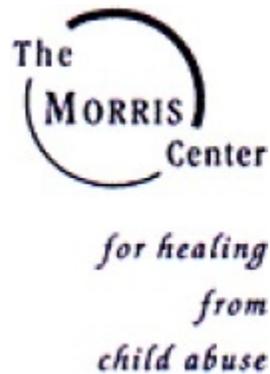


# Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Support Group



Original: 2005  
Edited: Jan. 11, 2024

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Getting Started: The Three P's.....	3
Participants.....	4
<i>Number of Participants</i> .....	4
<i>Advertising</i> .....	4
Options.....	5
Posting Flyers.....	11
Mailings.....	13
<i>Open Drop-in or Closed Meetings</i> .....	14
<i>Internet</i> .....	15
Email Address.....	15
Creating a Web Page on Yahoo.....	18
Meeting Place.....	20
Virtual Meeting Space.....	21
Administration.....	21
<i>Administrative Goals</i> .....	21
<i>Roles</i> .....	23
<i>Decision Making</i> .....	23
<i>Types of Decisions</i> .....	24
<i>Voting</i> .....	24
Other Tips.....	24
Additional Help and Resources.....	25
Stories by Starters.....	25
<i>Stu's Story</i> .....	26
Preparing to create a meeting.....	26
Getting things together.....	27
Materials for the meeting.....	28
People.....	29
<i>Scott's Story</i> .....	29

## Introduction

Congratulations on taking the initiative to form a support group for Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA). Mostly likely, you have not been able to locate an existing group with a convenient meeting time and/or location. Perhaps you know of a group other than ASCA but find its energy and style a mismatch for yours. Whatever the case, starting an ASCA group is an attainable goal and a rewarding experience.

The ASCA program has been employed for over a decade by a number of groups in cities throughout the world. ASCA is based on a twenty-one-step program for survivors of child abuse. You can find more material on the program itself in the *Survivor to Thriver* manual and the *ASCA Co-Facilitator Training Manual*. You can download these materials from the Morris Center website ([ascasupport.org](http://ascasupport.org)). If you have any questions, need more information, or just want some moral support, please don't hesitate to email The Morris Center at [info@ascasupport.org](mailto:info@ascasupport.org). They would love to hear from you.

There are currently two different group models: community-based groups and provider-based groups. The tips contained in this brochure are geared toward community-based groups. Community-based groups are formed by survivors of child abuse, who are also the group's participants and co-facilitators. On the other hand, provider-based groups are usually formed by mental health providers or organizations and may or may not be co-facilitated by adult survivors of child abuse.

## Getting Started: The Three P's

Starting a group may seem daunting at first, but, as with most tasks in life, you can achieve the goal by proceeding step by step and celebrating each accomplishment along the way. There certainly are numerous approaches to starting an ASCA group. In this guide, we will try to present an assortment of tips. These tips may or may not be helpful to you. Feel free to apply those that seem to apply to your situation.

There are three primary ingredients to a support group. They are

- 1) **Participants** (survivors),
- 2) **Place** (meeting place), and
- 3) **Procedure** (format).

It's a simple recipe. The Morris Center has prepared the procedures (format) and supporting materials for you, so you can focus your efforts on locating other survivors and the meeting place. We'll discuss which materials you'll need—as well as offer tips—for the first meetings later in this guide.

## **Participants**

Support groups are all about people, and so, in the end, people are the most important ingredient in the group. For that reason, try to find a few people to serve as the core of the group's formation. This group can assist with finding other interested parties, selecting a meeting place, and choosing an appropriate meeting time. If you act on your own, you may choose a place and time that do not work for others. It is hard to know these details without getting input from other people.

Of course, you may not be able to find others to help you form a group. Many people only want to commit to existing entities. However, we know of at least one group that started purely from the efforts of one person who, not finding others to help establish the group, chose a meeting place and time and then advertised to attract members. So, don't be discouraged!

### ***Number of Participants***

You may know some people who are interested in joining a support group for survivors of child abuse. Opinions differ on the minimum number of people you need for a meeting. There's no iron-clad rule on the matter. The Morris Center believes that the ASCA meeting format works best with seven or more people. Some people are satisfied with even just two people in the room, but this is not the norm. Consider aiming to have at least five people at each meeting.

Smaller groups, five to nine people, allow for greater intimacy, enough time for each person to share, and the possibility of extending shares beyond five minutes. Many participants appreciate the opportunity for longer shares. However, smaller groups carry the additional risk of having too few people when everyone is not able to attend each meeting. Larger groups may be more comfortable for people who prefer not to speak at a meeting. Even though no person is ever required to speak at a meeting, people sometimes feel a subtle pressure to do so if there are not enough participants to fill the allotted time.

Your own unique circumstances will determine how big your meeting will be. You will just have to wait and see how many people are interested in the meeting, and then navigate from there.

### ***Advertising***

If you do not know enough interested people to form a group, then you will want to find people. One good approach is to ask individuals you know. Naturally, you should ask people you trust. Some people do not understand these things, and you might be better off not telling them. Please do not pressure yourself to ask

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

people you do not trust, because there are plenty of other ways of finding participants.

### Options

Advertising is an effective way of finding participants. Some potentially good places might be Meetup or Craigslist. In the 2005 edition of this guide, Craigslist was used as an example, and it is here. First and foremost, be safe. More details and examples may be provided in another edition of this guide. A good place to start may be Craigslist, a popular classified ads web site. Craigslist receives a huge amount of traffic, particularly from the kinds of people who join support groups. Here's how you do it:

Get on the Internet, open your web browser, and type in the address [craigslist.org](http://craigslist.org). See **Figure 1** below.

**Figure 1**



The default city may be where you live. If you live in a different city, find it on the right side of the page and click it. For this example, we'll try St. Louis. See **Figure 2**.

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

Figure 2



On the top left of the page, click on the link called “post to classifieds.” See **Figure 3**.

Figure 3



Click on “community.” See **Figure 4**.

Figure 4



Posting a listing on **st louis** [craigslist](#)

What type of posting is this:

- [job](#) (jobseekers - please do not post under jobs!)
- [housing](#)
- [for sale / wanted](#)
- [resume](#)
- [services offered](#)
- [personal / romance](#)
- [community](#)

Click on groups. See **Figure 5**.

Figure 5

Posting a listing on **st louis** [craigslist](#)

To which of these categories would you like to post?

- [activity partners](#)
- [artists](#)
- [childcare](#)
- [general community](#) (please, no political stuff here -- s
- [groups](#)
- [lost & found](#)
- [musicians](#)

You will see an entry screen. See **Figure 6**.

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

**Figure 6**

**Posting Title:** [go easy on capitals]

**Specific Location**

**Posting Description:** [embedded URLs & HTML] [How to add a picture]

The St. Louis Chapter of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse meets on Tuesdays (6:30-8.00 PM) near Washington University. We follow the ASCA meeting format (see [www.ascasupport.org](http://www.ascasupport.org)). Our goal is mutual support in a gentle and non-judgemental environment. For more details, visit [www.geocities.com/ascasl](http://www.geocities.com/ascasl) or contact Scott at [ascasl@yahoo.com](mailto:ascasl@yahoo.com).

**Your E-Mail address: (We need this to send you the self publishing kit.)**

use this email as my reply-to    [anonymize](#) this email & use as my reply-to    no email reply-to

ok for others to contact you about other services, products or commercial interests

---

Fill in a title, description, and location. You can copy my description from the example above or compose a different one. You can leave the check box at the bottom (ok for others to contact) unchecked. It's not a problem if you place a checkmark there, but you might receive email solicitations from businesses.

You can choose to list your actual meeting address or just give a general description. This depends a bit on your group format. If the group screens new participants, then you would first communicate with the applicant. Even if you do not screen applicants, you still might not want to list the address publicly. Some participants worry that a child abuse perpetrator or some other unwelcome person might try to attend a meeting and cause a disturbance. Some people do not worry about this at all and just go ahead and list the address. The former approach requires a bit more work and may even deter some legitimate participants who would otherwise attend. As with everything in life, there are trade-offs.

In the above example, we listed a group web site that we established at geocities, which is Yahoo's hosting service. We'll show you how to set up an email address and web site on that service too. If you do not have a group email address, you can enter a different address. Alternatively, you can select "anonymize" at the bottom of the screen. Craigslist will invent an address for you and post it in the ad. This way, your email address will not be viewable from the web. Any mail sent to the temporary address will be forwarded to you at the address you specify after receiving your confirmation request from Craigslist.

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

If you have not yet selected a location or meeting time, then you might just write about your idea to form a group and ask for interested people to respond. You could write the following:

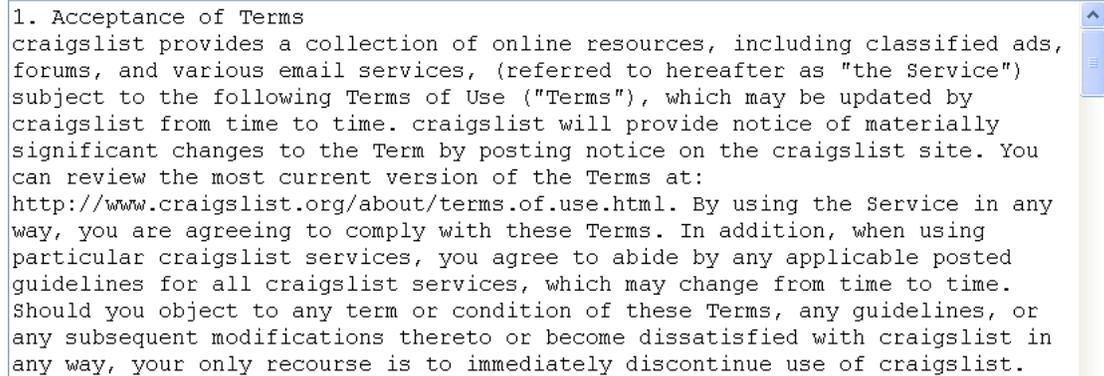
We are in the process of forming a support group for adult survivors of child abuse. Our goal is mutual support in a gentle and non-judgmental environment. We welcome adult survivors of any type of child abuse. If you are interested in helping to form the group or would just like to attend, please contact Scott at [ascanyc@yahoo.com](mailto:ascanyc@yahoo.com).

Note: We realize that we misspelled the word “non-judgemental” in our Craigslist entry form in **Figure 6**. It should be non-judgmental. But we are allowing ourselves to make mistakes, even those in public forums like the web. You do not have to be perfect in your effort to start a support group. You will make lots of mistakes along the way. That’s fine.

After clicking “continue,” you will get a screen asking you to confirm your entries. Click “continue” if you are satisfied, or “edit” if you want to change something. After clicking “continue,” you will see a screen asking you to affirm the “Terms of Use.” Read the terms and click “Accept.” See **Figure 7**.

### Figure 7

#### Terms of Use

A screenshot of a web browser window showing the Craigslist Terms of Use. The text is displayed in a monospaced font within a text area. On the right side of the text area, there is a vertical scrollbar with a blue track and a white slider.

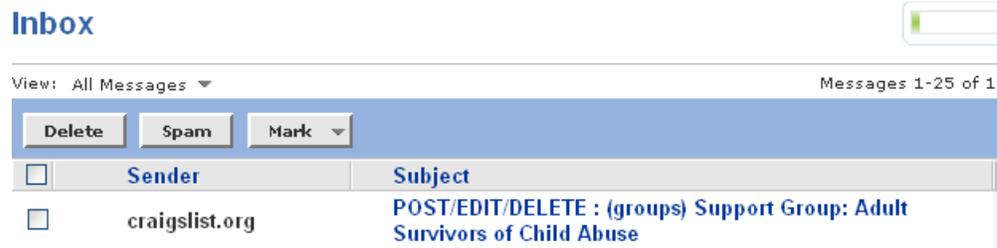
1. Acceptance of Terms  
craigslist provides a collection of online resources, including classified ads, forums, and various email services, (referred to hereafter as "the Service") subject to the following Terms of Use ("Terms"), which may be updated by craigslist from time to time. craigslist will provide notice of materially significant changes to the Term by posting notice on the craigslist site. You can review the most current version of the Terms at: <http://www.craigslist.org/about/terms.of.use.html>. By using the Service in any way, you are agreeing to comply with these Terms. In addition, when using particular craigslist services, you agree to abide by any applicable posted guidelines for all craigslist services, which may change from time to time. Should you object to any term or condition of these Terms, any guidelines, or any subsequent modifications thereto or become dissatisfied with craigslist in any way, your only recourse is to immediately discontinue use of craigslist.

The final screen doesn’t require you to take any action now but informs you that you will be receiving an email to which you must respond before your ad is posted.

An hour or so after your submission, you will receive an email from Craigslist. See **Figure 8**.

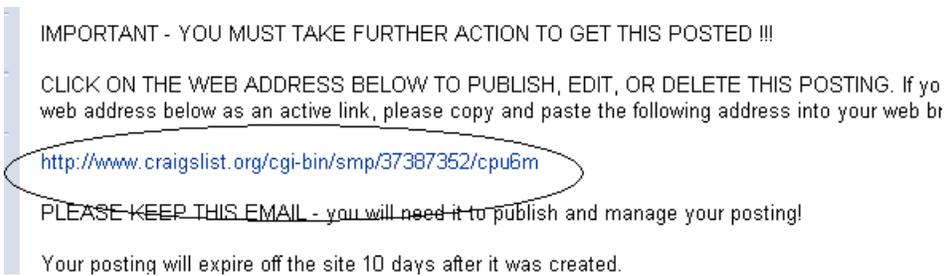
## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

**Figure 8**



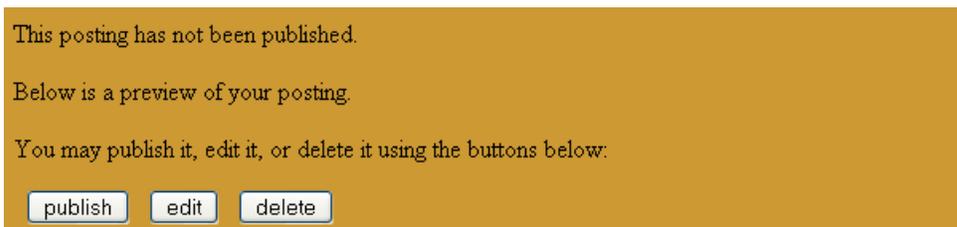
The email will contain a link. Click on the link. See **Figure 9**.

**Figure 9**



Click "publish" and you are in business. See **Figure 10**.

**Figure 10**



### Support Group: Adult Survivors of Child Abuse

---

Reply to: *your anonymous craigslist address will appear here*  
Date: Sun Jul 25th 07:54

To view your ad, go to Craigslist, and pick your city. In the search box on the top left, type in the subject of your ad (as you entered it) and click the arrow to the right of the search box. See **Figure 11**. Your ad should appear.

Figure 11



The ad will run for ten days. You can renew it every ten days if you like.

## Posting Flyers

Another good means of advertising is posting flyers at universities, health clinics, community-center bulletin boards, and even coffee shops. Most places take down the flyers after a few weeks. So, you'll have to get in the habit of making the postings as long as you are looking for new members. You might find this effort tedious, but you might also find it therapeutic. Each step towards establishing your support group is an affirmation of your initiative, independence, strength, and yearning to survive and thrive.

We have created a sample flyer. You can download your own copy of the flyer from the Morris Center web site ([ascasupport.org](http://ascasupport.org)) or at the ASCA NYC website at [www.ascanyc.org](http://www.ascanyc.org) You can also copy and paste from this document if you are reading via computer. The document is in Microsoft Word format. Obviously, you'll have to customize it a bit for your group. Here's the flyer:

Figure 12

ASCA: New York City

*Support Group for Adult  
Survivors of Child Abuse*



Join us for our weekly meetings. We give one another emotional support and an opportunity for expression of feelings, thoughts, memories, hopes, insights, and education on the subject of child abuse.

Held currently on Tuesday evenings from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM in  
Greenwich Village, Manhattan.

See <https://www.ascanyc.org/> for more  
information or Email [ascanyc@aol.com](mailto:ascanyc@aol.com)

Once your meetings get started, you can leave a few copies of the flyer on your literature table. Participants can assist in the advertising efforts by posting flyers at their schools and coffee shops. We don't suggest pressuring anyone to help (most survivors had enough of that as children), but you can mention it during business meetings or the announcements portion of the meeting.

## Mailings

You can also run a mail campaign by email or snail mail (snail mail is old fashioned mail with paper and envelopes). Who should you email? You can email anyone who might know of people who could use a support group. This can include the United Way, religious institutions, community centers, or even psychotherapy groups or individual counselors. The public library and web are great places to find addresses.

Here's sample text for the letter:

### Figure 13

Dear Community Services Director,

I am writing to tell you about the Adult Survivors of Child Abuse Program (ASCA), which was designed by the Morris Center ([ascasupport.org](http://ascasupport.org)) in San Francisco. ASCA is a support group for adult survivors of child abuse. This group may interest some of your staff and clients. You may have received inquiries from the public on the availability of such a group in our metropolitan area.

Our ASCA group meets once a week, currently Tuesday evenings in \_\_\_\_\_, for emotional and intellectual expression in a gentle and supportive environment. All participants are survivors of child abuse. There is no fee for attendance, only a suggested \$10 contribution, which is applied towards rent for the meeting room, recovery literature, and contributions to The Morris Center — the non-profit organization that maintains our World Service Office.

I would be most appreciative if you could include our group with any listings of services used by your staff or in literature and web sites. While our city has no shortage of support groups in general, it suffers from a dearth of groups specifically for this purpose.

Please find attached a flyer (in the form of an MS Word document) that you can place on a public bulletin board.

Suggested blurb for your literature:

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

### ASCA-NYC

Support group for adult survivors of child abuse. Meets Wednesday evenings 6:00pm to 8:00 pm in Manhattan.

Suggested contribution \$10. See <https://www.ascanyc.org/> or Email [ascanyc@aol.com](mailto:ascanyc@aol.com) for more details.

Thank you for your kind assistance here and for your important work in general. Sincerely,

Your Name

Of course, you need to adapt this sample with references to your particular group name, location, meeting time, and contact information. For the snail mail campaign, replace the word “attached” with “enclosed.” It’s also better to have a specific name in the salutation instead of the generic “Community Services Director.”

Please keep in mind that people may not welcome solicitations from mail order catalogs or credit card companies, but they often appreciate hearing about helpful resources. You might even receive phone calls (if you list your number) from people who ask for more information.

You might also find yourself speaking with someone who is checking you out for credibility. Do not be concerned or intimidated by that. The caller may represent a community organization that wants to exercise diligence on behalf of their clients. You do not have to impress them with a big show. Just talk a bit about your group, its format, and its goals. Some group starters have found that mentioning their association with the Morris Center is helpful. You can mention how the group closely follows the Morris Center’s meeting format. You can emphasize that your group does not give psychoanalysis or counseling but provides a safe place to express one’s feelings and thoughts in a supportive environment—without encountering analysis or cross-talk (please see the Welcome to ASCA Guide for more information on cross-talk).

### ***Open Drop-in or Closed Meetings***

As we mentioned earlier, you will need to decide whether to classify your meetings as “open drop-in” or “closed.” Closed meetings provide a more stable environment. This is both a strength and a weakness. Sometimes, people who

are new to the meeting can add a different perspective and fresh ideas. Sometimes, new people can inhibit free expression by those who do not want to share with complete strangers. The founding members make many of these types of decisions. You can change the genre of your meeting as necessary. You may need to change whether a group is open or closed in order to attract members. However, excessive change can be harmful because most support group participants tend to want a fairly stable environment. Even positive changes can sometimes unsettle a group. We will discuss group decision-making processes in the section titled Administration.

## ***Internet***

### **Email Address**

There are numerous advantages to establishing an email address for your group including the following:

1. You can insure that inquiries from the public do not get mixed in with your other email.
2. You can better guarantee privacy in your correspondence in case some other person at home shares your regular email address.
3. You can more easily maintain your anonymity if you so desire.
4. You can pass on responsibility for the email account to another person in the group.

We all know by now a number of ways to establish an email address. You might find it helpful to establish an address at yahoo.com because you Yahoo will also allow you to form an online web page and group. Here's how to set up an email account on Yahoo. In your web browser, type yahoo.com and when the page loads, click on Mail. See **Figure 14**.

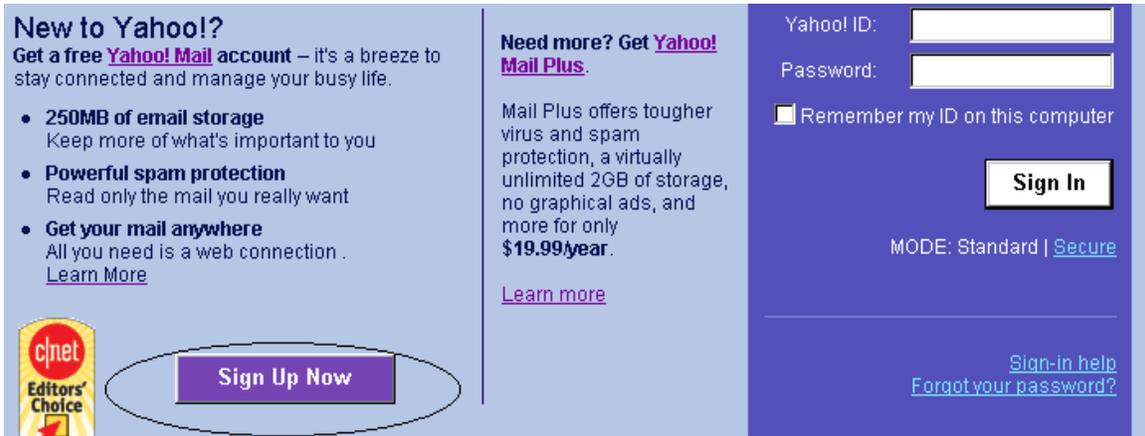
[2024 Note: Yahoo groups no longer is active. However, possible alternatives include [groups.io](https://groups.io), [meetup.com](https://meetup.com), etc. The example is left in place for educational purposes.]

**Figure 14**



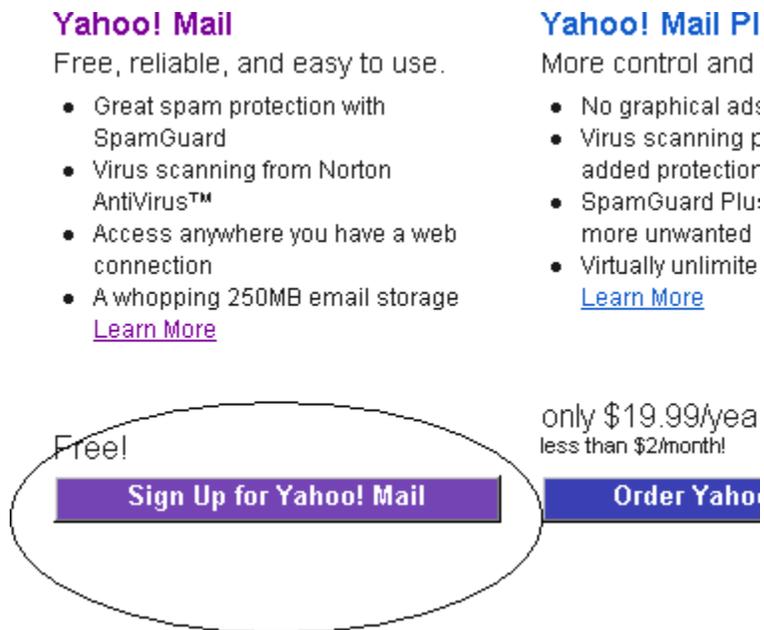
On the new web page, click Sign Up Now. See **Figure 15**.

Figure 15



On the new web page, click Sign Up For Yahoo Mail. See **Figure 16**.

Figure 16



Now fill out the information on the sign up page. See **Figure 17**.

Figure 17

The screenshot shows the Yahoo! Mail account creation interface. At the top left is the 'YAHOO! MAIL' logo, and at the top right is a 'Yahoo! - Help' link. Below the logo is a box with a yellow circle icon and the text: 'Already have an ID or a Yahoo! Mail address? [Sign In.](#)' Below this is a note: 'Fields marked with an asterisk \* are required.' The main section is titled 'Create Your Yahoo! ID' and contains several fields: '\* First name:' with a text input; '\* Last name:' with a text input; '\* Preferred content:' with a dropdown menu set to 'Yahoo! U.S.' and a help icon; '\* Gender:' with a '[Select]' dropdown; '\* Yahoo! ID:' with a text input followed by '@yahoo.com', with a note below stating 'ID may consist of a-z, 0-9 and underscores.'; '\* Password:' with a text input and a note below stating 'Six characters or more; capitalization matters!'; and '\* Re-type password:' with a text input. Below this section is a section titled 'If You Forget Your Password...' with two fields: '\* Security question:' with a '[Select a Question]' dropdown; and '\* Your answer:' with a text input.

From this point onward, just follow the instructions that Yahoo provides until you complete the creation of your account.

Once you set up your account, you can send and retrieve mail by going to my.yahoo.com and entering your id and password. See **Figures 18** and **19**.

Figure 18



Figure 19



## Creating a Web Page on Yahoo

[2024 note: Geocities was a popular place, but no longer exists. Some possible alternatives include [weebly.com](http://weebly.com), [wix.com](http://wix.com), etc. This example is here for educational purposes.]

Yahoo allows anyone to create a small web site on its servers. They use geocities.com, one of their subsidiaries for this purpose. To create a web site on geocities, do the following:

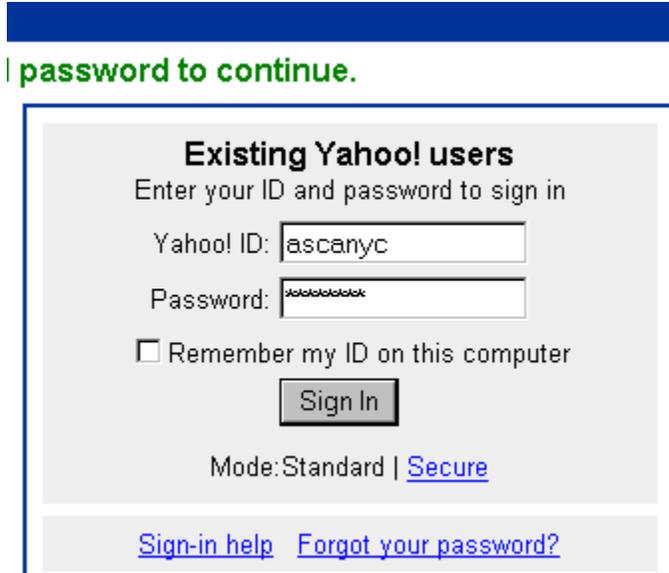
Go to geocities.com using your web browser and click on Sign Up. See **Figure 20**.

Figure 20



Enter the yahoo email address and password that you created earlier. See **Figure 21**.

Figure 21



Choose Health as your topic and click Continue. See **Figure 22**.

Figure 22

## GeoCities Free

**Choose a topic** to determine the type of ads that will appear on your site. (Can be change  
If you do not want ads on your web site, please check out our [premium packages](#).

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Alternative Lifestyle | <input type="radio"/> Friends           | <input type="radio"/> Religion & Beliefs  |
| <input type="radio"/> Arts & Literature     | <input type="radio"/> Games             | <input type="radio"/> Romance             |
| <input type="radio"/> Autos                 | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Health | <input type="radio"/> Schools & Education |
| <input type="radio"/> Business & Finance    | <input type="radio"/> Hobbies & Crafts  | <input type="radio"/> Science             |
| <input type="radio"/> Celebrities           | <input type="radio"/> Home              | <input type="radio"/> Seniors             |
| <input type="radio"/> Computers & Internet  | <input type="radio"/> Issues & Causes   | <input type="radio"/> Sports              |
| <input type="radio"/> Family                | <input type="radio"/> Military          | <input type="radio"/> Teens               |
| <input type="radio"/> Fashion & Beauty      | <input type="radio"/> Movies            | <input type="radio"/> Travel              |
| <input type="radio"/> Fitness               | <input type="radio"/> Music             | <input type="radio"/> Television          |
| <input type="radio"/> Food                  | <input type="radio"/> Pets              | <input type="radio"/> Women               |

On the next web page, note your web address (should be geocities.com/your email address, eg geocities.com/ascanyc) and click Build Web Page. On the Build My Web Site page, click Yahoo Page Wizards. See **Figure 23**. From this point onwards, follow the instructions yahoo gives you.

Figure 23

## Build My Web Site

Creating web pages is easy with these popular tools...



**Yahoo! PageWizards - Easy!**

Build a personal home page quickly with this simple step-by-step method. [Try it!](#)



**Yahoo! PageBuilder**

Design and customize pages easily with this powerful and full-featured editor. [Try it!](#)

## Meeting Place

To create a meeting place, you really just need a room and chairs. However, there are some other considerations. It is best to find a meeting room with a safe environment—well-lit, fairly public—so that participants do not fear for their physical safety. People who have been physically or sexually abused as children have a greater sensitivity to safety issues. One group tried to arrange meetings in the basement of a synagogue and realized that the windowless room, deep in the bowels of an old building, might appear unsafe to some people. For safety considerations, try to find a room with windows. The light from windows also cheers up the atmosphere. A room in good condition is optimal, although this is not always possible.

Another consideration in room selection is environmental control. By that, we mean that the place needs to be heated in the winter and cool in the summer (air conditioning). However, air conditioners can sometimes make a lot of noise! Watch out for this.

Stability is another consideration. You want to find a room where you can stay for the long haul. Switching meeting locations can be difficult for the group. The new location might not be convenient for some people. And if you have a drop-in meeting, communicating the change to all attendees can be cumbersome. So, try to find a stable situation with a reasonable landlord.

You might be puzzled by the choice of the word “landlord” for renting a room. You can try to locate a free room in the library, a hospital, or a community center. For example, one of the San Francisco groups and both of the Chicago groups found free meeting spaces in their local hospitals. However, most organizations charge rent. Rental costs will vary. The lowest rate you might find in New York City is \$15 an hour [in 2005]. Some places want \$100 [in 2005]. A group organizer has to be a bit of a businessperson. Negotiate the best deal you can.

You can search the classified ads for rooms to rent, including those on Craigslist, the yellow pages, or the web. You can also just ask around.

One important consideration in selecting a room is whether the lobby to the building has security, which requires people to show identification. Many meeting participants want to retain their anonymity throughout their association with the group. Having to show ID may compromise that desire.

## **Virtual Meeting Space**

Many virtual platforms exist to host virtual or online meetings. Zoom ([zoom.us](https://zoom.us)) is popular [in 2024] and requires a paid account to host meetings over 40 minutes. Another platform with a long-term presence and reputation as free and secure is Jitsi Meet: [jitsi.org](https://jitsi.org). They have an easy-to-use in-browser app, [meet.jit.si/](https://meet.jit.si/). To create a virtual meeting place, you really just need an account and a way to moderate meetings as a co-facilitator.

## **Administration**

Community-based ASCA support groups work democratically. Regular business meetings provide the space and opportunity for group participants to decide on issues such as how to develop new co-facilitators, how to raise funds, what types of reading materials to approve for Rotation C meetings, etc.

## ***Administrative Goals***

Before we discuss the administrative and decision-making process, we should detail the purpose of administration. There are numerous tasks involved in running a group. Some of the salient tasks including the following:

### People

- Continuous advertising for new members if necessary
- Responding to inquiries
- Resolving interpersonal conflict
- Communicating meeting place, time, and procedure changes

### Place

- Paying rent
- Tidying the room
- Ensuring climate control: heating/AC
- Making sure there are a sufficient number of chairs for the meeting

### Meeting

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

Communicating rotation schedule issues and topics  
Collecting contributions  
Providing Welcome to ASCA guides and other materials  
Bringing materials to each meeting

### Other

Record keeping/treasury

## ***Roles***

If you are just starting an ASCA group in your area, you (and your co-facilitator) might need to handle all of these tasks. Like anything, such an approach has its advantages and disadvantages. The primary advantage is simplicity. However, relying on a single administrator depends on one person to commit to the work, which may require two hours a week, not including meeting time. A disadvantage of this approach is that other people may want to contribute to the group administration. You won't find out if you don't ask for volunteers.

Here is a matrix of some of the tasks according to roles. Note that in many meetings, the co-facilitators handle all of these tasks. We are just suggesting that this doesn't have to be the case.

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Co-facilitator	Reads script and intervenes when rules are broken.	Usually a "veteran" of ASCA meetings, who knows the program and understands the importance of safety in a support group.
Initiator/ Literature Person	Brings materials to each meeting. Sets up meeting materials on a table. Posts signs.	Can change at every meeting with one person committing to be Initiator/Literature Person at the next meeting.
Treasurer	Collects contributions. Keeps records on collection Pays rent Buys support group materials	Co-facilitator usually handles this. But if someone attends regularly and is reliable, he or she might want to take on this role.
Door Monitor	Checks for late arrivals	
Timekeeper	Times the shares during the meeting	
Newcomer Greeter	Greets newcomers, explains the handout, and helps person feel welcome	

## ***Decision Making***

Survivors of child abuse tend to be especially averse to any hint of tyrannical control in a meeting. So, especially in community-based meetings, voting is usually a good way to make decisions. That way, each person has an equal say in the decision-making process. You can vote on almost anything, including topics for Rotation "C" meetings, whether to open windows on hot days, and the length of shares.

## ***Types of Decisions***

Some decisions, such as whether or not to turn on a fan, are relevant only to individual meetings. Other types of decisions might impact more than just your own group. People in recovery might attend more than one ASCA support group—if they are available in their area. You might consider designating special times for policy decisions at business meetings. Most people cannot commit to attending every meeting. A participant might become disconcerted if she or he finds out that the group made a major decision during the one meeting they missed. One solution to this dilemma is to vote on policy matters only during the first meeting of each month. This way, people know they should attend those meetings if policy decisions are important to them.

Another recommendation is to ask group members to bring all issues directly to the co-facilitator after the meeting. The co-facilitators then announce those items that the group needs to discuss at the business meeting. Presenting issues calmly and rationally is an important role of the co-facilitator.

## ***Voting***

The co-facilitators facilitate the voting process. For example, in the New York ASCA business meetings, any participant may raise an issue for discussion or suggest a vote. If another person seconds the motion, the co-facilitator asks if anybody wants to discuss the issue before voting. The length of the discussion depends on the availability of time and the productivity of the discussion. The co-facilitator then asks for a show of hands from those who are “in favor,” “who oppose,” and “who abstain.” The majority wins.

Please note that these are all just administrative suggestions. Your group can adapt these suggestions or discard them altogether in favor of a different approach.

## **Other Tips**

If possible, leave the phone list out after the meeting as you clean up. This will give people more time to copy down names and numbers.

Approach newcomers and make sure they have a copy of the Welcome to ASCA guide. Ask them if they have been to a support group before, and if not, explain to them the meeting flow (opening remarks, readings, main share, positive feedback, regular shares). Explain the concept of cross-talk. Help them feel welcome. Tell them they do not have to give a share or read aloud. They can just say “pass.”

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

Try to strike a balance between the enforcement of rules and tolerance and patience. People need a little time to learn the group guidelines. For example, we think it is better to enforce the punctuality rule (by allowing latecomers to enter the meeting at designated times only). However, a brand new participant might not see the sign on the door and just barge into the room. Such things happen now and then. Just try to recognize that participants usually break group rules because they do not understand or know about them yet. Please remember that support group administration is an art, not a science. Don't expect things to run perfectly. You'll learn many other tips over time.

## Additional Help and Resources

Once you establish your local ASCA group, you will find out that there is a whole community to which you belong! Not only will you meet other survivors who support you in your recovery journey. You can get to know other ASCA group facilitators around the country—and world!

The Morris Center provides several resources to help you continue to learn how to run effective meetings. You can:

1. Attend one of The Morris Center's ASCA Co-facilitator Training workshops online.
2. Download a copy of the *ASCA Co-facilitator Training Manual* from the website [ascasupport.org](http://ascasupport.org).
3. Contact The Morris Center at [info@ascasupport.org](mailto:info@ascasupport.org).

## Stories by Starters

Following are accounts by two different people of their founding of groups.

## ***Stu's Story***

I was in a very bad place in my life, again, in July 2001. I had lunch with one of the few people who I was able to have a friendship with from my workplace. At lunch she shared some things that were happening for her in her personal life which were very troubling for her. I then shared some things about my personal life. To which she said “Jeez Stuart, that sounds like child abuse”.

That really hit me like a ton of bricks.....So, that night I did a search on the web.....

By July, 2001, I had been going to ACOA and CODA for several years. It was helping, but there was much that didn't work for me in those programs. As a result of a comment from a friend, I did a search for adult survivors of child abuse on the web, and found ASCA.

I was bowled over. Within a few days I had poured over everything on their website, and had downloaded and read the “Survivor to Thriver” manual, as well as the Meeting Format manual.

Anyway, I got into a new therapy with a LCSW (licensed clinical social worker). I printed out a copy of “Survivor to Thriver” and gave her a copy, which she immediately read, and said she thought it was great. It became the tool I used to focus the path of my therapy.

So, I desperately needed to go to an ASCA meeting, but, of course, there wasn't one in Chicago..... So I HAD to start one, IMMEDIATELY. The following is how I progressed and the meeting was started and continues.....

### **Preparing to create a meeting**

I read the manual, all the way through, at least three times, so I would understand, exactly, what the program was and what the philosophy of the program was. This was very important for me personally, as well as an essential preparation, I believe, to co-facilitate an ASCA meeting.

I have had many false prophets in my life, who have talked the talk but did not walk the walk..... that was not ok, as far as I was concerned. So, it's essential for me to very aggressively be doing my own work, in order for me to be a safe co-facilitator.

I wanted to know everything there was to know about ASCA—so I read everything on the website, THOROUGHLY, until I was familiar with everything they put there.

I also found it very helpful to have read both “Healing the Child Within”, by Dr. Charles Whitfield, and “Soul Survivors” by J. Patrick Gannon (the creator of the ASCA program). Both these books were invaluable to me in my own healing as well as helping be a good leader for our local ASCA meeting.

Additionally, I had been going to 2 twelve step groups for several years—Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) and Co-Dependents Anonymous (CODA). Not only did those groups help me in my own healing, but they really helped me with the skills I would need in running a “clean” and safe ASCA meeting. And, since ASCA is based on the 12 step model of Alcoholics Anonymous, having a very good understanding of the 12 step recovery model has proven to be very helpful for me in running our meeting. Plus, many of the initial survivors at our meeting were also actively attending 12 step meetings. They proved to be a very good source of prospective ASCA attendees.

One of the most beneficial aspects of having attended CODA was to have helped me with a great amount of clarity regarding interpersonal boundaries, and allowing ASCA attendees to define, FOR THEMSELVES, what their work is and how they need to go about it. 12 step really helped me be mindful about not taking others’ inventories. And that helped A LOT with running the meeting. Giving our attendees the space to solve their own problems, their own way, was an essential piece to understand. These people want to solve their own problems, not be rescued.

## **Getting things together**

### Meeting space

I was pretty lucky. As a result of all the 12 step work I had done, I was very familiar with locations that were currently available for support group meetings. I checked out a few churches I knew were hosting some 12 step meetings, but many of the times I wanted to hold our meetings were already taken. A friend had told me about a local hospital’s professional building where she attended a 12 step meeting.

I called them, and voila.....it worked! They were very happy to provide the space for our meeting.....AND THEY WEREN’T GOING TO CHARGE US A PENNY! We really lucked out.

Everything about the facility was great. It was a building filled with physicians—that gave newcomers a lot of comfort, in that it was a professional environment. I found that women, especially, found that very comforting. Female survivors, especially, often times have a lot of concerns about their physical safety—and understandably so.

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

It was clean, always HVAC comfortable (heating ventilation air conditioning), and had unlimited free parking. The meeting room was carpeted, the chairs were plentiful (not really the most comfortable—made for business meetings—so I bring my own folding chair every meeting). Water fountains, clean bathrooms. They've been terrific.

Other locations I've considered contacting, in case I need an alternative location, would be our local junior college, other hospitals and houses of worship.

Not meeting in a place of worship avoids triggering people who have issues with god or higher powers. Many survivors having been abused by those whose hands our well-beings were in. Of course, there are also those who are triggered by medical settings, but.....we are doing our best.

### **Materials for the meeting**

Not wanting to mess around with any obstacles to the meeting proceeding, I expended some cash on my own part to front the cost for getting whatever was needed for the meeting to get going, to get going. So I had ten copies of the Survivor to Thrive manual printed up. I bought inexpensive loose-leaf binders and assembled the books. Getting a new meeting going was going to be difficult enough, I didn't want to not have the minimal materials available to people who were willing to come. I had a lot of confidence that the meeting was going to go fine, and that I would get my money back. And, if it didn't fly, I felt it was worth it to me. I REALLY wanted to be doing the ASCA program. All told, I laid out about \$200, which the meeting easily paid me back over a few months.

I bought pens and little notepads for people to make mental notes on, so when the time came for their share, they could include thoughts that came to them during the earlier parts of the meeting.

I bought a daily affirmation book used by ACOA which we read the day's entry for, at the beginning of our meeting.

I bought a copy of "Healing the Child Within" and "Soul Survivor". We first read "Healing", and since then we've read "Soul", which we read for about 10 minutes during every meeting.

I printed out the meeting format from the website and used it for the first month of our meetings. But numerous of the people who were coming were uncomfortable with the amount of "meeting overhead" there was. They wanted to get to the emotional stuff ASAP.

So I spent some time contemplating their reactions and my experiences in the 12 step meetings I attended, and I came up with a hybrid format that combined both the 12 step format and ASCA's meeting format. We have been using this modified format for 2 years and it has worked great.

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

I recommend getting familiar with the format that is on the website and using it numerous times before even considering modifying it. As far as I know, our meeting may be the only one which is using a modified ASCA format.

I created a handout with materials we read at every meeting, together. It consists of the ASCA philosophy, the Stages and Steps, Meeting Guidelines, and the Closing Statement. Everyone uses a copy of it during the meeting, and then turns it back in as we close the meeting.

We use the Topics for our Rotation B meeting just as they are on the website, and they have worked fine. There are about 24 topics, so with a 3 meeting rotation, it takes 72 weeks to cover all the topics.....we've had no problem with them being repetitious.

### **People**

I had been involved in numerous 12 step meetings and a self-work community called "The New Warriors". Our initial attendance was drawn from these two sources until we started getting people finding us from the ASCA website. We also got listed in a "Directory of Self-Help Groups" put out by an agency in IL, which is distributed to libraries and the mental healthcare community. There was no cost for this listing. These have been the only sources for attendees to our meeting to this point.

In the not to distant near future I hope to be able to muster the additional energy to do community outreach to hospitals, community mental healthcare agencies, social service agencies (United Way, Crisis Hotlines, Police, Libraries, and Social Workers.

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### **Scott's Story**

For all of my adult life I have had a notion that I would benefit from group therapy, but somehow, despite searching for a group and requesting the help of my therapists, I did not come across any for many years. When the 12-step movement became wildly popular some years ago, I found my way to 12-step support groups for people suffering from codependency and eating disorders. However, I felt somewhat out of place in these groups, as much as I enjoyed the group experience, since the subject matter and life experiences of the participants did not address the core of my struggle.

One night, an idea occurred to me that perhaps I needed a group that specialized in child abuse. Living in New York City, a center for psychotherapy, I thought that finding a support group for survivors of child abuse would be a breeze. But it wasn't. I searched the papers and the web. I called clinics and

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

hospitals and all sorts of social service organizations. Eventually, I found a group for female survivors of sexual abuse and later on a group for male survivors. However, I sought to discuss a broader range of child abuse issues and simply could not find in Metropolitan New York City, home to nearly 20 million people, a support group for survivors of child abuse in general.

I was exasperated and frustrated. As I started to dwell in feelings of bitterness that the world was once again letting me down, another idea occurred to me: start your own group. How hard could it be, I wondered.

I figured I could use the 12-step format, the only one with which I was familiar. Other than that, I needed some people and a room. I really didn't know where to start for either task so I just took shots in the dark. I asked around. I tried the phone book and the Web, specifically Craig's List, in search of rooms for rent. I phoned Churches, Synagogues, and community centers. I was surprised at first that these public service organizations required rent, sometimes sizeable sums for an hour of room space. In thinking it over, however, I realized that maintaining a room for the public carries an expense. So I set about finding one in the thirty dollar range for an hour or so of time.

I went to Craig's List looking for people too. My advertisement asked for people who would be interested in helping to organize a group. In the end, I didn't find anybody interested in forming the group, but there were a few who said they would come to the first meeting once it was all organized. I could live with that. All of my life, I have had to take care of myself, and I could do it here too. What I needed from other people was for them to show up at the meetings and share.

Several people inquired as to the group format. I told them it would be run like a 12-step group, but I experienced trepidation that I was working with only adumbrations as to the actual workings of the meetings.

At some point in all of this organizing work, somebody (might have been two people actually, my wife and one of my correspondents) referred me to the Morris Center website. I could see instantly that I had stumbled on a storehouse of great material for my goal of starting a support group for survivors of child abuse for such is their specialty. The meeting format document was the best find of all since it scripted the entire meeting and helped allay my fears regarding the running of meetings.

I also took instantly to the 21-step program in its design specifically for survivors of child abuse. As I mentioned earlier, the 12-step programs, as much as I appreciated them, never seemed ideally designed for my issues. For one thing, forgiveness, a staple of the 12-steps, is a much more complicated issue with trauma survivors. Also, while I believe in God, religious belief is a more complicated issue with many survivors of child abuse since religious abuse is a common form of child abuse. The 21 steps do not demand forgiveness or

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

reliance on a higher power (not that they discourage them) and address instead matters more relevant to recovery from child abuse, such as recall of memories, reclaiming of one's life from dominant personalities, and building of personal strength.

With the ASCA material in my possession, I felt more confident in my organizing efforts. While still looking for a room, my wife came to the rescue again by finding something in Tribeca, a neighborhood in downtown Manhattan. It was a fairly well maintained basement room in a synagogue and the price, whatever we could afford at first and \$25 per meeting after we established ourselves, seemed reasonable. With the room, the format, and a few interested parties in place, I settled on a meeting time that was agreeable to everyone and announced the first meeting a few weeks hence.

Naturally, I was excited and nervous on the day of the first meeting. But I felt enormous pride that I had taken an idea from germ to event. For much of my life, I had lived in a state of helplessness and hurt, and here I was taking charge of my emotional destiny. As I set up the room for the first meeting, I wondered who would show and what we would talk about. I was anxious to meet people with childhood experiences similar to mine. I sat down and waited. But nobody came! I waited an hour. I went upstairs to see if anybody was lost or locked out, but didn't find anybody. I couldn't believe it. All this work and nobody came. But I didn't despair. I believe that my proactivity boosted my faith in my self and the world.

I advertised some more and went to the second meeting. Again, nobody came. I waited an hour.

It occurred to me that my choice for a meeting place might be hurting my recruitment efforts. The building was not centrally located within Manhattan. Also, a basement room might be off-putting to some people for a variety of reasons.

So, I researched some more and found a place at the Children's Aid Society in Greenwich Village. I visited the room and loved it. The neighborhood was much more popular and maintained. I notified my mailing list of the location change and tried again. This time, five people showed up, and I had my first support group meeting. It went surprisingly well, thanks in large part to the ASCA format document, which I followed closely.

Well, ASCA NYC has been holding meetings now for over eleven months. We have some regulars, some people who came but once, and others who come periodically. If I had a dollar for each time I have been thanked profusely for starting the group, the sum would more than cover my share of the rent. But equal to my joy in having given something to the community and to survivors of child abuse is the psychological benefit to me of having a forum for sharing my story and hearing those of others like me. Group support is a powerful device, in some

## Tips for Starting a Community-Based ASCA Group

ways a perfect antidote to a lonely childhood. Starting a group took a bit of work and patience (although not excessively so), but it has been undoubtedly worth it.

**We hope you found this guide of tips useful! Again, congratulations on taking the initiative to start a group of your own! You are on a journey in which you do not have to travel alone any more. Welcome to ASCA!**