Embrace diversity. While it may sometimes be more comfortable to have a group filled with people who are like you in terms of class, race, politics, etc., sometimes we learn more in a group where a variety of diverse voices are present.

Try, to the greatest extent possible, to accommodate people’s needs. Is your meeting place wheelchair accessible? Are there pets, cigarette smoke, or other environmental substances present that members may be allergic to? Is your meeting place on public transportation for members without cars?

An occasional individual may contact you or show up at your meetings whose needs cannot be met by a support group. You may wish to have the names and phone numbers of the nearest hotline and of a couple of supportive therapists so that you can provide appropriate referrals.

Be clear in your advertising, and to new members that your group is not a dating service. Some support groups have policies stating that group members should not get romantically involved with one another.

Be aware that your group will provide support for many more people than actually attend meetings. The simple knowledge that there is a bisexual group meeting out there may be affirming to more people than you will ever know. And that is another good reason to get the word out.

If your group is an open group, try to make the meeting time, place and contact information consistent. Some people may be terrified at the idea of attending a bisexual support group, and it may take them months to get up the courage to come to their first meeting. Make sure these people can find you.

Once your group is established, don’t forget to get it listed in The Bisexual Resource Guide, available for $11.95 from the BRC. Send information about your group to the address listed below.

(c) 1993-1995 Robyn Ochs and BRC (last updated April 1, 1998) If you would like to distribute this pamphlet with your group’s contact information at the bottom of this page, please send a $10 donation to the BRC to support the development and publication of new literature. For more information and literature, write or call:

Bisexual Resource Center
(Phone: 617-424-9595 Email: BRC@biresource.org
URL: www.biresource.org)
PO Box 639, Cambridge Massachusetts 02140, USA.

Local Contact Information:
Logistics

The first step in forming a new group is to organize a meeting. This has several components: finding a space, letting people know that the meeting is going to happen, and deciding upon the agenda for the meeting.

Finding A Space: In many communities, it is possible to obtain meeting space at little or no charge. Public libraries, schools, city or town halls, someone's home, women's or progressive bookstores, food cooperatives, religious meeting houses (Quakers and Unitarian Universalists are usually particularly receptive) may have meeting space available. Keep in mind issues such as safety, accessibility to public transportation and wheelchair accessibility, and try to select a place which is fairly neutral, to allow the maximum possible safety to people who are "in the closet" or are new to a bisexual identity. When you have found a meeting space, make sure to leave time to advertise. Usually 6-8 weeks is sufficient.

Contact Information. It can be very helpful to list a telephone number or post office box which people can contact for more information. Should you list your own address or phone number? Some people feel comfortable doing this, others do not. One woman lists her telephone number with a pseudonym. That way she knows immediately whether someone is calling as a result of her ads or posters, and she feels safer because she is not giving out her real name. If you only want to be called during certain hours, state that clearly in the flier or ad, such as "for info. call Maria at 222-2222 between 6pm and 9pm." Another option is to rent a voice mailbox (usually inexpensive), or to ask a local (or not too far away) lesbian/gay hotline, or lesbian/gay center, or women's center to advertise as your contact phone number, at least for a limited time. If you have one, you also might consider using an email address as one way to be contacted. However, we don't recommend that you use only this method, which would exclude many people who do not have email. Whatever method(s) you choose, be sure to return all inquiries promptly. And remember to be discreet; this means that when you call, you should not leave a message saying you are calling from or about a bisexual group or bisexual meeting. Remember: homophobia exists, and not everyone is "out" to his/her roommate, parents, spouse, etc.

Covering Expenses: Keep expenses as low as possible, then "pass the hat" at the meeting. State what your expenses were, and propose a suggested amount, asking people to pay what they can.

Getting The Word Out: Advertising

Once you have located a meeting site, you must let as many people as possible know that it is happening. There are a number of ways to do this, including newspapers, fliers, and the Internet.

Newspaper calendars and classified ads. Many newspapers will list public events for free in a "calendar" section. Check your local newspaper. If this is not possible, you may want to place a brief classified ad. Keep it as short and inexpensive as possible, for example:

BISEXUAL support/discussion group forming. First meeting November 22, 7:30pm at Local High School Cafeteria. Call (789) 456-1234 for info.

Place this listing in many publications as possible: college newspapers, the nearest gay paper (even if it is based in another city or town), any local or regional newsletters (does a nearby Unitarian Universalist Church have a newsletter?) Is a women's center newsletter published nearby?

Fliers. Make a clear, concise 8 1/2 x 11 inch or other standard size flier or poster about the meeting. State the time and place of the meeting, whether it is wheelchair accessible, its purpose (e.g., "to discuss the possible formation of an ongoing bisexual support group."). A confidentiality statement may be helpful, especially in a more conservative environment. Get these posters up in as many locations as possible: on bulletin boards in local progressive stores, on local campuses, in bookstores, at the nearest food coop, gay bars, etc. Use your imagination. One place you may want to consider posting is the inside of bathroom stalls. They sometimes stay up longer before getting pulled down, you will have a captive audience, and interested people can read them and copy down the information in total privacy.

Remember: when choosing where to place calendar listings and hang posters, keep in mind that bisexual people are a very diverse group. To reach the maximum number of people, try to get the word out in many different locations. This means reaching people from all economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and who are bi-, gay-, and straight-identified.

Your First Meeting

Come to your first meeting prepared. Arrive early.

Arrange chairs in a circle so that everyone can see each other and everyone is included. Here is one possible format for a first meeting:

- Welcome everyone. Discuss ground rules (respect for one another, confidentiality, sharing air time, no one has to speak who does not wish to.)
- Review the agenda. Many people feel more comfortable when they know what to expect.
- Make sure that everyone is comfortable physically: let them know where the bathroom is, where they may and may not smoke, that they may get up and leave the room if they wish to, etc.
- Do some sort of "go-around" in which each person gets a chance to speak. Have each person say their name and answer a question or two (why they came, what they would like to get out of the meeting, an interesting fact about themselves.) One good icebreaker is to have people divide into pairs. Within each pair, have each person interview the other for 3 minutes, then switch roles. When each has interviewed a partner, come back to the main group and go around the room, having each person introduce her/his partner: "This is Teresa. She is the mother of two children. She hates lima beans and likes to play rugby and the violin."
- Have a moderated discussion. Most people in a new group have had little or no opportunity to talk about issues related to bisexuality and are starving for a chance to talk.
- Set aside time to decide on the next step. Do people want to have another meeting, to start a group, etc.? Make sure that you do not leave the meeting without scheduling your next meeting. Pass around a phone list so that you (or someone else who is designated) have a way to reach people interested in meeting again.

Make sure that this meeting does not last more than 2 hours, or people will start to drift out and will miss the planning segment of the meeting. Keep an eye on the time, and try to leave 40 minutes or so for the planning segment. You may have to cut off an interesting conversation, but explain that you are asking people to cut the current conversation short to work out a way to continue the discussion later.

Subsequent Meetings

Depending upon the needs and desires of its members, support groups usually take one of four formats:

- Focus on personal support or empowerment. A personal support group would meet regularly and might focus on "go-arounds," with each member giving an update on current issues in her or his life.