KAIROS PATHWAYS

Trauma-Aware Group Study Resource Kit

The Organization's Roles and Responsibilities

For Churches, Christian Ministries, and Christian Organizations

A Word from the Author

This document is a free resource to help organize and operate trauma-aware Christ-based growth groups. It's written specifically for the churches, ministries, and Christian organizations who'll host the groups that use these materials.

You're the foundation everything else rests on. Without a committed hosting organization providing training, oversight, and support, even the best leader and the most willing participants can't do this work safely. This guide exists to help you understand what that commitment looks like in practice, and to give you the tools to fulfill it well.

Thank you for being willing to open your doors to the people this kit will affect: the wounded, the traumatized, the abused, and yes even those who are trapped in the cycle of abuse. They're some of the most wounded and most overlooked people in our communities. What you're building matters more than you may know.

There's a song by Ray Boltz called Thank you. If you're able to, I would recommend you get the song. When I hear that song, I think of Mark and Bethina, and how it's me saying those words to them. The little things they said and did, the sacrifices they made; unnoticed on this earth, in Heaven now proclaimed. They probably have no idea how much their sacrifices meant to me and God, but in Heaven they'll be thanked by Jesus Himself – and as I watch them receive their crowns, I'll wholeheartedly thank them as well!

It's my hope and prayer that there'll be more like me in Heaven: people who have been set free from the pain and suffering that plagued their lives. I pray to God, every day, that they'll find the joy I now experience. I may not be a Psychiatrist, Psychologist, or even a Counselor, but I have years of experience as a victim of abuse, as an abuser, and, more importantly, a man who was set free from the cycle of abuse. I know what it's like to experience abuse at the hands of others, to experience abusing others, and the experience living free from it because my abusive cycle was broken. I'm not proud of my past, but I'm encouraged by God to share my life's story. Christ came to set the captives free, and "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36 NIV). If God can save me, He can save anyone!

The Chain of Responsibility

How care flows through every level of the group

Before anything else, it's important to understand how responsibility is structured in a trauma-aware growth group. This is not a flat structure where everyone does everything. It's a layered system where each role supports the people beneath it.

Role	Primary Responsibility	Accountable To
Hosting Organization	Train leaders and helpers; establish and maintain support networks; provide a list of trauma-aware counsellors for referrals; support every group they host	God and the community they serve
Group Leader	Create a safe group environment; support helpers and participants; facilitate sessions; know when to refer	The hosting organization
Helper	Assist the leader; be a steady presence for participants; help sessions run smoothly; support individuals between sessions	The group leader
Participant	Engage honestly; honor the GCA; seek additional help when needed	Themselves and one another

The hosting organization is not a passive backdrop. It is the active foundation that makes everything above it possible. Without a committed organization behind the group, the entire structure is unstable.

Role 1: Equip Your Leaders and Helpers

Help leaders and helpers become trauma-aware before the group begins

The single most important thing a hosting organization can do for a trauma-aware growth group is ensure that every leader and helper is trauma-aware before they sit in that room for the first time. Training isn't something leaders and helpers can do in isolation; the hosting organization must actively support, fund, and require it.

> **No leader or helper should be permitted to serve in this group without completing recognized Christian trauma-aware training.**

What This Means in Practice

- Identify your leader(s) and helper(s) well in advance of the group start date — ideally at least eight to twelve weeks before the first session.
- Research the training options listed in Trauma-Aware Training Resources and select the programs most appropriate for your context and budget.
- Supply your leaders and helpers with a list of courses they are required to complete before they can assume their responsibilities within the group.

- Provide financial support for training costs where possible. If budget is limited, prioritize the leader's training first, then the helper's.
- Set a clear deadline for training completion and hold leaders and helpers accountable to it — ideally at least two weeks before the group begins.
- Ask each leader and helper to provide confirmation of completed training before the group begins.
- Make ongoing training and development a part of your organization's culture, not a one-time event.

(For the full list of recommended training organizations — Christian and secular — see Trauma-Aware Training Resources.)

Role 2: Build and Maintain Support Networks

Ensure that no leader, helper, or participant is ever alone in what they carry

A support network is the structure of care that surrounds the group. It is the hosting organization's responsibility to build this structure before the group begins and to maintain it throughout the study. Without it, leaders burn out, helpers become overwhelmed, and participants are left without adequate care when the group reaches its limits.

The goal is a group where no one — including the leader — is ever alone in what they are carrying.

The Four Layers of a Healthy Support Network

Layer 1: The Group Itself

The group is the primary community. Leaders, helpers, and participants form a closed, confidential circle of mutual care. The structure of this study guide is designed to make this layer as safe and fruitful as possible.

Layer 2: Pastoral / Leadership Oversight

Every group leader needs someone above them — a pastor, ministry director, or elder — who is informed about the group, available for consultation, and willing to intervene if something beyond the leader's capacity arises. This person does not attend the group; they support the person who leads it.

The hosting organization is responsible for appointing this person before the group begins and ensuring they are genuinely available — not simply named on paper.

- Schedule a brief debrief between the leader and the pastoral overseer after every session.
- Ensure the pastoral overseer has read this guide and the relevant sections of the study guide before the group begins.
- Make clear to the leader that reaching out to the pastoral overseer isn't a sign of failure; it's how the system's designed to work.

Layer 3: Professional Consultation

Every hosting organization should identify, before the group begins, at least one trauma-aware Christian professional — a licensed counsellor, therapist, or clinical social worker with a faith-based practice — who has agreed to serve as a consultant. This person does not need to attend sessions; they simply need to be reachable when a leader encounters a situation that requires clinical guidance.

This relationship can often be established at no cost. Christian sources to try first:

- The American Association of Christian Counselors (aacc.net), whose directory can help you find a trauma-aware Christian clinician.
- Focus on the Family (focusonthefamily.com), which offers free pastoral consultation and can help connect you with licensed Christian counsellors.
- Your own denominational network, which may have trained counsellors available for consultation.

General / secular sources you can also draw on:

- Local seminary counselling programs, whose graduate students may partner with community groups.
- Community mental health centers, which sometimes have outreach staff willing to consult with peer support organizations.

Layer 4: Referral Pathways

Every hosting organization must have a clear, pre-established referral pathway before the group begins. When a participant needs more support than the group can provide, you must know exactly where to send them. This pathway should include:

- At least one local licensed Christian counsellor or therapist.
- Your denomination's pastoral care network, if applicable.
- Local crisis resources (see Crisis Lines and Support Resources).
- Community mental health services in your area.

See Role 3 below for full guidance on building and maintaining your referral list.

Step-by-Step Support Network Setup

Use the following steps to establish your support network before the group begins:

#	Step	Details
1	**Pray and assess readiness**	Before anything else, ask honestly whether your church or organization is ready for this. Hosting a trauma-focused group's a serious commitment. Half-hearted support is worse than no support.
2	**Identify and train your leader(s)**	Recruit people who meet the leader's qualifications in this guide and support them in completing the required Christian training before the group begins.
3	**Identify and train your helper(s)**	Recruit at least one or two helpers who meet the helper's qualifications. Ensure they complete their training. The ideal ratio is one helper per four to five participants.
4	**Appoint a pastoral overseer**	Identify a pastor, elder, or ministry director who'll provide oversight and be available to the leader throughout the study.
5	**Establish professional consultation**	Contact a local trauma-aware Christian counsellor and ask if they'd be willing to serve as an informal consultant during the study period.

#	Step	Details
6	**Build your referral list**	Compile a list of at least three local professional referral options before the first session (see Role 3). Keep this list with the leader(s) at all times.
7	**Prepare the GCA**	Work with your leader(s) to prepare the Group Confidentiality Agreement. Have it ready for every participant to sign at the first session.
8	**Set a debriefing rhythm**	Schedule a brief check-in between the leader(s) and pastoral overseer after every session — even just fifteen minutes. This is where problems are caught early.
9	**Plan for self-care**	Build regular self-care and rest into the leader's and helper's schedule for the duration of the study. This isn't optional.
10	**Review mid-study**	At the halfway point, meet with your leader(s) to assess how the group is going. Address any emerging needs before they become crises.
11	**Close the group well**	When the study ends, hold a formal closing session for leaders and helpers to debrief, give thanks, and process what they carried. Endings matter.
12	**Review and improve**	After the group closes, evaluate what worked and what could be stronger. Update your support network and training resources before the next group begins.

Role 3: Maintain a Trauma-Informed Counsellor List

Ensure that every group leader has a clear, current referral pathway

One of the most critical responsibilities of the hosting organization is maintaining an up-to-date list of trauma-informed Christian counsellors and mental health professionals that group leaders can refer participants to when the group reaches the limits of what peer support can provide.

This list must exist before the first session begins. A leader should never find themselves in a moment of crisis without knowing exactly where to send someone.

What the List Should Include

For each counsellor or professional on your list, record the following:

- Full name and credentials.
- Specialty areas (e.g. trauma, abuse, PTSD, depression, grief).
- Faith background or affiliation (e.g. Christian, interdenominational, faith-friendly).
- Whether they work with adults, youth, or both.
- Contact information: phone, email, and website.
- Location and whether they offer online / telehealth sessions.
- Whether they offer a sliding scale fee for those with limited income.
- Approximate wait time for a new client appointment (update this regularly).
- Whether they have experience specifically with abuse and trauma survivors.

Where to Find Trauma-Informed Christian Counsellors

- AACC Therapist Directory (aacc.net) — the largest directory of Christian counsellors in North America; searchable by location and specialty.
- Focus on the Family Counsellor Referral (focusonthefamily.com) — free referrals to licensed Christian therapists.
- Your denominational network — many denominations maintain lists of recommended counsellors for congregational referrals.
- Psychology Today (psychologytoday.com) — filter by "Christian" under faith and by trauma specialty; useful for supplementing the Christian-specific directories.
- Seminary counselling clinics — graduate students in clinical programs often offer low-cost or free sessions under clinical supervision.
- Local hospital or community mental health center — for participants who need care quickly and regardless of ability to pay.

Maintaining the List

A referral list is only useful if it is current. The hosting organization should:

- Review and update the list at least once every six months.
- Confirm that each counsellor on the list is still accepting new clients before the start of each new group.
- Remove any counsellor who is no longer practicing, has moved, or is no longer a fit for this population.
- Add new counsellors as they become known to your organization or community.
- Ask your group leaders for feedback on referrals they have made — did the participant receive good care? This helps you evaluate the quality of your list over time.

How the Referral Process Works

When a group leader identifies a participant who needs more support than the group can provide, the process should be as follows:

- The leader speaks privately with the participant, without shame or alarm, and explains that they believe the participant would benefit from additional support.
- The leader offers the referral list and, where appropriate, helps the participant identify one or two counsellors that might be a good fit.
- The leader offers to help the participant make the first contact if they are willing.
- The leader informs the hosting organization's pastoral overseer that a referral has been made (without disclosing confidential details).
- The group continues to be a source of community and support for the participant alongside their professional care — professional referral does not mean removal from the group.

A referral is never a rejection. It's an act of love that says: "Your needs matter enough for us to make sure you get exactly the right care." Train your leaders to communicate it that way.

What Your Organization's Committing To

By hosting a trauma-aware growth group, your church, ministry, or organization commits to:

- Providing or funding recognized Christian trauma-informed training for every leader and helper before the group begins.
- Appointing a pastoral overseer who is genuinely available to the group leader throughout the study.
- Identifying a trauma-informed Christian professional to serve as a consultant before the first session.
- Building and maintaining a current list of trauma-informed Christian counsellors for participant referrals.
- Establishing a regular debriefing rhythm between the leader and the pastoral overseer.
- Actively supporting the self-care and wellbeing of your leader and helper(s) throughout the study.
- Holding all information about group participants in complete confidence at the organizational level.
- Closing the group well, with a formal debrief session for leaders and helpers when the study ends.
- Evaluating and improving your support structure before hosting another group.

An organization that isn't ready to make these commitments isn't yet ready to host this group. That's not a failure — it's integrity. The people who'll sit in these groups deserve nothing less than full organizational support.

Recommended Partner Organizations for Churches

The following Christian organizations have experience working with churches and ministries to establish trauma-aware care networks:

- Trauma Healing Institute (traumahealinginstitute.org) — works directly with churches and ministries globally.
- GRACE (netgrace.org) — helps churches develop abuse-aware policies and care structures.
- Mending the Soul (mendingthesoul.org) — offers church partnership programs for hosting abuse recovery groups.
- Stephen Ministry (stephenministries.org) — provides a complete lay caregiver training system deployable within any congregation.
- Focus on the Family (focusonthefamily.com) — free pastoral consultation and referral services.
- AACC Light University (aacc.net) — affordable training for ministry workers at every level.
- Restored International (restoredrelationships.org) — Christian organization specializing in abuse recovery and church leader training.

A hosting organization that isn't willing to make these commitments isn't yet ready to host this group. That's not a failure — it's honesty. Better to wait until the support structure's in place than to begin without it.