

## Guide 2 Annex 6: Creating an effective self-help or self-care support group



Photo credit: The Leprosy Mission Trust India

In a self-help or self-care group, ideally, the leader of the group should be a trained person who acts as a facilitator. A group may be as few as two people and may be composed of family, friends, stigma-affected individuals or members of the community. It can be helpful is to get homogeneous groups, for example of only spouses/partners, women or men, as in some culture women do not open up if it is a heterogeneous group.

### The group needs to agree to abide by ground rules:

1. Everything said in the group stays with the group, and only if there is potential harm to an individual (such as thoughts of suicide) should the confidentiality be breached.
2. The focus is on exploring their feelings and experiences of stigma, and ways of coping.
3. All members have an opportunity to share.
4. A person who does not want to speak should be respected and may be encouraged but not forced to speak.
5. Time is given to each member, but members should not interrupt or talk so much that time is taken from other members.
6. Any tendency in a group member to dominate, put down or control should be checked in a gentle way.
7. Everyone has a voice in the solution and should have the opportunity to express their thoughts and discuss feasibility and options in a non-threatening manner.



Photo Credit: Lepra, Bangladesh

#### The functions of the group leader:

- Communicate with and listen to each member, direct and mediate the communication process and give background information when appropriate.
- Provide resources and referrals to community services or support networks.
- Explain the ground rules.
- Explain the reason and purpose of the group.
- Make sure that respect and time are given to each member – whoever dominates or takes up too much time should be gently dissuaded from continuing, or the counsellor should introduce a subject change, *and* should gently encourage reluctant or quieter individuals to participate. The leader should also be cautious not to talk too much him/herself.
- Help the group focus on exploring their feelings and experiences of stigma and ways of coping.
- Offer options and not solutions; give the group suggestions for solving issues.