

OM:NI

Older Men: New Ideas

Men's Discussion Groups

MANUAL

OM:NI is a program of COTA Victoria

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SECTION 1

MEN'S DISCUSSION GROUPS

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SECTION ONE

OM:NI MEN'S DISCUSSION GROUPS

1. What is OM:NI

OM:NI groups are unique in creating a safe male sharing environment, where men can meet and discuss matters with confidence and trust on issues that may affect their daily lives.

There are no formal membership requirements, and the expectations of people participating in the group are simple – they are about respect, trust and acceptance of each other.

OM:NI is about living and enjoying a healthy and positive retirement, and above all it is a space to talk and listen to each other

OM:NI Men's Discussion Groups are not support groups.

The meetings are facilitated an agreed member of the group.

Group participants may assist others on various issues during meetings which are held in an informative and private atmosphere.

2. OM:NI's Relationship with COTA Victoria

OM:NI is a program of COTA Victoria. The advantages of this ownership is that COTA Victoria:

- Is a recognised and trusted name for groups and individuals to identify with
- Is an organisation for community groups to liaise with
- Coordinates a network and promotes OM:NI in Victoria
- Provides the ability to seek funding to expand and develop the OM:NI networks
- Provides an auspice arrangement when funding is received by individual groups

3. OM:NI Advisory Committee (OAC)

The Advisory Committee Group is convened periodically as required to steer the development of the OM:NI network and program, and work on issues identified both by COTA Victoria and OM:NI groups. OAC members are appointed by COTA.

4. OM:NI Groups Representatives

COTA Victoria will host three (3) meetings per year where men from each OM:NI group will be invited to participate. These meetings are held at COTA's office in Melbourne.

The meetings are agenda driven and provide groups with an opportunity to provide a valuable forum that ensures that the groups are in regular contact with each other and have the chance to share ideas and issues directly with each other. It is also an opportunity to hear what is happening at COTA Victoria.

COTA will support the meetings with secretarial support.

5. Promotion of OM:NI Groups

OM:NI Groups are free to arrange their own promotion through local outlets and newspapers etc. However any promotion must include COTA and or the COTA logo.

COTA Victoria will promote the OM:NI Groups and meetings through its website, 'COTA Victoria E-Newsletter - Connects' and 'One COTA', its own information services and activities, as well as provide promotional flyers to groups, as they require them.

6. COTA Victoria's Role

COTA Victoria will promote OM:NI and support OM:NI groups through a range of mechanisms including information and training sessions where appropriate.

7. COTA Victoria Contact

To join an OM:NI group or to start a new OM:NI group please contact

COTA Victoria

Level 4/533 Little Lonsdale St
Melbourne 3000

Phone: 1300 13 50 90 or 03 9654 4443

Email: enquire@cotavic.org.au

Website: www.cotavic.org.au

COTA Victoria - OM:NI Liaison Registration Form

OM:NI GROUP NAME:

LIASON PERSON'S NAME:

Address:
.....**Postcode**

Telephone: **Mobile:**

Email address:.....

VENUE ADDRESS:
.....

VENUE CONTACT:.....

Telephone: **Email Address:**.....

ALTERNATIVE GROUP CONTACT:
(In case the Liaison person is unavailable)

Telephone: **Email Address:**.....

OM:NI Groups are part of COTA Victoria's OM:NI program, and enter into a partnership with COTA Victoria by agreeing to the guidelines and protocols outlined in the OM:NI Information and Resource Manual. Registration of the OM:NI Liaison person with COTA provides that person with volunteer status, which includes Insurance whilst engaged in OM:NI activities. As a part of COTA Victoria's programs, OM:NI Groups are covered by COTA Victoria's Insurance.

Signature:

Date:/...../.....

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SECTION TWO

OM:NI INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

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SECTION TWO

OM:NI Information for Participants

1. OM:NI History

OM:NI was first established in NSW in the late 1990's under the auspice of COTA NSW.

It was set up in recognition of the unique issues faced by many men as they near or enter retirement.

This led to the first group being set up in Victoria in 2004 under the umbrella of Council of the Ageing (COTA Victoria). Since 2006 a group of volunteers known as the OM:NI Advisory Committee has worked with COTA to promote and manage OM:NI groups in Victoria.

Since the initial OM:NI group was formed many more have commenced using the same principles and continue to function successfully with men growing in confidence.

2. What Happens at OM:NI Meetings?

Each group is different, and how a group operates will be up to the participants. Usually a group will have a designated facilitator for each meeting, who will make sure the meeting runs smoothly. A general format in use with groups is as follows:

2.1. Welcome to everyone

- Any man new to the group or those returning from an absence is acknowledged.
- Any apologies from participants are also acknowledged.

2.2. Check-In – a time to share what's been happening for you.

- Each participant in turn is given time to share what's been significant to them, how they are 'travelling' and what's been happening since they were last at a meeting.
- A maximum time will need to be agreed upon by the group, particularly if there are a large number of participants at the meeting, for example 3 or 5 minutes.
- Remember this time is an opportunity for people to speak without interruption. Hold on to any comments or questions which can come later.

NOTE: If someone is dealing with a big issue the Group can either extend their time or say that they will be given extra time after everyone else has shared.

2.3. Questions/Comments

- There may be things that people have said that have sparked thoughts or ideas this is the time to say anything else or to ask questions.

2.4. Housekeeping:

- There should be an opportunity to deal with any matters such as meeting procedure, social events or activities etc.

2.5. Coffee break: (10 –20 minutes)

2.6. Topic Discussion:

- A chance for participants to give their opinion about the chosen topic. (See list of suggestions)

2.7. Picking next meetings Topic for Discussion:

- A list of suggested topics is provided in this manual, but groups can identify topics that are of interest to them.
- Check for ideas amongst other group participants.

2.8. Check-Out:

- Each member can have the opportunity to say how the meeting was for them. It may only be a few words.

See you at the next meeting.

3. OM:NI GROUP GUIDELINES

There are no formal membership requirements, and the expectations of people participating in the group are simple – they are about respect, trust and acceptance of each other.

OM:NI is about living and enjoying a healthy and positive retirement, and above all it is a space to talk and listen to each other.

All men in the group are expected to follow these guidelines:

Confidentiality

Whatever is shared in the group stays in the group. It is OK to talk about yourself, but it is not OK to talk about other group participants to other people outside the group. This helps build trust.

Acceptance

We all need to feel accepted for who we are. We don't need to be judged or criticised (most of us are very good at doing that for ourselves!). We are all doing the best we can within the circumstances we find ourselves in. There are few right or wrong ways to be, for us or for others.

Respect

Respect others' opinions and don't interrupt when another person is speaking. Don't give advice (unless people ask for it). Most of us just need to be heard and don't need others in the group telling us what to do. (See notes on 'Listening' – refer next page.)

Issues

Discuss only your own personal issues in the group – it is not a place to gossip or discuss what is going on in the lives of other participants in the group, or people outside the Group. As much as possible, discuss what's happening for you currently.

Sharing your feelings or experiences is always optional. If you don't want to speak in the group that's OK – just say 'pass'.

Help

If you need help, it is ok to ask for it.

LISTENING

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problems, you have failed me, strange as it may seem.

Listen! All I ask is that you listen, not talk or do – just hear me.

When you do something for me that I can, and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and inadequacy. And I can do for myself.

I am not helpless - maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

When you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I stop trying to convince you and fret about the business of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling. And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer works sometimes for some people.

So please listen and just hear me. And, if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn, and I'll listen to you.

By Ralph Roughton

Suggested Topics for Group Discussion

This list is only a beginning. Make a list for discussion with the men in your group. Include topics around beliefs and values in relationships and community that concern all men.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Creative Thinking | 33. Confidence |
| 2. Communication | 34. Seeking Advice |
| 3. Isolation and Competitiveness | 35. Responsibility |
| 4. Work | 36. Financial Security |
| 5. Social Life | 37. Values |
| 6. Married Life | 38. Adapting To Change |
| 7. Listening | 39. A Project You Always Imagined |
| 8. Growing Up – Maturity | 40. Self Reliance – Keeping Your Own Council |
| 9. Hobbies, Recreation | 41. Pleasure – Creative And Positive |
| 10. Enjoying Old Age | 42. Your Philosophy Of Life |
| 11. Depression | 43. What Do You Want Of Life? |
| 12. Loss and Bereavement | 44. Life Is In Action |
| 13. Coping with Pain | 45. Goals – Aspirations |
| 14. Intimacy | 46. Love And Relationships |
| 15. Meditation | 47. Structuring A Meaningful Life |
| 16. Fathering –Sons/Daughters | 48. Coping With Stress |
| 17. Mid-life Crisis | 49. Follow Your Bliss |
| 18. Health, Physical, Mental, Emotional | 50. Calculated Risks - Live A Little Bit Dangerously |
| 19. Faith | 51. Awareness |
| 20. Joy of Giving | 52. Think Tank |
| 21. Forgiveness | 53. Wisdom |
| 22. Happiness | 54. Sex/Sexuality |
| 23. Positive Thinking | 55. Procrastination-Do It now |
| 24. Integrity/Trust/Fear | 56. Relaxation |
| 25. Community | 57. Searching for Direction |
| 26. Facing Your Demons | 58. Laughter & Love of Friends |
| 27. Duty Vs. Personal Satisfaction | 59. Groups |
| 28. Retirement | 60. Where To Live |
| 29. Freedom | 61. Talking To Strangers |
| 30. What's Life All About | 62. Clairvoyance, Telepathy |
| 31. What To Do With Your Time | 63. Exercise Your Body, Mind |
| 32. Problem solving | 64. What Is Our Role In Saving The Planet |

OM:NI Participant Registration and Contact Details

GROUP LOCATION

NAME

ADDRESS

.....

TELEPHONE: HOME **MOBILE**

EMAIL

EMERGENCY CONTACT **RELATIONSHIP**

TELEPHONE

KNOWN MEDICAL CONDITION/S UNDER TREATMENT

.....
.....
.....

LIST OF MEDICINES AND DOSAGE

.....
.....
.....

SIGNED:

DATE:

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SECTION THREE

OM:NI INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

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OM:NI Information for Facilitators

1. OM:NI Group Operations

Each group is able to operate as independently as practicable under the umbrella of COTA Victoria. This important interdependent relationship is expanded in Section 1 of this Manual.

Groups will have their preferred method of operation and the various roles can be undertaken by one man or many. Spreading the various roles around will help men take ownership of the group. Some men will feel threatened if they are asked to perform beyond their confidence level. It is important that roles are undertaken voluntarily. Confidence may grow with experience and coaching. If difficulties arise it may be possible to access additional resources from outside the group.

How these roles are combined or distributed is a matter for the group.

2. Essential Roles

Contact Person (Coordinator):

The Contact person is the main person that liaises with COTA Victoria. This person will need to register as a volunteer with COTA Victoria and therefore will need to complete a 'Volunteer Registration' form, available in the 'Volunteer Handbook'. The contact person is covered by Public Liability, Professional Indemnity and Personal Accident Insurance through COTA Victoria.

Facilitator:

Facilitation is the key to the vitality of an OM:NI group. Facilitating each meeting can be shared but one person needs to take a lead role in organising the group overall. That does not mean doing everything but generally means making sure things happen. Spreading roles helps men develop ownership of the group. It helps to have a deputy to this lead role.

The main role of the Facilitator of an OM:NI meeting is to provide some level of structure for that meeting, as well as assist men to feel comfortable in the group. The Facilitator's role is "*to facilitate*" which means "*to make an action or process easier*". The aim is to ensure every man has an opportunity to participate and that the guidelines are followed. Familiarity of the Facilitator with the guidelines and meeting format are therefore essential.

All OM:NI men are encouraged to have a go at facilitating an OM:NI meeting and gain an understanding of the role. It is not obligatory to have a go, but it is important that all men are aware of the role and support the Facilitator during the meeting. He is a participant in the group and his task will be made easier with group support.

3. Welcoming New Participants

OM:NI groups periodically have new men turning up. It's therefore important the group is open and welcoming so that the new man will feel comfortable. The warmth and comfort of a group of men who know each other well, and who may come from similar social and/or cultural backgrounds, can become real barriers for new participants joining the group. Following are some ideas for making new members feel welcome and accepted.

Name tags make it easier for old and new to learn each other's names. The issuing of a group designed name tag, especially if the new man is expected, will be appreciated as a sign of acceptance.

Have some long-standing participants of the group responsible for making new men welcome. Maybe they could introduce the new man to other men before the meeting or during the coffee break.

At the start of the meeting acknowledge the new man (men) and welcome them to the group and explain the purpose of the group.

Make sure each man introduces himself to the new visitor.

If you have any printed information about the group hand it out to the new man.

Recognise that it's his first meeting and that it might take him a while to feel accepted and for trust to be built up to enable him to open up. Encourage all the men to create new friendships within the group. One existing participant could phone or make personal contact with the new man during the following week.

4. Tasks and Responsibilities of the Group Facilitator

Confidentiality: It is important to emphasize what is spoken in the room stays in the room.

Provide Safety: By fostering a supportive, trustworthy and friendly atmosphere, participants will come to know what is expected. This is accomplished by reinforcing the guidelines, aims of the group and, when necessary, putting time limits on discussions.

Encourage Participation: Not every participant immediately shares with the group. The facilitator, over time, gently encourages men to participate, but be aware of their limitations. Find out what men want from their meetings and make sure all decision making is fair to all men.

Respect, Access and Equity: It is essential to create an environment in which all of the group, regardless of race, religion, sex or disability are respected and have equal opportunity to participate. This means taking the time and effort to discover what people's needs are and develop practices to ensure these are met.

Provide Focus: Tactfully redirect conversations that are not related to the current topic. If a participant wants to talk about something else, then leave it until the main topic has been dealt with and use it to generate other potential topics.

Active Listeners: These listeners are sensitive to what is, and what is not said. Look around the group for boredom, talking, hands up for interjection and detect open and subtle pain or grief in another, and respond to these. If you believe the group has ignored an important point, go back to it.

Foster Personal Responsibility: Facilitators should not exclusively enforce the rules of the group. Participants should also have an obligation to the group's welfare and be encouraged to extend their comfort zones.

Encourage Self-esteem: Let men know their sharing is important to the group and that they are valued as individuals and thank them. Don't permit personal attacks on any man during group meetings. Also include and encourage humour in the group.

Handle Problems: Men may try to monopolise the discussion in the group, become angry and in conflict, question others too aggressively or violate group guidelines in other ways. A good Facilitator deals with these situations tactfully through a combination of appropriate comments and actions.

Share: Facilitators should not forget that they are also group participants. They should share feelings and experiences when appropriate.

Honest Feedback: Obtain feedback from each participant on how they feel at the end of the meeting (be prepared to be upfront).

Farewell: Shake hands with each participant and invite them back to the next meeting.

5. Some Useful Skills for a Group Facilitator:

Regardless of the group facilitator's background it is important to have, or at least develop, the following skills and attributes.

- An interest in and an understanding of the purpose of an OM:NI group and the other participants of the group, to create trust and loyalty.
- Good listening skills and eye contact.
- An understanding and appreciation of other men's thoughts and feelings.
- Ability to be non-judgmental. As a group Facilitator you need to be open to other men's different experiences, values, beliefs and opinions.
- Ability to resolve conflict and deal with difficult situations.
- Awareness of your own capabilities and limitations. The group will sometimes not meet the needs of all its participants and will not find a solution to every issue discussed.

6. What a Facilitator Does NOT Do:

- Believe that the group is 'their group'. It is essential that group participants all feel that they have some 'ownership' of the group.
- Dominate and monopolise the discussions.
- Dictate what the group will discuss.
- Lecture or preach.
- Lead participants to believe that you have all the answers and encourage participants to have realistic expectations of the group.
- Attempt to run a therapy group.
- Breach confidentiality.

7. More Information:

The main source for the facilitator document is the comprehensive 'Support Group Survival' Kit published by the Mental Health Association NSW Inc.