



Parent Support Services Society of BC

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STARTING A PARENT SUPPORT CIRCLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The Parent Support Services Society of BC (PSS) is a non-profit organization that is mandated to work towards the prevention of child abuse. The Society operates a province-wide network of support groups called *Parent Support Circles*. The Circles are an integrated part of a community based structure of support for families. They supplement other services in the community by providing a neutral place to seek information, express fears and practice newly acquired skills. Working on a self-help model to provide support, information and resources through a discussion format, the circles provide an opening for parents to connect with their peers over common concerns, provide support and offer an opportunity to develop connections from within their community.

The following is a guide for some of the steps that can be taken to set up a Parent Support Circle and that has been used successfully in other communities:

1. **Contact the Provincial office** at (604) 669-1616 or 1-800-665-6880 **or the PSS office in your region** (see above) and request a package of information for development of new Circles. Feel free to call the nearest PSS Local Program Coordinator / Program Director listed below for clarification on any points.

Prince George and Central Interior - Contact Julie Bergen, Parent Resource Coordinator, Prince George

Vancouver, Lower Mainland, South Interior and Sunshine Coast - Contact Bella Cenezero, Program Director, Vancouver

Central Island Region - Contact Sandi Halvorson, Local Program Coordinator, Nanoose Bay

Victoria, North and South Island, Northwest BC - Contact Tina Pearson, Program Director, Victoria

2. **Develop a Steering Committee:**
 - (a) Usually there are one or two individuals in a community willing to lead the creation or development of a Parent Support Circle. The first step is to create a Steering Committee.
 - (b) Approach people working in child welfare, family support agencies, First Nations/Aboriginal agencies, bands/reserves, multicultural agencies and interested individuals in your community to be on the Steering Committee.
 - (c) Begin developing a Steering Committee. When it has been determined that the community wishes to support a Parent Support Circle the next step is to bring together family serving professionals and other interested individuals in preventing child abuse and in supporting families.

3. **Hold an Orientation meeting:**

Set the date, time and place for an Orientation meeting and invite the Local Program Coordinator to this meeting. The Program Coordinator will provide the Steering Committee with information about the program, promotional materials and the procedure for getting a Circle established. She/he will let you know what Parents in Crisis expects of communities and what we can provide for you.

4. **Steering Committee development:**

The Committee may decide to meet a time or two and discuss how they see Parent Support Circles working in their Community. Participants will begin the process of deciding whether they wish to join the Steering Committee.

- (a) Those who choose to join the Committee will decide which roles they would like to take on. There is need for a chair (or co-chairs), promotion, recruitment, screening committees, and a liaison who will be available to the volunteer facilitators between meetings especially in cases where crisis intervention, consultation or emotional support is needed.
- (b) They will find a location where the steering committee can meet for approximately 1.5 - 2 hours each month (many committees meet over lunch, although the decision is completely up to your committee). It is important for the volunteer facilitators to be able to attend these meetings, as it is their source of support. Meeting times needs to be convenient for the facilitators as well as the committee members.
- (c) The participants will begin to recruit potential group facilitators from within their own individual networks and/or by advertising more widely in the community.

5. **Steering Committee Training:**

At this point in the development of the Committee it is useful to arrange with the Parent Support Circle Program Director for your area, to provide Steering Committee Training. This requires a special meeting of 3 hours in duration. This in depth training will cover the roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee, the structure and function of the Society, issues of child abuse and abuse prevention and the role of the group facilitators. *A Steering Committee Handbook* will be provided at the training.

6. **Steering Committee Information Kits:**

Once the Steering Committee is formed the Local Program Coordinator will provide you with the following information kits:

- (a) **Volunteer Recruitment Package** - includes recruitment guidelines and advertisements, a sample job description and volunteer agreement, and a volunteer application package (sample cover letter, application form, *Parent support Circle* brochure, newsletter, fact sheet, and membership form).
- (b) **Volunteer Screening Package** - includes screening guidelines, criminal record check forms, questions for checking references and an interview question guideline.

- (c) **Promotion Package** - for recruitment of group members - includes sample cable T.V. message board ad, program information sheet, sample ads for school newsletters, an agency profile and some sample newspaper articles.

7. **Recruit Volunteer Facilitators:**

The next step is recruitment and screening of volunteer facilitators.

- (a) The Recruitment Committee will choose volunteer facilitators who have demonstrated a good sense of self-awareness, openness to others, good listening skills, non-judgmental attitude and are not in need of support from the group themselves based on the application form, interview and references.
- (b) Once the interview and reference check have been completed, potential volunteer facilitators are invited to the next Initial Training Session. The Initial Training forms part of the screening process. The Local Coordinator is available to assist in this process as needed. Initial Training is held at different times of the year and is offered when we have a sufficient number of people ready to be trained. The training is held in the most cost effective location and expenses (transportation, accommodation and meals) involved in attending the training by out-of-town participants are covered by PSS. Refreshments and lunch are provided at the training site.
- (c) Trainers will provide feedback to the Committee (either directly or through the Local Coordinator) about the trainees. This feedback about the potential volunteers' performance during the training session will be used for assessing their suitability. Those chosen will be required to undergo a criminal record check and invited to be facilitators.
- (d) Those who are not chosen to be facilitators can be invited (as determined appropriate) to volunteer in other ways (steering committee, driver for group meetings, child minding - if on-site child minding is applicable).

8. **Development of the Parent Support Circle:**

The Steering Committee and the new facilitators (who are now part of the steering committee) have some decisions to make:

- a) Where will the group meet?
- b) Which day of the week?
- c) Will it be daytime or evening?

The most important determinant of group day and time is the convenience of the volunteer facilitators and of course availability of the meeting space.

- d) If this will be a day group will Childcare be provided on site? This is the usual practice for daytime meetings.
- e) How will parent referrals be handled? Will they come through an existing community group such as the local Crisis Line, through the nearest PSS office, or directly to the facilitators? You may wish to discuss this with the Local Program Coordinator.

9. **Support Circle Promotion:**

The Promotion Sub-Committee of the Steering Committee is responsible for promoting the Circle by developing a list of places to put posters and brochures to inform parents of this new program and distributing the material throughout the community. This could include: submitting an article about the Circle to the local media - or request the media do a story about this new program; requesting an invitation to make presentations at staff meetings of appropriate family serving agencies (i.e. public health, mental health, Child & Family Services, immigrant serving agencies, aboriginal/First Nations Friendship Centres, etc.). The Committee ensures that promotional materials are replenished on a regular basis.

As each Community is unique, this list can only offer a guide as to what is typical when setting up a group in a new community. Please contact the Local Program Coordinator or Program Director if there are any questions or comments regarding the process.