Running MyTime Groups

As a facilitator, you bring structure and flow to each session, which is achieved by planning sessions. Sessions should be planned with your members' needs in mind, and also meet the requirements of the MyTime program.

Planning sessions

MyTime groups are flexible, but sessions should balance these three key elements:

- time to **check-in and connect**
- **topic-focused** discussions
- time to take part in **activities.**

Together, these three key elements give members space to share, learn, and look after themselves. Most sessions will naturally include more than one of these elements, but planning them intentionally helps keep activities relevant and gives the group a clear sense of structure and flow. Example session formats include:

- Coffee and conversation (check-in and connect) with optional craft (activity)
- Guest speaker followed by reflection and discussion (topic + check-in and connect)
- Facilitator-led discussion on a parent-identified topic, followed by a short guided meditation (topic + activity).

Tip: The 'Member-led Guiding Principle' in the Guiding Principles Handbook has information on planning sessions for your members, and how you involve them in decision-making.

In established groups, allocate time each term to discuss the plan for the next term as a whole. In new and establishing groups, you should actively make suggestions for guest speakers and activities (based on what you hear and learn from members in your sessions) until members feel more comfortable contributing ideas in a more direct way.

Bear in mind it's not possible to cater to everyone's needs at every session – some members will be less interested in a particular session or activity than others. Instead, try to balance the three key elements across a term. Not every session will look the same, and that's OK.

If you'd like to use a session planning tool, a term plan template is available and can help you:

- **involve members in planning** – try setting time aside to plan for the upcoming term with your group members
- **promote your group** – a term plan can help potential new members to get an idea of what to expect at MyTime
- **let your members know what is happening** – making the term plan available in advance empowers members to decide whether to attend any given session based on their current needs and interests
- **share your planning with your coordinator** – talk to your coordinator about if and when they expect to receive your term plan.

Check-in and connect

This is the heart of MyTime. Providing time to check-in and connect gives members a chance to get to know one another and build meaningful connections around shared experiences. It's time for them to talk about what matters to them that day — challenges, wins, or anything in between.

Good check-ins are opportunities for members to improve their wellbeing by experiencing:

- validation ("I'm not the only one who feels this way")
- belonging (feeling valued and understood)
- stronger networks and connections
- hope and optimism for the future
- confidence to give and receive support.

Check-in and connect time requires you to use all your skills as a facilitator. Your role is to gently guide the conversation, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to share and that the group remains a safe and respectful environment. Sensitive topics may be raised, and there may be deep emotions to navigate, along with the sharing of experiences, advice and opinions.

Tip: Refer to the Guiding Principles Handbook for ideas to build into your current practice.

Topic-focused time

A proportion of your MyTime sessions should be centred on topics of interest. Topic-focused sessions build knowledge and skills that support parenting and wellbeing by providing members with the opportunity to share and learn, in turn strengthening:

- better self-care and greater self-compassion
- an increased sense of hope and possibility
- greater confidence when advocating for themselves and their child(ren)

- helpful parenting and coping strategies.

Topics can be chosen by the group or based on common interests you've observed. Ideas for topic-focused time include:

- a guest speaker from a trusted organisation (you'll need to plan ahead for this session)
- a discussion you facilitate (get group consensus at the beginning of the session)
- a member sharing knowledge or experience.

Example topics include:

- understanding children's behaviour and learning how to respond
- navigating services like the NDIS
- self-care and self-compassion
- healthy living and wellbeing
- disability-specific information
- information about local services and resources.

Aim for quality, evidence-based information. Guest speakers should be from reputable organisations, and all other topic-based discussions are supported by evidence-based resources.

Just as check-in and connect time can require you to facilitate difficult conversations, so too can topic-focused sessions.

Tip: The Guiding Principles Handbook includes tips for facilitating safe, balanced discussions.

Activity time

Activity time provides an opportunity to do something together as a group. Activities can give members permission and opportunities to relax, try something new, or practise self-care. These sessions can also support connection and confidence.

When planning activity time, think about what parents might gain. Activities can stand alone or complement other session elements (for example, organise an activity to help parents build a skill or self-confidence) or serve as a regulation strategy during challenging conversations (for example, colouring, sensory or relaxation activities).

Example activities include:

- crafts, puzzles or games

- guided meditation, yoga or mindfulness
- cooking demonstrations
- a member sharing a hobby or skill.

Activities can be simple and low-cost, and, like other types of MyTime sessions, they can be facilitated by you, a member, or a guest. Occasionally, these sessions are a special event (for example, an end-of-year celebration).

Remember: Seek members' ideas and input so the sessions respond to what members find enjoyable and useful.

Working with play leaders

If preschool-aged children attend your group regularly, you'll need to have a play leader. The play leader's role is to engage children in safe, age-appropriate activities, allowing parents to focus on the group.

You can support play leaders by:

- ensuring the venue is safe and suitable for children
- sharing information about children's interests or needs (with parent permission)
- planning activities, setting up the room and settling children into the session together
- touching base before and after sessions to debrief and troubleshoot any problems.

Always be clear with parents that while play leaders run activities, parents remain responsible for their children.

Group agreements

Every group should have a group agreement (sometimes called 'group norms' or 'expectations'). A group agreement outlines how members want to work together — for example, being respectful, listening without judgment, and keeping confidentiality. These expectations are defined and agreed on as a group, providing clear guidelines for how members should behave. Group agreements are an important part of creating a safe space at MyTime as they provide a neutral, shared foundation for interaction and communication, and can help you prevent or manage conflict.

Revisit your agreement regularly (each term, when new members join or, at a minimum, annually) and share it with new members.

Tip: A template agreement and tips can be found in the Guiding Principles Handbook – see the 'Safe space' principle.