

Name of Resource:	"Guide for Starting Empowerment Groups"
Authored by:	Illinois Imagines Project
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Link to Resource:	Full Resource

Purpose: An empowerment group is a group of women with disabilities who support each other in preventing sexual assault and finding resources to help survivors of sexual assault which may occur within a partner relationship. Members of empowerment groups work together to make changes within themselves and their communities. An empowerment group is not therapy, although some survivors who participate may find it therapeutic as well as empowering.

This guide will take you through the process of creating and facilitating an empowerment group. The guide includes instructions in preparing for and conducting group meetings. Please note that this is only a guide. Each group will have its own personality. Feel free to use the guide as it is, or adapt it to the needs of your group.

NOTE: "Guide for Starting Empowerment Groups" is written for women, and the language within is focused on women. Men can and do benefit from empowerment groups; adapt the language in the guide accordingly.

In addition, the "Guide for Starting Empowerment Groups" has at its core empowering survivors of sexual violence to speak up and support themselves and each other. Adapt the guide to empowering survivors of domestic violence.

Barriers:

People without disabilities and people with disabilities benefit from the support of peers; however, people with disabilities may not be given the opportunity or support to form their own peer network. This guide builds upon the strengths and resiliency of people with disabilities and provides one method for people with disabilities to lay claim to their power: to share their life experiences, to listen to others, to claim safety from sexual violence as a basic human right and to create a space of safety and mutual support.

Promising Approaches:

This guide provides structure and content for a 23-session empowerment group for women with disabilities. Each session is described in detail including session plans, materials needed, a script for the facilitator to use, handouts for sessions and forms to keep group notes and records. Allies may be partner with people with disabilities to secure space and assist with group as invited and needed. A key value of Empowerment Groups is ownership of the group by women with disabilities and grounded in the concept of "nothing about us, without us."

Topics included in this guide are:

- Meeting 1: Community Building
- Meeting 2: Organizing the Group
- Meeting 3: History of Oppression of People with Disabilities
- Meeting 4: Power – Personal and Group
- Meeting 5: Power – Using Our Personal and Group Power
- Meeting 6: Self-Esteem
- Meeting 7: Bullying
- Meeting 8: Gender Inequality
- Meeting 9: Sexual Violence 101
- Meeting 10: Sexual Assault Exams

- Meeting 11: Self-Care and Assertiveness
- Meeting 12: Safe Places and People
- Meeting 13: Internet Safety
- Meeting 14: Helping a Friend Who Discloses
- Meeting 15: Interview with Local Rape Crisis Center Workers
- Meeting 16: Surrounding Yourself with Support Systems
- Meeting 17: Group Decision Making
- Meeting 18: Community Organizing
- Meeting 19: Empowerment Plan
- Meeting 20: Connecting with Other Community Groups
- Meeting 21: Group Leadership and Structure
- Meeting 22: Conflict Resolution and Keeping Up Energy
- Meeting 23: Moving Forward Celebration

Recommendations: "Guide to Starting Empowerment Groups" was developed as a project of Illinois Imagines. Illinois Imagines produced a variety of education and other materials for use by rape crisis centers, disability service agencies, and self-advocates. Access the materials developed [here](#).