**Group work Policy**

Rochdale Connections Trust are facilitators of group work across delivery of many of our programmes and projects for children, young people, families and adults. We operate in accordance with the guidelines laid out in this policy document to ensure all participants are safe, supported and the sessions are inclusive. There are general ground rules that are relevant to the delivery of all group work sessions and enhanced guidelines that relate to the delivery of Domestic Violence and Abuse group work sessions, where there must always be 2 facilitators.

At the very beginning of group work sessions, it is important to explain that group rules are

necessary, and that having process guidelines in place helps to facilitate group discussions.

Participants must adhere to the ground rules that are set and communicated by the facilitator at the outset of all group work sessions. They consist of:

**Have respect for each other**

* Respect each other’s ideas
* Respect the other group members
* Don’t interrupt each other
* Everyone’s opinion should count
* Be honest with each other

**All group members should contribute**

* Everyone should share the responsibility of the tasks/activities
* Don’t take over and don’t let others take over
* Help each other to understand requirements

**Be open to compromise**

* Be willing to cooperate with others on their ideas
* Keep an open mind

**Effective communication**

* Make sure everyone is able to be vocal about their ideas and problems
* Give ideas no matter how “off” you may think they are
* Listen effectively
* Don’t be critical

**Time management**

* Attend and arrive on time to all group meetings
* Be flexible about meeting times
* Keep on task (limit talk about non-related events)

**Specific Guidelines for facilitating Domestic Violence and Abuse sessions for female victims:**

There must be two Facilitators in each session. They must be female and it is preferable that they possess similar skills, knowledge and training. Women are more likely to access a service and feel comfortable within it, if it is run for women only. This helps to avoid the unconscious or conscious repetition of the male/female power imbalance that is so prevalent in violent partnerships. One of the goals of group working is to empower women through the example of female leadership and, in this case, female facilitators. One will act as the session facilitator and the other as the co-facilitator, supporting delivery, particularly in a crisis situation. For example, if a participant needs one-to-one support during a session, the co-facilitator is able to withdraw from the group setting with the participant, while the facilitator carries on with the session. Having two facilitators means there is always someone to run the group in case of unexpected absence, e.g. illness.

**The Role of the facilitator**

The facilitator’s role is to promote the principles of empowerment and self-help within the group and to ensure that the group works as a constructive and cohesive unit. The facilitator should encourage the participants to:

* share their experiences as domestic abuse survivors,
* encourage participants to share new ideas to create a non-violent environment for themselves
* help shape discussion of emerging issues such as basic rights, self-esteem, assertiveness and boundaries.

The facilitator uses her knowledge and experience to:

* create a safe, welcoming, informal atmosphere that provides support and trust;
* create an inclusive environment to allow equal participation for everyone in the group;
* create an empowering environment that enables participants to increase their assertiveness and self-esteem;
* help the participants understand the dynamics and processes of the group;
* help women to recognise, validate and explore what they are feeling and why;
* monitor individual and group growth and change;
* help the participants to understand the meanings behind certain behaviors and issues pertaining to domestic abuse;
* share knowledge and information on violence against women in general and domestic violence in particular;
* promote understanding that domestic violence is an unacceptable violation of human rights;
* refer participants to other services in addition to/in place of, the RCT group if needed;
* make referrals to our In-house counselling service for the group members if needed;

Participants should be given ample opportunity to express their opinions and discuss the issues with one another. However, if the group strays too far from the original objectives, or fails to adhere to the agreed group rules, it is the role of the facilitator to guide the participants gently back into productive discussion and to ensure the group rules are respected by all.

**Responsibilities of the facilitator**

The facilitator has a range of key responsibilities:

**a) Organise the group:**

* ensure the set-up and proper functioning of the sessions;
* prepare any material, if needed, for each session before the group meets;
* consider access, mobility and other needs of the group participants.

b) **Within the group:**

* conduct sessions from the standpoint that all participants are believed and respected;
* adopt effective means to structure the group and encourage everyone to participate;
* explain the necessary group rules, and ensure they are adhered to;
* encourage the women to take responsibility for their own behavior;
* challenge any myths or stereotypes about domestic violence that arise within the group.

**c) Support participants:**

* ensure participants feel listened to, and not judged;
* recognise the individual needs and experiences of all group members;
* support group participants to make informed choices and decisions by providing relevant, available options.
* maintain knowledge of relevant local agencies that may be able to support the participants in different ways.

**d) Safety:**

* ensure the safety and security of the group and its participants are always the first priority;
* ensure the session is always held within a safe and secure women-centered environment;
* make the group participants aware of the processes of risk assessment that are in place throughout the sessions;
* take appropriate action if any risk of serious harm to the group participants is identified, by providing relevant information and conducting realistic safety planning;
* prevent crisis situations in the group by referring participants on a timely basis to our professional In-house counselling team for effective intervention.

**e) Diversity and fair access:**

* respect the diversity of all participants; demonstrate anti-discriminatory practices;
* ensure that the support group is accessible and welcoming to all participants;
* promote diversity within the support group’s literature and environment; avoid jargon;
* monitor access to group sessions, to ensure it fairly reflects local demographics and takes account of individual needs;
* recognise potential additional barriers some groups may face when attempting to access sessions including race, minority ethnicity, refugee or asylum-seeking women, migrant women, older women, lesbian and bisexual women, and disabled women;
* challenge any unfair prejudice and/or discrimination if it arises within the group, and document any specific incidents.

**f) Confidentiality:**

* safeguard the confidentiality of the group at all times and clarifying with the participants those situations where confidentiality may be limited e.g. reporting obligations based on child protection;
* ensure that all electronic or hard copy information regarding the group sessions is stored securely and confidentially. Any information that might individually identify a group member cannot be released outside the group;
* at the beginning of the sessions, agree with group participants that anything confidential will only be released with their express consent.

**Key Principles**

A facilitator of a group should fully embrace these key principles as the foundation of “best practice” in providing service for domestic violence survivors:

* safety, security and dignity
* understanding domestic and sexual violence and its impact on women & children
* confidentiality
* empowerment and participation
* diversity and fair access to services
* advocacy and support
* supervision by a collaborative agency
* zero tolerance of domestic and sexual violence; holding perpetrators accountable
* governance and accountability

**Core Beliefs**

A facilitator should always believe survivors and never ask for proof or evidence of their abuse. A facilitator should also uphold the following core beliefs:

* Domestic violence is preventable
* Domestic violence is never the survivor’s fault
* Domestic violence is rooted in the relations of power and control in intimate relationships
* Perpetrators have sole responsibility for their violence
* Children may also be victims of the abuse, and need a violence-free environment

These fundamental principles and core beliefs will enable the group participants to:

* recognise their individual strengths, maintain their independence
* acknowledge their rights to respect, dignity, independence, choice and control (where safety is not compromised).

In order to create an empowering atmosphere within the support group, it is important that the facilitator acts in an empowered, assertive, non-judgmental and empathetic way, to promote the skills that are discussed throughout the sessions and to maximise the potential of the group.

**Key Female Group Work Facilitator Competencies:**

**Knowledge**

The facilitator should have an accurate and current working knowledge of domestic violence and its impact on women and children, as well as local resources and support agencies. The facilitator should also have a broad overview of all types of gender-based violence, gender discrimination and equal opportunities.

*Before* the support group begins, the facilitator should have an in-depth knowledge of the following areas:

* Definition, history and the basic fundamentals of domestic violence; historical & feminist perspectives; societal & institutional issues; myths & realities.
* Statistics and dynamics of domestic violence: cycle of violence; power & control wheel; types of abuse; barriers or challenges to leaving an abuser; identifying victim/survivors.
* Intervention skills needed to work with victims/survivors: listening skills, service planning, confidential communication, personal & professional boundaries, empowerment perspectives, defining advocacy; basic crisis intervention skills; documentation/files & victim/survivor’s rights.
* Skills needed to develop and implement safety plans, how to identify tools and skills to assist in assessing the possible danger levels that the victim/survivor may be facing and how to assesses/intervene in potential suicidal crisis situations: safety planning; lethality assessment; suicide assessment.
* Abuser profile and perpetrator intervention services.
* Negative effects domestic violence has on children and safety planning for children; working with children.
* Issues of culture, ethnicity, race and religion from a culturally competent perspective.
* Unique needs of specialised populations that are affected by domestic violence and abuse including people with unique challenges; mental health issues; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender issues & homophobia; substance abuse & domestic violence; prostitution/trafficking etc.
* Legal issues related to domestic violence and abuse.
* Code of Ethics; Referrals to and Working with Other Agencies/Systems.
* Knowledge of the local community demographics in which the support group is set.
* Self-care

**Experience**

To ensure the group participants receive the best service, the facilitator should ideally have

the following experience:

* experience of working with female survivors of domestic violence and abuse, in a professionally supervised capacity
* experience of providing emotional & practical support to female survivors of domestic violence and abuse
* experience of safety planning and conducting risk assessments
* experience of planning and facilitating group work

**Skills**

The facilitator should possess skills that enable them to run the group effectively and

ensure that collective and individual needs are met. Skills should include:

* excellent group management skills, including the ability to plan and facilitate group sessions effectively;
* excellent communication skills, including clear verbal delivery & positive body language;
* active listening skills, and the ability to respond empathetically to the group members;
* the ability to challenge participants, where relevant and necessary, in a non-confrontational but assertive manner;
* the ability to handle issues, such as anger, in the group;
* an understanding of professional boundaries and the facilitator’s limitations within the group, e.g. not getting personally involved with the women’s lives; not counselling;
* self-initiative to plan and execute their group facilitation responsibilities effectively;
* ability to apply anti-discriminatory practice and equal opportunities into all aspects of the support group;
* ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the support group and report on the outcomes;

**RUNNING THE GROUP**

There are several management issues that should be considered when running the group.

**Initial session**

It is valuable to meet each woman who is referred to the support group before it starts. If participants are referred to the group from a collaborating agency, it is likely that an initial one-to-one session has taken place already. However, it is advisable to begin the initial group session to discuss each woman’s expectations of the group.

It is important to acquaint future participants with the structure of the group:

* to clarify the aims and objectives of the group in order
* to ensure that the expectations of the participants and what is provided in the group are compatible.

This is recommended for collaborating agency referrals, as well as external or self-referrals.

**Specific Guidelines for facilitating Domestic Violence and Abuse sessions for Male Perpetrators:**

The goal of perpetrator programmes should be explicit both for the facilitators and for the men they work with. Priority is given to the safety of the women partners and their children at every level of the programme, including group work. Only men who fulfil the following criteria can be admitted to a perpetrator programme:

(1) sufficient knowledge of the language spoken in the course

(2) sufficient cognitive skills

(3) confession of their offence

(4) willingness to co-operate

(5) the ability to work within a group

The perpetrator will not be admitted to the programme if he does not fulfil one or more of the named criteria. This can be, for example, an alcohol- or drug addiction, consummation of psychotropic substances and a mental disorder.

The bulk of male perpetrator DV work should fundamentally take place in a group setting, as the interaction and the group dynamics assist social learning. In the group there are the optimal requirements for the men to learn from other participants who have had similar experiences. They will be confronted with their wrongdoings, and their denials and justifications will be questioned. They can examine their own behaviour with that of the other participants and therefore critically question their own violent actions. There must be 2 Facilitators for Male Perpetrator Group Work sessions and at least one should be male. All sessions are recorded via video camera for reasons of security and to address any training needs of staff.

The duration and process-oriented character of perpetrator programmes is important in order to achieve a sustained behavioural change. Therefore, Rochdale Connections Trust are committed to delivery of a perpetrator programme that takes place over at least six months, plus admission procedure and follow-up. The appointments should take place once a week. In exceptional cases another scheduling is possible, as long as they are in line with the drafted standards. The group should consist of 5-10 participants.

Key to the participation in our male perpetrator programme containing group work is the written agreements between Rochdale Connections Trust and the participating man. Necessary components of this are:

• contents of the perpetrator programme

• binding and regular participation

• adherence of the rules and agreements

• break-up and disqualification policy

• policy by new violent actions during group participation

• release from data protection towards

* (Ex-) Partner
* Institutions that make injunctions
* Case involved woman’s Help Services
* Existing intervention services

• consent to contact the (Ex-) Partner

The basic principle of the work is a positive concept of human being. The violent behaviour, and not the person, is not approved of. Next to respecting the perpetrator as a person in his own right, the following principles are also applied:

• Conflict- and violent behaviour is to be differentiated

• Domestic violence is not acceptable and must be prohibited

• The perpetrators must be made responsible for their behaviour

• Within the setting of perpetrator work DV change can be made when the

perpetrators intensively examine their own behaviour

• An efficient approach against domestic violence is ensured when politics,

justice, police, social- and health centres, society and every individual work

together.

• Perpetrator work DV should encourage a positive social relationship with a

foundation of acceptance and equality.

**The Skills and Knowledge of the Facilitators:**

* Facilitators should have sufficient knowledge about the issues of Domestic Violence and Abuse and the characteristics and behaviours of male perpetrators.
* Facilitators should possess the skills to effectively work safely with a group of men and to encourage the men to change their behaviour and attitudes and to become responsible, loving partners and parents.

**The Personal Presence of the Facilitators:**

* Ability to be present and fully engaged in the immediate moment.
* Aware of self, group members and the group process.
* Transparent (not putting on a mask, being defensive or autocratic).
* Authentic (being genuine, direct, open, comfortable in own skin).
* Able to transmit a genuine feeling of attunement and empathy within the group.

**Facilitators are required to create an atmosphere of trust and safety by:**

* Being transparent.
* Ensuring clarity of boundaries.
* Ensuring clarity around focus and purpose.
* Establishing an attitude of respect within group (both group members and facilitators).
* Ensuring they are attuned to group members, themselves and the process.
* Developing familiarity through consistency of attendance.
* Ensuring a consistent approach to delivery.
* Ensuring they are a consistent presence in all group work sessions.

**Facilitators will develop the group by:**

* Encouraging group members to become more honest and open
* Creating, maintaining and developing a depth of feeling within the group that allows and encourages more emotional vulnerability alongside the development of greater empathy and attunement.
* Supporting the development by group members of greater self-awareness and transparency.
* Encouraging the acceptance and active embracing by group members of the taking of greater responsibility for their inner lives (thoughts, feelings, sensations), as well as for their external behavior.
* Supporting the ongoing practice of group members recognizing and dealing with whether their heart is open or closed and noticing this in others.
* Developing in each group member a basic attitude of openness to inquiry in relationship to himself, other group members and the facilitators.
* Enabling each group member to feel basically supported by the facilitators, other group members and the ongoing group process in their particular journey of change.
* Facilitating the group sessions in such a way that they can be experienced as an ongoing progression of support and change.

**Delivering Groupwork:**

When delivering any groupwork the Facilitators must consider the following:

**Risk assessment**

In the context of domestic violence and abuse work, the facilitator must consider their ability to manage risk, and put a support plan in place.

It is important to assess the venue where the support group will be held to ensure both the location and building are safe and secure. Risk assessment should include:

* assessing the likelihood of further abuse;
* evaluating likely harm;
* assessing future security;
* deciding, along with the survivor, with whom to work and what resources (i.e. support outside the group);
* evaluating any risk to other participants in the group.

Risk assessment should be integrated within the whole support group process. Risk should be assessed at the beginning, during the sessions and at the end. When a risk assessment is conducted with a woman, it may be concluded that this may not be the right time for her to join a support group. For example, if she is in a very dangerous situation, attending the group may increase the danger she is in, or put other participants at risk. If a woman is in a dangerous situation, she should be assisted to draw up a safety plan.

Depending on the facilitator’s ability to manage risk within the group, she may or may not be able to offer services to women who are high-risk. In some cases, the initial risk assessment might result in a referral to our In-house Counselling service or other appropriate services. If we are unable to offer a service to high-risk women, it is important that the woman is referred to more appropriate services that have the resources to meet her needs.

**Confidentiality and data protection**

Participants, facilitators and possibly the administrative staff will inevitably get to know certain sensitive information about participants of the group. The facilitator needs to know the legal requirements relating to mandatory reporting and disclosure, and the obligations of staff/others if they become aware of ongoing child abuse.

Participants, the facilitator and administrative staff all need to be clear about their rights and

obligations regarding sensitive data and confidentiality.

**Complaints procedure**

Rochdale Connections Trust have a Complaint procedure in place. Participants must be able to initiate a complaint externally, and not just to the facilitator, if they choose to. At the first session, the women must be informed about the complaint procedure and how to make a complaint.

**Facilitator support**

Facilitators receive regular supervision with their Line Manager and 8-weekly clinical supervision in addition.

**Childcare**

We are unable to provide childcare or creche facilities for the children of women accessing our group sessions. This is discussed at the point of referral and they are signposted to an alternative provider with those facilities should they be unable to arrange their own childcare.

Part of the work of the support group will be to work on recognizing and changing abusive patterns. Therefore, it is essential to set the ground rule that any belittling or abusive language or attitudes will not be tolerated. It may be appropriate for the participants to agree on how to appropriately challenge and prevent such behavior.

In order to demonstrate their commitment to the rules created by the support group, the facilitator can write the group rules on a flipchart or poster. Each group participant is then asked to sign the shared set of rules in agreement. The flipchart or poster should remain visible at every session in order to make it easy to refer to any of the rules.

**Basic process guidelines**

The following are recommended guidelines, although each group can come up with

additional rules.

* Give everyone an opportunity to speak. Each person should avoid dominating the discussion (including the facilitator).
* Good listening is important. Actively listen to what a person is saying before speaking.
* Don't interrupt others.
* Speak from your own experience.
* Be honest.
* Value and validate others' differences and experiences. Put downs of other people will not be tolerated.
* Confidentiality & trust are shared responsibilities – no personal information ever leaves the support group meeting without express consent.
* No drugs or alcohol are allowed on the premises, nor should they be consumed immediately before attending the group.
* Consistent & punctual attendance is expected of everyone. Group participants need to contact the facilitator if they are unable to attend a meeting. If the participant has decided to leave the group for the time being, she should try to attend one more session, to notify the group and facilitator. If this is not possible, she should contact the facilitator to explain her reason(s).

**When group rules are violated**

Most of the time, support group participants will adhere to the agreed rules, and will be supportive and cooperative towards each other. Unfortunately, there are exceptions when, intentionally or not, a participant may break the established group rules. If this happens, the facilitator should clearly indicate as soon as the violation is noticed, and use effective

techniques to resolve it. Repeated violation of group rules are best solved with one-to-one sessions to discuss the meaning behind the behavior, and try to come to an agreement on how this can be worked through.

**In what kinds of situations should a participant be excluded from a group?**

Ideally, the facilitator will not be faced with a situation in which a participant has to be excluded from the group. However, in cases when an individual’s behavior is such that it prevents the group from functioning, exclusion should be considered as one option. While the need for exclusion may be rare, it may be appropriate if the excluded group participant is alleged to have done one or more of the following:

* jeopardised the safety of the group;
* disclosed personal information of group participants outside of the group setting;
* attended the group while severely under the influence of alcohol or other substances;
* repeatedly broken the group contract and/or rules;
* behaved abusively towards other participants.

**REVIEW SCHEDULE:**

The Group Work Policy is formally reviewed on an annual basis.

**Date of last review:** November 2021

**Reviewed by:** Lizl Donnelly

**Job Role:** Business Support Manager

**Date of next Review:** November 2022