



Guide to Starting Your Own
Support Group for
Parents of Gender Creative Kids
(who may or may not identify as trans*)

This guide was produced in the following project

Au delà du genre: Supporter les enfants trans*, leur famille et leur communauté dans une plus grande acceptation des différences.

(Beyond gender: Supporting trans*children, their families and their communities by increasing acceptance of diversity.)

submitted by :

Famijeunes

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THE GOAL OF THIS GUIDE:

To present the process used by Gender Creative Kids Canada in order to create the possibility for other parents, service providers or organizations across the province to reproduce this experience in their own support groups for parents and caregivers who have a trans* or gender creative young person.

THE OBJECTIVES OF A SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS WITH GENDER CREATIVE/TRANS* YOUNG PERSONS

- 1) Empower participants by providing an understanding of the challenges trans* persons and their families through the model of a self-directed group.
- 2) Create a space that promotes sharing and healing to facilitate family life and social insertion.
- 3) Encourage participants to open conversations about their reality in order for them to be able to fight transphobia.
- 4) Provide tools for participants to find information and specialized services to self-educate and educate those around them.
- 5) Support parents of trans-youth by developing their abilities and their knowledge in order to advocate and defend their rights
- 6) Break the isolation and reduce the stress lived by the participants
- 7) Offer psycho-educative theme based programming based on the life experiences and needs of participants to increase understanding of the social and medical transitions of a trans*person.
- 8) Strengthen relationships between parents, their social environments and their trans youth
- 9) Offer a space of healing and support for parents who are often ostracized and isolated.

GENDER CREATIVE KIDS CANADA / ENFANTS TRANSGENRES CANADA:WHO WE ARE.

Gender Creative Kids Canada provides resources for supporting and affirming gender creative kids within their families, schools, and communities. By offering information and opportunities for connection between parents and caregivers, educators, health and social service providers, researchers, activists, and children and youth across Canada, we hope to contribute towards transforming our world into a safe, affirming, and joyful place for all children. Our monthly bilingual support groups aim to do just that!

We offer monthly groups for kids and their parents to come together to share their experiences of gender creative realities highlighting both struggles and strengths, creating transformative spaces of mutual support and aid for parents and their kids. Through group programming — wherein the parents group and the kids group meet simultaneously but separately to explore, discuss, share and support their experiences of homophobia and transphobia — we aim to build inter-relational support and growth within families and communities.

Our programming is parallel, meaning that the discussion topic in the parents group is the same that features in the kids group. Parallel programming is an important and powerful group model in that it fosters communication tools to aid in intergenerational exploration and a mutual sharing of ideas and experiences, which affect family systems while creating ongoing opportunities for open communication.

Gender Creative Kids offers a space for youth, parents, and caregivers to find people with similar journeys and interests. It's a space for all those people looking for a heart-to-heart, a "spill-it-all-out" talk, or a laugh-out-loud conversation with other parents or caregivers who have a gender creative child.

GENDER CREATIVE KIDS: WHO THEY ARE.

Gender creative kids are kids who identify and express their gender in ways that differ from what others may expect. They are also sometimes referred to as gender nonconforming, gender variant, gender independent, transgender, and in the case of Aboriginal children, two-spirited. Sometimes gender creative kids grow up to identify with the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two spirited (LGBTQ2) communities... and sometimes they don't. Gender diversity is healthy and gender creative kids deserve to be supported and affirmed in their families, schools and communities.

PARENTS OF GENDER CREATIVE / TRANS* YOUNG PERSONS. WHO THE PARENTS ARE.

The key to offer services and support to gender creative and trans* young persons is to work in collaboration with the parents. Most parents feel isolated and may feel at a loss when they discover that their child may express themselves or may identify with a gender that is different from the one the child was assigned at birth. When the young boy puts on a dress at home this may be tolerated, however when that child wants to do this in public, things may get complicated. There are some parents that have no problem with this while others may discourage this behaviour.

Understanding the experience of a young person who is gender creative or trans* is important. The key to success for the well-being and health of these young persons is the support that the parents can offer ((Moller et al 2008; Ryan et al, 2010). Trans Pulse in 2012 published the article « Impacts of Strong Parental Support for Trans youth ». They found that once a parent accompanies their young person's gender identity in a positive and supportive way, the young person has a higher rate of life satisfaction, a higher self esteem and less mental health problems while reducing the risk of attempted suicide.

A parent should never feel alone as they confront medical and educational services, their family or the community when it has to deal with the stakes that surround their gender creative/trans* young person.

INTRODUCTION

You may be a parent or a caregiver of a young person who is trans* or gender creative and you are interested in starting your own group. You may be an ally who thinks a group in your area is needed. Whoever you are, we hope that we can help you in starting your own group.

There are many guides out there for starting your own support, action, advocacy or peer group, regardless of the topic. I would encourage you to get tips and tricks from many of the guides by using a popular internet search engine or visiting your local library, to create what is best for your community. We have included a few links, in our reference section for some of those guides that we found to be helpful.

In this guide, we want to concentrate on what may make your group stand out among the rest. Creating a group for parents of gender creative and trans* young people may have specific challenges and needs which may not be addressed in some of the other guides.

Creating a group starts with some basic principles:

- responding to a need
- creating a space to share
- finding participants
- animating or facilitating conversations
- growing, evolving and expanding
- creating satellite activities.

So...where do you start?

Well...as we encourage you to follow the rhythm of your child, we encourage you to follow your own rhythm as well. The best place to start is right where you feel the most comfortable starting.

RESPONDING TO A NEED: THE BEGINNING

Many people who have a gender creative or trans* young person in their care need to break their isolation in order to be better equipped to embark on this journey with their child (no matter what the child's age). It is important to reach out and get to know other people who are living or who have lived a similar experience. This journey is not easy, and in some cases, may seem impossible in the beginning. Knowing that you are not alone is a great asset in preparing you for this voyage of not only self-discovery but of discovering who your child is and will become.

For some, it is reaching out to others using online social media or meeting up with someone in person, connecting with someone by phone or by joining a group. Each and every one of these are possible by starting your own parent group which can take on different forms or evolve to something greater.

For others, your group, in whatever form it may take, may be the first time that a parent may have found others with similar experiences. Your group may be the only one existing in your town or maybe your whole province.

There is a need to go to a place that you and your child feel welcome, a place where being a parent to a trans* or gender creative young person is accepted and celebrated.

It is clear that the need is there. Here are the main needs that our parents shared:

- to not feel alone (for the parent and the young person)
- looking for information, references and support (services, stakes, schools, social and medical transitions)
- networking (to meet and exchange with other parents)
- a certain validation that what they are doing is okay.

CREATING A SPACE TO SHARE WHERE AND HOW THE GROUP IS GOING TO CONNECT

Now depending on your comfort level and the area you live in, your group can be offered:

- through online meet-ups (through a networking platform with or without video chat)
- in person at someone's home
- in person at a community space (with or without child care)

In some communities, where there is a concern for safety, the details of the meeting spots are often only shared with members once they are screened in order to ensure that person joining the group will not pose a threat to the parents or the children.

We have found that in Canada, most of the spaces are public knowledge, however we know of groups in other countries which hold most of their meetings in a secured undisclosed location. We see this especially with their specialized summer camps and retreats which are exclusively for trans* identified youth. The location is only divulged after a participant signs up to the activity and a preliminary contact is made with someone from the organization.

One of our main goals of creating a safe space for parents was to also create a safe space for their children including the trans*child and their siblings. Offering parallel programming for the children is one of the key components of our groups. We understand that just as parents want to meet up with other parents like themselves it is as important (if not more) for trans* and gender creative children to be able to meet others like themselves.

We also know that when a trans* child transitions, so do their whole family in their own respective ways, therefore siblings are welcome to meet other brothers and sisters who are sharing this bigger journey.

FINDING PARTICIPANTS

To start a group, you may need either another parent or an ally to help in the process. You may be the only parent ready to take this on, however if you find this other person to help you out it will make everything a lot easier for you. This additional person can co-animate, act as a replacement, and just be your “go to” person when things get tough or a person to celebrate with when things go well. If you are an ally and not a parent, it is imperative to find at least one parent of a gender creative or trans* young person to start your group. After all, our model is based on creating parent empowerment and peer based support. Although many professionals may have knowledge of our challenges no one really knows what a parent goes through but another parent. Plus, parents will feel much more comfortable exchanging with other parents.

Enlist the help of an organization (hospital, community center, etc) to get the word out that there is an upcoming group meeting or even to offer a neutral space to meet. It is very important to have an email account or phone number where people may reach you or the group. That contact information must be current, must be attended to and checked regularly. Remember how it was like when you were looking for someone or somewhere to go to support you and or your trans* child. It may not be easy for many to reach out and if they call a number that is out of order or send an email that never gets answered, it’s like getting a slap on the face to many. It can be discouraging or just may scare the parent away

Other parents or caregivers of GCK can be found through online forums, using one of the popular social media platforms, or by reaching out to your gender specialist or pediatrician to refer new parents to your group. For us, 1 in 5 people are referred by the Dr. in our area that specializes in gender variance. Local papers, bulletin boards, referrals and social media are other ways of getting the word out. We also get many new parents who contact us either by email or by phone after doing a news story either through a radio show, newspaper or television.

We posted information for our group at the clinics, the hospitals, local papers and received many referrals from the local pediatrician that specialized in gender variance.

Monthly Invitations

Here are examples of our monthly invitations to the parents. We would add the information for the particular theme being presented at the next meeting. Since we are a bilingual group (French and English) everything is sent out in both languages.

We used social media, mainly Facebook. The group has their own private secret Facebook group which posts events while also giving a chance for the members to connect outside of the monthly group meetings. The organization also has a website and a Facebook page which will post our public activities and events while also posting current news stories.

The invitation is also available through the website and sent out individually to parents that requested to be on our mailing list. This invitation is sent out at least one week prior to the event or several weeks before, with a reminder the week before.

If you are interested in adding your group's monthly meetings, your organization or your services to the Gender Creative Kids Canada website, please feel free to add them using the following links.

<http://gendercreativekids.ca/submit-event/>

<http://gendercreativekids.ca/submit-resource/>

<http://gendercreativekids.ca/submit-provider/#service-type>

Anyone can add an event and a website administrator will receive an email notification that someone's event is awaiting approval. A volunteer parent administrator will then verify your information and publish the event for everyone to see. If you need to update or change anything once submitted, please contact info@gendercreativekids.ca.

Please be sure to include the possibility of requesting to be taken off the email mailing list as is required by law.

Monthly invitation templates

(ENGLISH MESSAGE WILL FOLLOW)

Bonjour à toutes et tous,

Je vous écris pour vous inviter à la rencontre de _____ (mois) des deux groupes de Montréal — Gender Creative Kids / Enfants transgenres Canada — qui auront lieu lundi prochain, le _____ (date), à 18h15, chez Famijeunes (3904 Rue Notre-Dame Ouest, Montréal, QC H4C 1R1, Montréal, Métro St-Henri ou métro Lionel-Groulx). Deux groupes se rencontrent: le groupe des parents — et le groupe des enfants.

*** le programme pour le mois***

Merci de confirmer la présence de vos enfants à l'adresse courriel suivante: (entrer l'adresse courriel ou no. de téléphone du contact) avant vendredi! Veuillez noter que vous pouvez venir sans enfant. Tout au long de l'année, les groupes se tiendront de manière régulière le 2e lundi du mois. N'oubliez pas que les rencontres du groupe de parents sont ouvertes, et que vous êtes les bienvenu-e-s aussi souvent que vous le souhaitez, et ce, même si vous n'êtes pas venu-e-s depuis des mois!

Pour plus d'information sur les activités de Gender Creative Kids / Enfants transgenres Canada, nous vous invitons à visiter la page enfantstransgenres.ca régulièrement.

Vous recevez ce courriel car vous avez participé à une activité d'Enfants transgenres Canada. Si vous ne voulez plus recevoir notre courriel mensuel concernant le groupe, n'hésitez pas à nous contacter — nous vous retirerons de la liste sans problème.

Au plaisir de vous revoir,

(insert names of organizers/animators/facilitators), Enfants transgenres Canada

Hello,

I am writing to invite you to the _____ (month) meeting of Gender Creative Kids / Enfants transgenres Canada Montreal group, to be held on Monday, _____ (date), at 6:15 pm at Famijeunes (3904 Rue Notre-Dame Ouest, Montréal, QC H4C 1R1, St-Henri or Lionel-Groulx Metro station). As usual, two groups will meet: the parents' group, and the children's group.

*** insert info about the theme of the month or the program presented ***

Please confirm the presence of your children with (contacts email or phone number) before Friday! Please note that you can come without your children. The groups will be held throughout the year, the second Monday of each month. Remember that the parent group meetings are open, and you are welcome as often as you like, and even if you did not come for months!

For more info on all the activities proposed by Gender Creative Kids/ Enfants transgenres Canada, please visit our web page gendercreativekids.ca.

You are receiving this email because you have participated in some activities offered by Gender Creative Kids Canada. If you do not want to receive this monthly invitation to the group, or the occasional update on the organization's activities, do not hesitate to contact us to let us know.

Looking forward to meeting up with you again,
(insert names of organizers/animators/facilitators), **Gender Creative Kids Canada**

Monthly invitation template for Facebook

Bonjour à tous et toutes,

Je vous écris pour vous inviter à la rencontre de discussion du mois de _____(mois) des deux groupes de Montréal — Gender Creative Kids / Enfants transgenres Canada — qui auront lieu le lundi prochain, le _____(date), à 18h15, chez Famijeunes (3904 Rue Notre-Dame Ouest, Montréal, QC H4C 1R1, Montréal, Métro St-Henri ou métro Lionel-Groulx). Deux groupes se rencontrent: le groupe des parents — et le groupe pour les enfants. Merci de confirmer la présence de vos enfants à l'adresse courriel suivante: (entrer l'adresse courriel ou no. de téléphone du contact) avant vendredi!

Veuillez noter que vous pouvez venir sans enfant.

Tout au long de l'année, les groupes se tiendront de manière régulière le 2e lundi du mois.

N'oubliez pas que les rencontres au groupe de parents sont ouvertes, et que vous êtes les bienvenues aussi souvent que vous le souhaitez, et ce, même si vous n'êtes pas venus depuis des mois!

Au plaisir de vous revoir,

(Noms des organisateurs/animateurs), Gender Creative Kids / Enfants transgenres Canada

Hello,

I am writing to invite you to the _____(month) meeting of Gender Creative Kids / Enfants transgenres Canada Montreal group, to be held on Monday, _____(date) at 6:15 pm at Famijeunes (3904 Rue Notre-Dame Ouest, Montréal, QC H4C 1R1, St-Henri or Lionel-Groulx Metro station). As usual, two groups will meet: the parents' group, and the children's group.

Please confirm the presence of your children with (contacts email or phone number) before Friday! Please note that you can come without your children. The groups will be held throughout the year, the second Monday of each month.

Remember that the parent group meetings are open, and you are welcome as often as you like, and even if you have not come for months!

Looking forward to meeting up with you again,
(names of organizers/animators/facilitators) Gender Creative Kids

ANIMATING OR FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS

In the beginning for any participant of any group it's just about getting together with others who share a similar interest or have a similar need. What attracts a participant to a particular group is what that group can offer them or what they can offer the group. The importance is to create a safe space. The basics are as follows:

- anyone can relax to be able to express openly any thought, belief or reality
- feel welcome and safe
- where there is no judgement
- free from oppression
- ask questions if you need clarification to anything.
- this is a confidential space. Anything personal shared stays within these spaces.

Workshop series

Workshop series, or theme based group meetings, can offer a fresh look from the regular type of group support meetings. Each theme was created based on a subject or topic that was brought up by the parents or their children at previous monthly meetings. After all, this is their group. It is important that they drive the direction of the group. Therefore it is based on what parents would like to hear and not something you think they should hear.

Each group of parents or kids may have different needs or desires on what they would like to see happening. For some groups, time for just sharing may be what is requested and needed for a particular group. For others, it may be that they want more information on certain subjects. Some parents work really well with support groups while others work well with interactive workshops or information sessions.

We had a mix of group only events to guest speakers or interactive workshops based on each theme. However, be ready to switch directions, if there is no guest speaker, even if there is a theme for scheduled for that particular group meeting. Example: the theme may have been “coming out” yet the parents at that group needed to talk more about “their kids social transition” and name changes or medical transitions. No worries if the conversation goes away from the theme that was chosen for that particular group. Take a deep breath. You got this. After all, the group is there to provide an outlet for parents and respond to their needs.

A schedule was sent out to the parents with a short description of the year’s themes. You can also send out 3 month or 6 month planning schedule or even announce a special group meeting with a special guest or theme, month by month.

We have found that when compared to an open group meeting, which only focused on providing a space for conversation, more people attended these themed-based groups. The calendar gave parents a chance to plan ahead and make it a point to attend a particular theme based on their need. Therefore we found our group growing to a point where we had a minimum of 15 parents who would show up, including up to 6 newcomers and the frequent flyers (parents who attend regularly).

Some themes may or may not have guest speakers or a showing of some video to facilitate exchange among members or to stimulate a discussion. Guest speakers can be found in your local organizations, a parent (and their network) a trans*youth or family member (of the parents attending the group). For one of our workshops, we asked our trans* young adults (17-19), whose parents had attended our meetings, to be on a panel. To encourage their

participation, we offered all of them an honorarium. Many speakers agree to voluntarily present for your group while others you may need to pay an amount for their presence.

The following is an example of the schedule we presented to the parents at the beginning of the year. Each workshop theme was created out of the needs expressed by the parents. Each parent group will have different needs based on their individual journeys and where they find themselves. However, the following examples stem from some of the basic “themes” we have found pop up regularly at our meetings.

Example of a programming program Calendar for 2015

(from the project financed by the Ministère de la Justice of Québec)

Workshop 1: Jan – Guest speaker – Sex educator (by online video chat)

“What Makes a Baby by Cory Silverberg”

Reading and discussion/response to *What Makes a Baby*. Discussion topics include explorations of notions of family, gender stereotyping of parental roles, who carries babies, reproduction, and where babies come from. Questions include asking children to reflect on their families, ideas of reproduction, parental roles, and education around reproduction aimed at children. Sex, sexuality, and gender identity will also be discussed.

*Details for the parents group : A sex ed. specialist leads an interactive conversation with parents about sexuality and sex education of their trans*children/ youth. How to discuss sexuality and how to maintain open communication is also presented.*

Workshop 2: Feb – Guest speaker – Pediatrician that specializes in gender identity

“Going to the doctor and accessing medical care”

Reflections on feelings about doctor’s visits: what makes you feel safe and what doesn’t? Advocacy and self-advocacy, naming your experience, and being an active participant in your health care will be explored. Activities include making waiting room signs affirming gender creativity and diversity.

*Details for the parents: A doctor specializing in providing care for gender creative and trans*children answers general medical questions that parents may have about their children and their youth. It is also a chance to create a connection with a health provider.*

Workshop 3: March – shared stories from parents

“Coming out”

It’s all about “coming out” or not, to our families, friends, and all those people around us. Join us and share experiences, share strategies, and especially meet other parents who are living or have lived similar situations as your own. The children and

youth will also be doing activities along the theme of “coming out.”

Workshop 4: April – Guest speakers: Panel of 3 youth (male, female agender)

Youth Panel: “Centering gender creative kids’ voices”

Three gender creative youth panelists will present their expert voices and experiences. The goal of this session is to encourage youth to find the words to define, name, and communicate their experiences — situating gender creative kids’ voices at the centre of the dialogue in order to learn from them. This event will also help create a platform from which to build a better understanding of some of the strengths, struggles, and resiliences of growing up gender creative.

Parallel programming with the kids: In the kids group, youth are encouraged to find words to define, name, and communicate their experiences.

Workshop 5: May – Interactive activity is presented on active listening

“Reflection and Communication: Underscoring the importance of listening to your kids!”

Parents, listen to your kids! Kids, express your needs to your parents and caregivers. This meeting will focus on strengthening families through communication, through explorations of and reflections on the importance of intergenerational communication. Skills which foster open, honest communication and listening through difficult conversations will be shared, as will strategies to talk about potentially difficult experiences such as homophobia and transphobia.

Workshop 6: June – sharing of stories

“Navigating spaces and finding community and allies”

Exploring strategies for creating safer spaces and locating allies in spaces such as day camps, sleep away camps, summer activities, swimming lessons, etc. Reflecting on strategies used to find safer spaces throughout the last school year and developing strategies to adapt and grow while taking on new summer challenges and activities. Themes will include body and self-esteem, reaching out to family and friends, and creating space where kids can shine!

(supplemental) Workshop: Aug – Community special event – Corn roast

Back to school activity: “Shifting gears – Explorations of school cultures”

The goal of this session is to support youth and their families in the preparations for the upcoming school year. Issues such as bullying, harassment, homophobia, transphobia, finding allies, asserting rights, needs, and boundaries will be explored. Additionally, topics such as working with educators and school administrators as potential gender creative youth allies will be addressed. This is done through a community event where everyone gets a chance to get to know one another outside of the group setting.

Workshop 7: Sept – sharing

Questions not answered. Review, reflections, and insights from the last year, Answering questions not answered and sharing skills and successes!

Workshop 8: October – Guest speaker: Mental Health professional

“Mental health and well-being: Self-care for you, by you”

Recognizing the impacts, challenges, and rewards of gender creative parenting, this workshop will focus on the importance of self-care, mental health and well-being. The goals will include identifying needs and how to meet them, recognizing self-care strategies, and coping skills to draw upon so that you don't run on empty! Kids workshop will likewise focus on mental health and self-care as we explore the impacts, challenges, and rewards of asserting gender creative identities.

Workshop 9: Nov – Guest speaker – Legal professional (Lawyer)

“Legal rights and empowerment”

A guest speaker will talk us through some of the legal nuances and possibilities of supporting gender creative kids and families, such as name changes and changes of sex designation. Empowerment strategies and tools will also be reviewed.

Workshop 10: December

WRAP-UP: – Celebration of gender creative kids and their families, and a celebration of all that you've accomplished!!!!

Workshop Series Notes – Parents and children's

Each workshop runs from 6:15 to 8 pm. Doors open as of 5:45 pm.

For the parents group, parents are welcome to start arriving from about 5:45pm to 6:15. At 6:15pm we all have a seat and the animators (child care persons) for the children group accompany the children to another room located in the same building. Allowing parents to arrive a bit earlier permits a time for parents to exchange, catch up, and get a feel of the place. This is also a good time for the facilitator or another parent to connect with a new parent. Parents are also given a card where they may write their name using a white board marker. We use a cardboard, folded like a place setting tag, and cover it with a plastic (similar to what is used to protect books for schools (adhesive film) We can then reuse the cards at each meeting being sure to erase the parents name after each meeting.

For the parents group, we start off with a quick introduction of who we are, what we do as a group, what are some of the baseline info regarding how the group will proceed. This is where you can ask parents for how they would like the meeting to go and set the guidelines for exchange within the group. For new groups, it is recommended that the parents decide and agree upon the guidelines. If the group has already decided on them but there is a new parent, just do a quick refresher on some of the guidelines. Also be sure to ask the new parent what they would like to see happen at the meeting. These guidelines can include, yet are not limited to, the following:

- 1) speak one at a time
- 2) be respectful, be aware, be present
- 3) try speaking in the general and keep personal opinions to self
- 4) step forward or step back – someone who is shy and doesn't share may take step forward, and for those who share often will step back to let others talk.
- 5) Vegas rule – what happens in “Vegas” (the group) stays in “ Vegas” (the group)

A confidentiality statement is very important at this time to insure that what is said within the group stays with the group. We also sometimes add that if sharing a story of someone else (because sometimes we have the need to say to someone else that we are not alone and there are others or we need to strengthen our own experience by stating/sharing the experience of another) be sure not to mention the persons name, location, the childs name, etc. In short, no identifying clues, as not all parents are “out” and many children are “stealth”.

We then do some type of activity or ice-breaker so the parents can have a chance to know a bit more about who is around the table. Here are some examples:

- a) Name, a “aha” moment, age of your child.
- b) Name, how are you feeling today in a few words, child's gender.
- c) a series of pictures are placed on the table and participants are asked to choose their favorite one or the one that best fits the moment and share with others while stating their name and or age of child and gender.
- d) name, a positive experience and a negative experience

There are many other ice-breaker and introduction type of activities online. Just use a popular web search engine online and type in “ice-breakers” or “name games” and you will have more than enough ideas for your activity bank.

It is important to go first, with an example, so that participants have a reference for when it is their turn. Try and keep this introduction part as short as possible, especially if you have a guest speaker showing up, enabling participants to fully benefit from the workshop or the discussion in the group. If one participant is taking too much time, try and interject when there is a pause or find a moment to cut in politely so that other parents can also have time to share.

Remember for new parents, this is the first time they have seen or met other people who are living what they are. They may need some extra time to introduce themselves and may take more time than what was proposed. Stay flexible but aware of how many other people are left to be introduced.

For the kids group here is an example of a schedule for a self-directed group.

Schedule:

15 min – Begin with intro, ground rules and check-ins. This will include deciding on the schedule for the night which is determined by the group and the proposed activities for that session are chosen by a random draw. This is done to empower the children as this is their group, their education and they get to decide.

Ground rules (identify a participant or two to write them on the chalkboard and then ask each kid to sign the board to show they agree with the rules)

These are examples of proposed rules, they are to be developed together.

- * Everything said in the room stays in the room
- * When someone talks, we listen
- * Oops! Sorry!
- * Speak in “I” statements
- * Respect and listen to the rules

1 hr 15 min – 3 sessions (approximately 2 free play, 1 discussion/activities)

25 minutes – session 1

25 minutes – session 2

25 minutes – session 3

15 min – check-out, clean-up, report-back to parents, good-byes.

At the end of both groups we have the children join the parents group and a child will then share a summary of what they did in their group before saying good-bye to everyone.

GROWING, EVOLVING AND EXPANDING

We started by organizing small picnics in parks where we could meet some other parents and give a chance for our young people to connect. From there, parents started to invite the group to their places for potlucks every few months so that we could keep in touch during the whole year. We finally found a neutral space, in a community center, that allowed us to open our meetings to a larger public to be able to reach new parents.

The community center we found was able to offer two spaces, simultaneously, on a monthly basis. One space was for the parents and the other was for the children from the ages of 5-14. The monthly group meetings were small to start off with (some meetings there were only 2 of us), yet we were there every month ready to welcome any new parents.

For about two years we struggled with participant attendance at our monthly meetings. We were having a hard time getting new parents to join us. There were times we were only two parents and never hit more than 8. So we decided to try something new. We decided to try offering workshops within the parents group. We are not sure if our present success is because of the new format or if it is an increase in the number of parents out there (or maybe it's a combination of both). By the third year, we now have an average of 15 parents and 12 children at each meeting with at least 3 new parents attending. Our last event we had 52 participants attending (roughly 40% parents and 60% children).

From what started out as 5 parents meeting in a park has now grown to over 75 members who may continue to attend the group meetings or who join us for our other satellite events like potlucks, conferences, special events and/or through social media.

Therefore, any form your group will take in the beginning is a start to something greater. Whether it be a meet-up every few months, monthly group meetings, or weekly connections it's all good.

CREATING SATELLITE ACTIVITIES.

Our satellite activities were created out of the need to offer an alternative to the monthly Monday night meetings. They included the participation of parents from our monthly group, parents with older youth (since our children's/youth group is only for 6-14) and parents who cannot make the Monday night meeting. Our satellite activities are:

- potlucks and picnics
- conferences
- trainings (we invite parents to share their story as well as help in our trainings offered to schools and other organizations
- informal get-togethers
- organized activities (pumpkin picking, holiday parties)
- mini retreats
- two Facebook groups
- our “connect locally” feature offered through our website.

CONCLUSION AND RECAP

Creating a group starts with some basic principles:

- responding to a need
 - to not feel alone (for the parent and the young person)
 - looking for information, references and support (services, stakes, schools, social and medical transitions)
 - networking (to meet and exchange with other parents)
 - a certain validation that what they are doing is okay.
- creating a space to share
 - through online meet-ups (through a networking platform with or without video chat)
 - in person at someone's home
 - in person at a community space (with or without child care)
- finding participants
 - enlist help of another parent or ally
 - enlist help of a partner organization or service provider
 - post it using social media, newspapers, etc.
 - use our website!
- animating or facilitating conversations
 - a place to relax to be able to express openly
 - a place to feel welcome and safe
 - where there is no judgement
 - free from oppression
 - ask questions if you need clarification to anything.
 - this is a confidential space. Anything personal shared stays within these spaces.
- growing, evolving and expanding
 - be ready to adapt and move forward
- creating satellite activities.
 - Offer other ways for parents and youth to get together

ANNEXE

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/safespace.pdf>

Starting a parent group links – liens pour débiter un groupe pour les parents.

http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=8&ved=0ahUKEwj5_vgioTKAhUlWj4KHZi9BZYQFghJMAc&url=http%3A%2F%2Fnccc.georgetown.edu%2Fdocuments%2F LGBT_Brief.pdf&usq=AFQjCNEEHU1radVEG4rUczvu60uSISqj5Q&sig2=ZEhKN7P5Zb5SMMmkm0Z2_Q

Made primarily for parents with children who have a disability or who have special needs yet all of them have some very pertinent tips:

<http://www.parentcompanion.org/article/print/tips-to-start-a-parent-support-group>

<http://fpiesfoundation.org/starting-your-own-support-group/>

http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwj8pqHVjITKAhVI8j4KHYAWCpYQFggoMAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cmha.bc.ca%2Ffiles%2FParentPeerSupportGuide.pdf&usq=AFQjCNG7-KAx_6rdssaxfQWabQ5VYKRffg&sig2=kfKND0a71YoysshQ_LjSlw

Français

<http://fr.wikihow.com/animer-un-groupe><http://www.enfant-different.org/analyseprofessionnel/42-quotidien/417-groupes-de-parole-parents.html>
<http://www.childrenparenting.com/fr/teenagers/teen-development/1007010460.html>

Glossary – glossaire :

http://www.safenetwork.org.uk/training_and_awareness/Pages/supporting-lgbt-young-people.aspx

Notes to parents :

<http://mygsa.ca/parents/parenting-lgbt-child/your-trans-child-what-other-parents-want-you-know>
<http://www.belongto.org/service.aspx?sectionid=144>
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/173-parents>

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l'intimidation. <https://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/Documents/plan-action-intimidation-2015-abrege.pdf>

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<http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/welcoming-schools/documents/Welcoming-Schools-Research-Gender-Identity-Stereotypes.pdf>