Will we approach the LPG in phases, such as committing to complete Part 1 and reassessing if we continue?
- Where will we meet? What costs, if any, are associated, and how will we handle expenses?
- How often will we make 7th Tradition donations? What percentage will we send to WSO, Intergroup, and Region?
- How will we share meeting duties such as chairing, keeping time, paying for space if needed, etc.?
- How do we want to run the meetings? Will members sign up to chair different dates? Do we want co-chairs who will alternate chairing? Will we chair for a set period, such as one month? Will members divide up chairing for each meeting?
- Will we record the guided practices to play during the meeting or on our own? ACA WSO hopes to make a recorded collection available, but it will depend on fellowship participation.

Format

- Will we complete reflections, exercises, and worksheets before we meet? Or during the meeting? The first option can take around a year to work through the whole LPG; the second may take 2+ years.

- Will we read relevant LPG sections ahead of time or in meetings? Will we read a short section or series of excerpts from different pages or the whole chapter? Will we share a few highlights from the reading or focus on our answers to activities?
- Will we time our shares or leave them open-ended?
- Will we pair up to share at times, or will we share only with the whole group?
- Will we use an outline or schedule?
- How will we begin meetings? Some options: an agreed-upon script, a short silent, guided reparenting check-in, opening Chapter Affirmation, reading the 12 Steps, short shares in response to a question such as, “When did you remember to reparent since we last met, or when would reparenting have been helpful,” and the like.
- How will we end meetings? Some options: an agreed-upon script, a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer, The Promises, sharing a reparenting intention, reading the ending Chapter Affirmation, and the like.
- How and when will we debrief our study group experience when we end our time/work together? In the last meeting? A week or two after the group ends? Will we complete a fellowship review feedback form (<http://litreview.adultchildren.org>) together?

Establishing Guidelines

- Do we allow crosstalk after we share, meaning that during our turn to share, we can cover topics or resonate with what has been shared, or do we want to use crosstalk boundaries like in public ACA meetings?
- When someone becomes emotional during a meeting, will we pause before the next person speaks?
- What group guidelines do we want to adopt? We don’t need to read them at every meeting, but we can refer to them as needed. (See LPG Study Guide, page 4, “Supporting Group Safety,” available at <http://lpg.adultchildren.org>)
- How will we practice personal responsibility when we get triggered? Some possibilities:
 - Reparent silently to ourselves and use other program tools such as the 12 Steps.
 - Seek outside support, maintaining confidentiality, from a neutral, experienced ACA member, therapist, or the like.
 - Discuss the conflict during the meeting, sharing from the I-perspective (I feel, I need) without blame.
 - Let others know if we need to step out of a meeting momentarily.

Note: Group members are responsible for their well-being and are encouraged to look after themselves and seek support if needed. See LPG *Appendix G: Working with Reparenting Challenges*, p. 228-229, and *Chapter 10: Feeling Is Healing*, p. 101-117.

Group agreements

A group agreement lists guidelines on how groups handle discussions, meetings, and confidentiality. A group agreement clarifies the intentions and requests of the group. If and when issues arise, groups can refer to the group agreement or written responses to remind everyone of group guidelines or renegotiate by group conscience. You can adapt the following sample if your group wants to use a study group agreement.

LPG Group Sample Agreement (Please adapt as needed)

Meeting Length & Frequency: We will meet weekly on Tuesdays from 6-7 pm for one hour.

Group Members: Pat, Kiran, Lorem, Ipsum, Blake. Membership will close after two weeks and is limited to eight members.

Meeting Location: We will meet at Pat's house.

Meeting Costs: We will practice the 7th tradition each month. After paying necessary study group expenses, we will direct donations to service bodies by taking a group conscience, referring to guidance on page 599 of the BRB or updated ACA World Service Organization communications.

Meeting Structure: We will do guided practices together in meetings. We will read and complete all other activities before meetings, reserving meeting time to share our responses. We will each take turns chairing the meeting.

Absences: When we need to miss a meeting, we will notify everyone by email or group text. If we miss more than two consecutive meetings, we will let the group know we are withdrawing from the group or recommitting. In the case of extenuating circumstances, the group will take a group conscience. If we take an extended absence or vacation, we will let the group know with as much notice as possible so the group can take a group conscience on how to proceed.

Guidelines: Everything discussed in this study group is confidential. What we hear at the meeting remains at the meeting.

We respect everyone's right to participate equally or not to participate. If one of us feels uncomfortable sharing regularly, that person will seek outside support to understand and help resolve the issue. We might not be in a place in our recovery to participate in a group, or the group might not be a good fit for us. Regardless, we strive to communicate if/when we need to leave to practice healthy ways of working with conflict.

We will refrain from interrupting or talking while someone else is talking and will listen attentively to one another. We recognize that some people need longer to gather their thoughts or might be less comfortable speaking in groups than others, and we strive to create space for one another to share. We use 'I' statements to share our personal experiences.

If we resonate with another person's share, we can speak about our experience on the same topic, but we refrain from commenting on or referring to the speaker's share.

We contribute to group safety and order by keeping the focus on ourselves in the here and now, using ACA tools, principles, and the Twelve Traditions.

We will be responsible for our triggers, look after ourselves, and seek outside support if we're upset before or after meetings. It's okay not to participate in an activity if we will not have the capacity to be in our challenge zone. This capacity grows the more we recognize and tend to our triggers. It's okay to say, in our own words, something such as, "I am getting triggered and need to step out. I will come back in a little bit." (See LPG Preface, p. 4.)

We will do our best to respect each other's feelings, views, and concerns. If we need to speak up about a conflict with another group member(s), we will do so while honoring the humanity in each person to the best of our ability. We will avoid indirect communication.

For more bonus resources, visit <http://lpg.adultchildren.org>.