New Beginnings >

Connecting Thread

Facilitating New Beginnings Online

BACKGROUND

Whether your group cannot meet in-person or you want to further your reach by holding your sessions online, *New Beginnings* can help people live well with diabetes from anywhere. Participating in an online support group is a great option for people who live in rural or remote areas, who don't have consistent access to transportation, who are unable to leave their homes due to health and safety concerns, or whose busy schedules make attending in-person sessions hard to do. This Connecting Thread will provide you with the tools to facilitate *New Beginnings* through online sessions.

☆ KEY POINTS

1. **Online delivery can help you keep the group engaged.** Virtual delivery of *New Beginnings* via video conference can be an option when it is unsafe or difficult to hold a *New Beginnings* session in-person or to reach those who may have travel or other limitations.

2. **You will want to research or try different different technology platforms before you select one.** There are multiple video teleconference platforms available for leading online meetings/discussion groups, each with different features and pricing options. If you are part of a larger organization, they may already have a preferred platform that you could use. If not, you can often request a demo or a free trial from the vendor before making a purchase.

3. **It will take time to orient participants to the new technology.** Communication prior to the first online session, as well as a "test-run" where participants log on early before the session starts, or on a day prior to the first session, will help the group navigate the new technology platform. Most video teleconferencing platforms offer a telephone number for those who are unable to connect to video.

4. **Ground rules can be adjusted to reflect the virtual group environment.** These include muting your video/phone when you aren't speaking, saying your name before you speak (especially on the phone), and recognizing that not everyone may have or want to use video. You can let group members know that they can add a photo of themselves to their profile in the platform or send you a photo that you could display at the beginning of the session.

5. **The same facilitation skills you have developed for your in-person sessions will help you lead virtual groups.** While some adjustments are needed to facilitate from a distance, you will still use icebreakers, discussion prompts, and activities to keep the group engaged and on track.

6. **You can find tips throughout the *New Beginnings* materials to help you transition from in-person to virtual.** While the core discussion content works online with little adaptation needed, each module has a Going Virtual Tips section. There is also a customizable PowerPoint template that you can use to show discussion prompts, content from handouts, and multimedia stories to lead your group through the *New Beginnings* modules.

7. **It may be helpful to share content via email before or after sessions.** When you can't be in the room together to pass out handouts or worksheets, take time before or after the session to share any worksheets related to the session. Sending these in Microsoft Word or Google Docs format will allow them to be easily completed without printing. Evaluations can be sent after the session using an online survey tool. There are many free or low-cost options for creating online forms. Again, your organization may already have a tool in place for gathering feedback electronically, or you can request a free trial of an online survey tool.

ADAPTING THE GROUP ACTIVITIES

Think-Pair-Share

- Pair off participants using virtual breakout rooms through the video teleconference platform. You will need check that the breakout room feature is available in the platform you choose.

- Consider leading a "Round Robin" style activity where everyone takes time to think on their own and then shares 1 to 2 ideas related to the discussion topic with the group. This can be done by audio or video or by using the chat box (or a combination of both). Don't rely too much on the chat box because you don't want to lose the personal connection of the audio or video.

- Have group members think about their responses and then, for homework, discuss with a family member or friend. They can then share highlights from the discussion in the next session.

Stories

- Send an email with the link to the audio or video files of any stories in advance of the session.

- Share your screen during the session and play the audio or video files. Be sure to share your computer audio as well as your screen view or the participants won't hear the sound.

- If the story is an audio-only file, insert the file into your *New Beginnings* PowerPoint template along with images that complement the audio file.

- Consider putting text-only stories that you might have handed out to the participants on a slide in the *New Beginnings* PowerPoint template for each module. Or you could record yourself, a colleague, or a participant volunteer reading the story before the session.

Role-playing

- Role-playing activities that would have been done in pairs can be done in breakout rooms, or you can reach out to participants in advance and ask for volunteers to participate in a role-playing activity during the virtual session.

- Ask a colleague to record the role-playing activity with you in advance and then play it during the session. Consider pairing the audio with graphics in your PowerPoint.

- Consider changing to a "What Would You Do" activity where you ask for volunteers to share what they would do in the given situation if they were the person in the story or role-play activity.

ADAPTING THE GROUP ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

Feedback Gathering

- Following a story or role-playing activity, you can use the polling feature of your video teleconference platform to gather feedback from your group members. This allows for anonymous feedback via multiple choice questions.

- Consider using a virtual whiteboard or annotating on a handout or PowerPoint to make the online session more interactive and gather input on the topic being discussed.

- It is important to look at what features are available in the platform and to practice before hand using these tools.

Sample Activity

The Be Your Own Best Friend worksheet is an activity in Module 4: Building Self Confidence that can easily be adapted for an online group:

- Send the link to the worksheet through the chat box so your participants can access it before you begin the activity. You can also email the worksheet to the group ahead of the session.

- Ask one volunteer to read the examples of being your own best friend and being your own worst enemy.

- Use the interactive whiteboard feature and ask participants to write one example for each category.

  These instructions are an example. You can adapt these steps according to your audience and your own comfort with the video teleconferencing platform.

RESOURCES

- Delivering from a Distance: Reaching People at Home with the National DPP Lifestyle Change Program: This webinar was hosted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Diabetes Prevention Program. Presenters shared tips and best practices for delivering traditional, in-person diabetes programs using video teleconferencing.

- A Guide for Using Telehealth Technologies in Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support and in the National Diabetes Prevention Program Lifestyle Change Program: This document offers guidance on how to use different telehealth technologies. *New Beginnings* facilitators may find this information helpful.

- Tips for Facilitating Online Peer Support Groups: This webpage from the Academy of Peer Services offers tips and resources on how to effectively lead online support groups. Although not specific to diabetes, the information can be applied to *New Beginnings* support groups.