



## **ESTABLISHING PEER SUPPORT GROUPS**

After completion of the Kick Kentucky Cancer program, participants may be interested in continued social support as a group. Encourage participants to continue meeting regularly to provide social support to one another. They can do this either formally or informally after the completion of the series. There is evidence that shows peer support groups either formally led by trained facilitators or peer-led groups are equally effective. Both types of peer support groups can be successful establishing positive relationships, supportive environments, reducing the burden of care, providing a safe space to experience difficult emotions, and creating a sense of belonging.

### **FORMAL PEER SUPPORT GROUPS**

Some Extension agents may choose to continue planning, organizing, and hosting meeting opportunities for participants through a regularly scheduled peer support group. In this role, the agent serves as the organizer and communicator of all events and meetings. These could be either in-person or virtual, depending on the needs of the participants. The physical location for an in-person support group could be the Extension office or a more accessible location in the community. Rather than delivering an Extension program during the meeting time, a safe space and place is provided for participants to feel comfortable sharing highs and lows, current experiences, asking questions, or debriefing lived experiences. Consider providing beverages and refreshments, if possible.

### **INFORMAL PEER SUPPORT GROUPS**

The Extension agent does not have to organize or lead peer support groups after program completion. Instead, the Extension agent can serve as a connector. Support the establishment of the peer support group by sharing contact information among the participants (e.g., phone tree, email, mailing addresses). Encourage the group to take ownership of their meetings or talk to a champion in the group who is willing to take on the role and responsibility of organizing events. Allow the group to plan and schedule their support group sessions. They might ask you for ideas and ways they can meet, but that does not mean you have to plan or schedule the events. With an informal peer support group, there may be more flexibility in the types of meetings and events the group can have.

Whether the peer support group is formal or informal, there are creative ways participants can spend time together. Some examples are below. Consider what resources and opportunities exist within your community and are accessible to your participants.

- Meet regularly to walk at a local park or walking trail.
- Fellowship together over lunch at a local restaurant.
- Volunteer with a local organization supporting patients in cancer treatment or people who have survived cancer.

## EXISTING PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

There may be situations in which only one or a few participants are interested, but not enough are devoted to establishing a new peer support group. For those individuals, encourage them to seek out resources and organizations that facilitate existing cancer support groups locally, regionally, or virtually. Here is a list of organizations that would be helpful under these circumstances.

Organization	Contact Information
Kentucky Cancer Program Pathfinders (listed by county)	<a href="https://netapps.louisville.edu/Pathfinder/Resource/survivorship-and-support-groups">https://netapps.louisville.edu/Pathfinder/Resource/survivorship-and-support-groups</a>
Gilda's Club KY	<a href="https://www.gck.org/">https://www.gck.org/</a> ; karen@gildasclublouisville.org
National Gilda's Club	<a href="https://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/">https://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/</a>
UK HealthCare Cancer Support Services	<a href="https://ukhealthcare.uky.edu/markey-cancer-center/cancer-support-services/groups">https://ukhealthcare.uky.edu/markey-cancer-center/cancer-support-services/groups</a>

For additional information about facilitating or supporting peer support groups, consider the following resources.

- Coping - Cancer Support Groups. <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/coping/adjusting-to-cancer/support-groups>
- Support and Online Communities | American Cancer Society. [https://www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services/online-communities.html#:~:text=Cancer%20Survivors%20Network%20\(CSN\)&text=CSN%20is%20available%2024%2F7,of%20cancer%20and%20its%20treatment](https://www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services/online-communities.html#:~:text=Cancer%20Survivors%20Network%20(CSN)&text=CSN%20is%20available%2024%2F7,of%20cancer%20and%20its%20treatment)

## REFERENCE

Ussher, J., Kirsten, L., Butow, P., & Sandoval, M. (2006). What do cancer support groups provide which other supportive relationships do not? The experience of peer support groups for people with cancer. *Social science & medicine*, 62(10), 2565-2576.