

UAB SUPPORT TEAMS ORIENTATION HANDOUT

How to Work Together to Share the Care!

UAB SUPPORT TEAM NETWORK

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS A SUPPORT TEAM?

A support team is a group of people organized to provide practical, emotional, and spiritual support to people with health concerns or other special needs. It's like extended family for people when they need it most.

Team activities may include a ride to the doctor or grocery store, or help with household or yard chores. Other team members may run errands, cook or deliver meals, visit, call, or offer caregivers a brief break. Support team members can share a prayer or communion, but the care is always based on the needs of the person being cared for.

The most important thing to ask team members is, "What do you love to do for others?" It's different for everyone, and a team approach allows that flexibility.

A support team generally has three major boundaries: money, medicine, and medical advice. The team does not loan or give money to the team's friend (recipient/patient), dispense prescription medications, or offer medical care or advice.

WHAT DOES A SUPPORT TEAM DO?

A team's activities may include transportation to the doctor or grocery store, household or yard chores, errands, meals, social outings, visits, phone calls, or a time for caregivers to rest or have a break. Team members simply do what they can and when they can, using an organized approach. Each person makes a one-year commitment to the team.

WHY ARE SUPPORT TEAMS NEEDED?

The number of people with health care needs at home is increasing due to people living longer and with fewer resources. Improved medical treatments help people live longer but not necessarily with the quality of life desired. At the same time, fewer caregivers are available due to family members living farther apart. One-on-one volunteers easily can get "burned out" without needed support, and many community groups focus primarily on short-term crises.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF A TEAM APPROACH?

A team approach provides volunteers with maximum time flexibility, a built-in support system, and the opportunity to offer a variety of skills. Each team member's monthly time involvement is flexible, though a one-year commitment is expected.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT WAYS TO ORGANIZE A SUPPORT TEAM?

There are three support team models that allow a team to organize in different ways, depending on the need(s):

1. Basic model: focuses on one person/family and meets a variety of needs
2. Mission model: focuses on the common need of several people
3. Facility model: focuses on one place (i.e. nursing home, hospital unit, clinic, etc.) and meets some of the needs of people at that site

Each team designates a leader to coordinate the work and a coach to access community resources. Please contact Malcolm Marler at 205-934-3936 or email mmarler@uab.edu for support.

WHAT TRAINING IS NEEDED?

Support team orientation lasts 1.5 to 3 hours. All support team members attend this initial training to learn the basics of the support team model, how to set healthy boundaries and limits, and how to offer emotional support. Continuing education is built into regular team meetings. Support team leadership development training is available to teach people how to develop support teams in their own communities. Visit SupportTeams.org for more information.

CAN SUPPORT TEAMS WORK WITHIN PROGRAMS OR MINISTRIES ALREADY IN PLACE?

Yes, a team approach can be integrated into any program or ministry, such as homebound ministry, pastoral care, crisis ministry, youth programs, Stephen Ministries, deacon or outreach ministry, women's or men's ministry, employee assistance programs, and many more.

HOW IS A TEAM SUPPORTED?

Bringing people together is our common mission. A critical part of coming together is the team itself, and support teams are built and sustained by proper training and ongoing support. Through partner relationships with congregations and other organizations, the UAB Support Team Network seeks to enable this training and support. Anyone can become a Support Team Network partner.

WHAT IS THE UAB SUPPORT TEAM NETWORK?

The UAB Support Team Network teaches congregations, organizations, and individuals how the support team model can be used in an effective way to care for people with health care concerns and other special needs.

UAB Medicine is not responsible for the team. The team members are responsible for their own work and actions with the patient or support team friend.

The UAB Support Team Network has trained hundreds of support teams since it began in 1994, when it was originally formed for people with HIV. The network expanded in 1997 to include teams for people with any health care concern or other special needs.

We are proud to be associated with UAB Medicine, a world-class university and academic medical center.

ADVANTAGES OF THE SUPPORT TEAM MODEL

The advantages to a team approach for caring for an individual or family with long-term health care needs include:

1. Time flexibility for volunteers

Each support team member can decide from month to month how much time he or she has to offer on the support team. Some people give 4-5 hours per week, while others may offer a couple of hours per month. When the work is coordinated on a team, the assistance does not depend on one person.

2. A built-in-support system

The team approach is the opposite of the "Lone Ranger" approach due to team accountability. The team meets monthly for approximately 59 minutes to:

- Reflect on their experience together and share joys as well as frustrations.
- Learn something new through continuing education that will help them be more effective in their work.
- Coordinate the upcoming month's duties by sharing the support among multiple team members.

3. A way to share what you most enjoy doing

Not everyone on the team has to do the same thing. Some people are better at preparing meals, cutting the grass, providing transportation, being a good listener, writing notes, or holding a hand. Each person does what he or she enjoys and is most comfortable doing.

4. A proven model

The support team model has been used successfully throughout the United States to care for people, especially those with HIV. The UAB Support Team Network has expanded this model to people with longer-term needs, such as chronic or terminal illnesses, disability, frailty due to age, etc. On average, a new support team is formed every week in Birmingham, Ala. The model is flexible to meet almost any long-term need.

SUPPORT TEAM MEMBER COVENANT

As a member of my support team, I will be committed to the following statements for as long as I want to serve:

- **Attend the Support Team Orientation**

I will attend an orientation session when my team is forming or prior to joining an existing team. Or, I will watch all orientation videos online at SupportTeams.org.

- **Be Committed to a Team Concept**

I will be present at our monthly support team meeting. I will do my best to communicate openly with team members and our support team friend(s)* and work through any problems that may arise. I will learn about our support team friend's health needs in order to better care for him or her. I will keep all information regarding our support team friend(s) confidential within the team, unless I have permission from him or her to share such information outside the team. I will be accountable to my team regarding my involvement.

- **Avoid Direct Financial Involvement with Our Support Team Friend(s)**

I will not pay bills, loan, or give money to our support team friend(s). If the support team friend has financial needs, I understand that we will decide as a team how to respond by helping him/her find community resources.

- **Avoid Offering Medical Advice or Managing Medication for Our Support Team Friend(s)**

I will not dispense medications or offer medical advice. I will refer such needs to qualified family members and/or health care professionals.

- **Be Responsible with Closure Issues**

If I want to stop serving on the support team for any reason, I will tell my team directly through email or in our monthly meeting. I will also contact the support team friend or family and let him/her know, in order to build team trust and have closure with the team process for everyone.

**Support team friend (STF) refers to the patient assigned to, or selected by, a support team. Support team may also relate to the primary caregiver(s) for a patient.*

Signed

Date

SUPPORT TEAM LEADER ROLE

Role: The team leader coordinates the work of the support team, promotes good communication between the team and the friend, and facilitates team meetings. The team leader is essential to planning meaningful team meetings and for communicating, educating, and coordinating activities. A support team may choose to have co-leaders that switch off times, as negotiated within the team.

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Coordinate the work of the support team**

The leader helps the team in scheduling and completing assignments, based on what each member is able/willing to do.

- **Promote good communication between the support team and friend**

Typically, the leader is involved in the initial visit with the friend and considers ways in which the team may be helpful. Then, after consulting with the team, the leader tells the friend what the team will be able to do. Prior to each monthly meeting of the team, the leader will be in touch with the friend (or delegates that contact to another team member) to confirm dates and services for the coming month.

- **Organize and facilitate support team meetings**

The purpose of the monthly team meeting is to communicate about the work of the team and offer support to its members. It's also an opportunity to educate members on relevant topics and coordinate the care for the support team friend for the following month. The team leader confirms details of the meeting and facilitates the agenda.

- **Seek input and assistance from other resources as needed**

The support team leader encourages team members to take ownership of their roles and use additional resources as needed. The leader should be aware of these resources and how to access them. The leader also may facilitate learning for team members.

- **Update support team on news from the Support Team Network's website**

Support Teams Network news is shared primarily through email and the website at SupportTeams.org.

Any of the above roles can be shared (with co-leaders, for example) or delegated to team members who wish to help in those areas.

SUPPORT TEAM MEETINGS

You cannot work together effectively unless you know and learn to trust your fellow team members. Experience has taught us that the best way to do this is by getting together on a monthly basis for a team meeting that lasts approximately 59 minutes. There are three main purposes for the meeting, though certain sections may be emphasized more or less depending on need. A few minutes should be set aside to share relevant news and new developments about the overall program.

Monthly support team meetings are critical to communicate, educate, and coordinate the work of the team.

HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING MORE SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT TEAM MEETINGS:

- Have a well-planned agenda, and distribute it one week prior to the meeting as a reminder. Team leaders may delegate this monthly task to another team member.
- The meeting should start and end on time and should not last more than 59 minutes. Setting a regular time and place for the meeting may make it easier for team members to remember. Try to make each meeting fun, interesting, and a little different.
- The support team friend should not attend the meeting unless specific feedback is being requested. If he or she does attend once or twice a year, ask him or her to come at the beginning or end of the meeting, so that the team can feel free to discuss other matters.
- Consider a social gathering a couple of times a year for team members to have fun together. Seeing each other in different settings like this helps build teamwork and cohesiveness.

One of the most effective ways for a support team to function smoothly is through a monthly, 59-minute meeting.

THERE ARE THREE MAIN GOALS FOR EACH SUPPORT TEAM MEETING:

1. Communicate: Reflect on your experiences together.
2. Educate: Learn something new that will help team members be more effective.
3. Coordinate: Establish the tasks (or work) for the team, as well as the schedule.

SAMPLE TIME AND TASK CALENDAR

Working Together to Share the Care!

Captians of the Week	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Pete & Janice	30 Give ride to church - Wade	31	June 1 Dinner - Janice	2	3 Dinner - Pete	4	5 Grocery store - Pete Yard Work - Pete, Janice
Wade & Alesia	6	7	8 Dinner - Wade	9 Doctor 2pm - Alesia	10 Pharmacy pick up medicine - Alesia Dinner - Patricia	11	12 Grocery store - Wade Yard Work - Alesia, Nancy
Carol & Kaye	13 Give ride to church - Carol	14	15 Dinner - Kaye	16	17 Dinner - Carol	18	19 Grocery store - Kaye Yard Work - Carol, Randy
Rosemary & Nancy	20	21	22 Dinner - Rosemary	23	24 Dinner - Nancy	25	26 Grocery store - Nancy Yard Work - Rosemary
Randy & Patricia	27 Give ride to church - Randy	28	29 Doctor 11am - Patricia Dinner - Randy	30 Pharmacy pick up medicine - Patricia	July 1 Dinner - Patricia	2	3 Grocery store - Patricia Yard Work - Randy
Judy & Greg	4 Give ride to church & trip to Botannical Gardens - Judy, Greg	5	6 Dinner - Judy	7	8 Dinner - Judy, Greg	9	10 Grocery store - Judy Yard Work - Greg

CO-CAPTAINS: Your role is to stay in touch with the support team friend during your week. This may include a call, a visit, meeting a specific need on the calendar, or sending a note or card. Please call the captain(s) for the next week and update them on any new information. If you need additional help to meet various needs during your week, please call your support team leader or inform him or her after you invite others to participate, so that we can share the care!

SUPPORT TEAM MEMBER INVENTORY

Name _____

Address _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ Fax _____

Mobile Phone _____ Email Address _____

AVAILABILITY: What are the best days/times for you to help with our support team friend?

Day/Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Mornings							
Afternoons							
Evening							
Varies							

IDENTIFYING MY STRENGTHS: Where do you fit in when it comes to the following areas? Remember, it's ok not to like something. Add your own strengths at the bottom of the table. This is a team approach!

In Dealing with	I'm terrific	I'm good	I'm fair	Don't call on me
Automotive maintenance				
Cooking				
Cleaning house				
Delegating tasks to others				
Finding solutions to problems				
Fixing things				
Organizing				
Friendly visitor				
Hospital visitor				
Listening				
Running errands				
Shopping (grocery)				
Social outings				
Talking on the phone				
Transportation				
Writing notes				
Yard work				

SUPPORT TEAM SCENARIOS

“Friend” = support team friend

SCENARIO ONE

You have been with your friend for almost a year. Several times in the past, your friend called team members and insisted on an immediate response to some need. Though team members usually have responded, some expressed frustration (even anger) over the friend’s demands. The friend calls you one morning at 6:30 am and says that she needs to go to the emergency room. You say that you will be glad to call an ambulance and visit her later in the day. She says she’s afraid of ambulances and would prefer that you to take her to the hospital. You say that you are willing to make some calls to try to find someone else to go with her, but she says (more desperately) that she can’t wait for all the phone calls. She says if you send an ambulance, she will refuse to go. What do you do?

SCENARIO TWO

You have known your friend for only a month. You meet the friend’s mother on your second visit. His mother tells you how glad she is to have you help out and has prepared a list of things for you to do each time you visit. She says, “You know I can’t do everything that needs to be done, so I really need you to do them.” The list includes things like changing and washing bed sheets, taking out the garbage, sorting and giving medications to her son, and going to the grocery store for him twice a week. How do you respond to her requests?

SCENARIO THREE

You are a part of a team that does small home repairs for people, mostly for disabled or elderly people in the community. On several occasions, the team has done work for a man paralyzed from an automobile accident. He has talked with team members about his financial struggles. You are at his home repairing a leaking faucet, and he tells you he is \$40 short on his rent, due to the increased cost of medications. He asks you to loan him the money and promises to repay you when his next check arrives. What do you do? What are your options?

SCENARIO FOUR

Your team was organized as an HIV/AIDS support team and is serving a person living with the disease. She has not wanted others to know she is HIV+, believing they would shun her. A few days after you take her to the grocery store, a member of the church says he saw the two of you there and asks about her. What do you say? He presses harder and says, “Is she your AIDS person?” How do you respond?

SCENARIO FIVE

The team has been helping a friend for a few months. She has responded well to certain members of the team, and regularly calls on them for help. When other team members offer help, she puts them off, saying she doesn’t need anything at the moment. Some members of the team are getting discouraged. How does the team address this concern?

SCENARIO SIX

Your team is helping 12 people living on one wing of a nursing home. Your plan of caring involves a visit to each person twice a month, with a particular focus on reading to them. In addition, something special is done on each person’s birthday. Those living in other sections of the home learned of your caring and inquired about being included. A staff member at the nursing home asks you about the possibility of extending your work beyond the 12 people you’ve been serving. What is your response?

OFFERING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

THE THREE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF LISTENING

1. Help people feel what they are feeling when they are feeling it.

There is only one path through grief, and that is through it. Ask an extra question for clarification, to better understand what the experience is like for them. Don't assume you know what it's like for them, even if you have had similar experiences.

2. Learn to walk at the same pace as your support team friend.

You may be tempted to get him or her to hurry through a feeling or ignore it altogether. Take the pressure off of yourself in thinking that you have to "make them better." Your job is to be present and care. Honor where they are in the process, because everyone has their own pace of working through different emotions and feelings.

3. Embrace the role of student in your relationship with your support team friend, allowing him or her to be your teacher.

Your support team friend has much to teach you about living and what it is like to have so many losses in one's life. You may have thought that you would be the one teaching. Instead, realize that this relationship is a two-way street, and you may get as much or more out of it than your friend.

THE GREEN BEAN CASSEROLE RULE

By Malcolm Marler

It sounded like a strange request on the phone. "Malcolm, can you ask my support team not to bring me any more green bean casserole?", the support team friend said. "Sure Mike, that's not a problem. Can you tell me why?"

"Well, the truth is," he confessed, "I hate green bean casserole. But several members of my team are really good at cooking it. I don't want to hurt their feelings, so when they bring me green bean casserole, I smile and say thanks. After they leave, I throw it away, wash the dish, and return it to them next time. I don't think this is how this is supposed to work, is it?"

I assured him that it is not the way it is supposed to work. This experience reminded me of an important rule in support team work. I call it the "Green Bean Casserole Rule."

Sometimes a Support Team Member knows how to do something really well, and he or she believes the support team friend needs it or wants it, so they just do it. The intentions are good, but just because you are able to offer something doesn't mean it needs to be or should be done.

If you have something to offer, ask the support team friend if he or she wants what you have to offer.

Respect the wishes of the friend, even if you think you know what is best. The need may be there, but if the support team friend doesn't want you to do it, you defeat the purpose of the giving. Ask yourself, "Whose need am I meeting here, mine or the support team friend's?"

In fact, this principle applies to most aspects of the relationship with the support team friend. You may see a need and want to fix whatever it is, but taking your cues from the friend about meeting that need is the key.

So, the next time you start to do something for a support team friend, remember the Green Bean Casserole Rule. And respect their right to have choices in life – that may be all they have left.

We welcome your stories that can teach others. Please email them to Malcolm Marler at mmarler@uab.edu.