# Creating a Successful Group Meet-up



## Selecting Students (Smead, 1995, pp. 48-49)

**DO** select:

* A range of participants so the child will have at least one positive behavioral model
* Children who are not more than two years apart chronologically
* Children with approximately the same and social, emotional, intellectual, and physical maturity
* Children who respond well to social influence
* Children who are known to be able to work cooperatively in a group situation
* Children from different racial, cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds
* Both boys and girls

**DO NOT** select:

* The participant’s siblings or relatives
* Children who are suicidal or homicidal or who have seriously considered attempting these actions
* Children who habitually lie or steal
* Children who are in a recent or ongoing crisis (unless the group is specifically designed to deal with this issue)
* Children who you strongly suspect are being physically or sexually abused
* Children who are too “different” from the rest of the group (e.g., one pregnant girl or one new student from Vietnam who has not yet fully adjusted)
* Children who are extremely aggressive, either physically or verbally

## Starting the Group (Smead, 1995, pp. 54-55)

The group should consist of approximately 6 to 8 students who choose to be part of the group *voluntarily*. Choose a room that closes completely and be sure you hang a sign on the door reminding people not to enter during the session unless there’s an emergency.

General session structure (Smead, 1995, p. 52):

1. Ice breaker or review – This is when the facilitator can address any ideas, feelings, thoughts or questions about the previous session. It is also a time to share about what participants might have practiced since the previous session.
2. Working time – This is the longest part of the session and focuses on the topic for the session.
3. Process time – This is when the group can share what they have felt or learned and also to reflect on plans for future behavioral changes.

## Maintaining the Group (Smead, 1995, pp. 57-73)

**DO**:

* Encourage cohesion by pointing out connections between group members
* Model being real and authentic by self disclosing appropriately
* Use gentle confrontation. For example, “On the one hand you really want to make something of yourself and get a good education, but on the other hand it looks like you keep sabotaging your goal by doing things to get in trouble and make low grades. What you think might be keeping you from reaching your goal?”
* If hostile behaviors are present, deal directly with them. Ask the target youth what it is like to be in a group that they don’t want to be in. Share constructive ways of expressing anger, such as go-arounds with “Today, I feel most angry about…” Encourage exploration of what is provoking anger and encourage other group participants to share about how they might or have felt in similar situations. You could also use physical activities in the session to help teach appropriate way to externalizing anger – e.g. throw paper balls at a wastebasket, draw pictures, hit a punching bag, etc. Be aware that many children come from homes where either anger is not expressed or is expressed inappropriately and, hence, they may never have seen anger dealt with appropriately.
* Allow children to experience negative feelings without “rescuing.”
* Keep reinforcing the need to take responsibility for behavior, helping each child change “you” statements to “I” statements.
* Ask children to review the roles about three quarters of the way through the group.

**DO NOT**:

* Expect children to understand the norms and expectations without your modeling in reinforcing the behaviors many times.
* Use a teacher voice. Instead, use your voice to develop a relaxed, genuine atmosphere so children will understand that group is different than class.
* Let one child monopolize. You might need to say, “You have had a lot of air time today. Please let everyone else had a chance to talk before it’s your turn again” or “You seem to need a lot of attention today. What seems to be bothering me that needs to come out?”