

FAQ for Growing Groups

▶ How does the group respect people's confidentiality?

Remember, people who may be interested in your group will be at all stages of the coming out process; some people will not be sure if they even are bisexual. (And, in fact, they may decide to identify some other way and stop attending.) It is very important to make confidentiality a priority in the group. Announce at each meeting the statement of confidentiality so that everyone understands the ground rules. If you create mailing or phone lists, do not share them with people not in the group. If you meet people from the group in other circumstances, do not assume that they are out to everyone in their lives.

▶ How do you deal with disruptive people in the group?

This will not happen too often but you should be prepared if it does. Depending on what the behavior is, you may consider:

- Taking the person aside after the meeting and explain why the behavior is a problem. Give the person a second chance at another meeting.
- Addressing the behavior in the group in a respectful way, but indicate that the group rules of behavior have been breached.
- Conferring with others after the meeting and decide on next steps.

The group has a right to meet without being disturbed by one individual's problems. If a problem does persist it should be addressed or it may create an environment where other members will decide to no longer attend.



Bisexual Resource Center

▶ How can you help people who have larger issues to deal with than your group can handle?

Occasionally, there may be a participant in the group that has personal issues that are beyond the reach of the group. It's good to figure out possible resources to pass along to them. Most groups will need referrals for psychologists or mental health centers, lawyers, HIV/AIDS information, and other services.

▶ How do you keep a group going?

Most people participate in groups because it is fun and they get something out of the meetings. That doesn't mean it has to be constant frivolity, just that people need to feel listened to, engaged in activities, and connected to other people. Also, even though you may be really excited about starting a group, try not to take on all the responsibilities of the group yourself. As others join, provide opportunities for them to feel invested in the group and take the lead on different activities. Sharing the load between people is very important so that you don't get burnt out quickly. That said, you will find that some people are not organizers and just want to attend a group without taking on a leadership role.

▶ What happens if people want to do more than just have a support group?

As people start hearing about the meeting and the group gets larger, see if its members want to do other things such as social outings, movie nights, or a book club. Eventually, some members may want to do some political work on important LGBT issues in the community. Over time, allow the group (and perhaps even more than one group) to evolve into what the community's interests and energy are.

National Resources

Bisexual Resource Center
P.O. Box 170796, Boston, MA 02117
617-424-9595
www.biresource.net

BiNet USA
4201 Wilson Blvd., Suite 110-311
Arlington, VA 22203-1859
800-585-9368
www.binetusa.org

Boston Bisexual Women's Network
P.O. Box 301727, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
617-424-9595
www.biwomenboston.org

American Institute of Bisexuality
www.bisexual.org

Different Types of Support Groups

A personal support group meets regularly and focuses on "go-arounds," with some/all members giving an update on current issues in their lives. Group members listen and, may, if asked, offer comments or advice.

A discussion-focused group picks a topic in advance of each meeting. Topics might include a book or article, or a subject such as coming out to one's children, parents, friends, or partners; dating; monogamy and open relationships; safer sex; being bi in the gay community; etc.

An activity-focused group meets regularly for social activities: dancing, movies, brunches, bowling, biking, etc.

A combination group sometimes focuses on support discussions, other times chosen topics and still others social activities.

Starting or Growing Your Bisexual Support Group

If you are ready to start a new bi support group in your area, or trying to jumpstart a waning one we've got some tips for you!

- ▶ A support group can help provide a safe place for people in your community to talk about bisexuality and to meet other people dealing with similar issues. There are bi groups and organizations around the country that have been established for many years—the **BRC** just celebrated 25 years—while some are new and are looking to get established. Whatever the case, these tips can help create or reinvigorate your local group.

The BRC uses bisexual (or BI for bi-inclusive) as an umbrella term for people who recognize and honor their potential for sexual and emotional attraction to more than one gender. It includes people who identify as pansexual, fluid, omniseual, queer, no labels, and more.

We celebrate and affirm the diversity of identity and expression regardless of labels.

Where to Start, What to Do

Logistics: The first step in forming a new group is to organize a meeting and invite community members to discuss plans.

To do that you will need to:

- locate a meeting space,
- inform people about the meeting, and
- plan an agenda for the meeting.

Meeting space: In many communities, it's possible to obtain meeting space for free or for a small fee at public libraries, city or town halls, women's or progressive bookstores, food coops, nonprofits, or religious meeting houses (Unitarian Universalists, United Church of Christ, Reformed Jews, & Episcopalians are often receptive). Keep in mind issues around wheelchair accessibility, public transportation, parking, and, if there is a cost, how you will cover it.

The space provider should be aware that you are a bi support group and that you need an LGBT-friendly environment. However, you should also be conscious that some people wanting to come to the group may be closeted and may not feel comfortable coming to some spaces. (If public spaces are not commonly used in your area, you can meet in someone's home but be aware that some people might feel uncomfortable about going to a stranger's home.) Once you have found a meeting space, allow yourself at least 6-8 weeks to advertise the meeting.

Outreach: There are many ways to get the word out and you should try as many methods as possible. Be clear in your advertising that your group is not a dating service so that people don't get the wrong idea. The bi community is very diverse and you should consider ways to reach different age groups, races, genders, and the fact that some bi people identify more with gay/lesbian or straight identities.

- ▶ **Flyers.** Design an attractive flyer that has the time, date, location, idea of the meeting and provides a contact email for more information. Post them at various coffeehouses, bookstores, women's centers, and LGBT centers at colleges and in surrounding communities. Make a digital version as well to distribute online. Create a new email account just for this group and do not post your own phone number.
- ▶ **Newspaper calendars and classified ads.** Many newspapers will list events open to the public in a free calendar section, both print and online. LGBT publications should definitely be used, but also think about community, church and organizational newsletters that will reach a larger audience.
- ▶ **Meetup groups.** Meetup.com is a social networking website that can be used to find interested participants in bi-friendly activities. If you can finance the start-up cost of a Meetup group (about \$12 per month) it can be a good way to reach a lot of people who are looking for ways to connect within their areas.
- ▶ **Facebook/Twitter.** Use your own social networking pages to spread the word or post on pages of other bi groups such as the Bisexual Resource Center Facebook page. Ask people to pass along the info and to retweet to their networks. It is probably not necessary or worth it to have your own Facebook page, at least not right away.
- ▶ **Other Internet Communities.** Connecting online is now one of the easiest ways to reach others with similar interests. There are several bi-identified listservs that have national memberships, such as the Bisexual Resource Center Yahoo group (www.groups.yahoo.com). Use these groups to post your own group's notices.

The First Meeting

Come to the first meeting prepared. Arrange chairs in a circle so that everyone can see each other. 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 of the meeting: introductions, moderated open discussion, discussion about meeting regularly.

- ▶ Take a few moments for introductions in which each person gets a chance to speak. Each person says their name and answers a question or two (why they came, what they would like to get out of the meeting, an interesting tidbit about themselves.)
- ▶ Have a moderated open discussion led by you or someone else who is prepared to initiate the conversation. Most people in a new group have had little or no chance to talk about bisexuality and are ready to talk. Refer to things that people said in their introductions to spark the conversation, but also have some topics ready in case of lulls.
- ▶ Set aside the last half hour to decide on the next step for the group. Do people want to have another meeting, to start a group, etc.? Don't leave the meeting without scheduling your next meeting. Pass around a phone or email list so that you (or someone else who is designated) have a way to reach people interested in meeting again.

Make sure the meeting does not last more than two hours or people will start to drift out and will miss the planning segment of the meeting. If you have to cut off an interesting conversation, assure people it is so that there will be other future conversations.

Words of Advice

Don't feel everything has to be decided at the first meeting. Allow for the group to grow organically and take shape as new people join. At the same time, you will need to provide leadership to keep the group moving forward. Once the group has met a few times and people are happy with it, a momentum usually develops.

The group should discuss whether it wants to have a facilitator guide the meetings or not. It can be a designated facilitator, a rotation of a few people, or a facilitator can be designated at each meeting depending on the members that show up.

Talk to other people who have experience in starting bi support groups in areas similar to yours, or who have started other types of support groups in your community. **Contact the BRC at brc@biresource.net if you'd like some guidance on this.**

Don't be discouraged if the group doesn't last; group chemistry is fickle. You may want to try again and try some different strategies.

Don't stop advertising the group once you get it started. Most groups fluctuate due to normal life occurrences like people moving, pairing off, or having different needs and you will want to welcome new people in over time.