

How to Start Your Own Blooming Group

from

Night Bloomers: 12 Principles for Thriving in Adversity

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What is a “blooming group”?

A blooming group is like a book group, but its purpose and function differ in important ways. Unlike a regular book group, the purpose is not so much to discuss the book, the author, or literary choices and devices; its purpose is to advance the blooming process of each individual member. It does so by using the principles and writing prompts provided in *Night Bloomers: 12 Principles for Thriving in Adversity*. Group members discuss how they are applying these principles in their lives and what they are learning from engaging with the writing prompts.

A blooming group also differs from a typical support group or grief group in that the focus is less on the darkness and more on the blooming. It's not that you won't discuss the various losses, life upheavals, and tragedies that brought you to the group. It's just that this won't be the main thing you discuss. Those discussions are best for individual or group therapy or a night out with friends. The intention of the blooming group is to forward the blooming process. Since our lives go in the direction of our attention, the group's attention needs to be on blooming. The principles in *Night Bloomers* provide the framework for the group discussions, as well as tools for moving through adversity (rather than just talking about adversity, so we don't get stuck there!).

Why is a Blooming Group helpful?

We weren't meant to bloom alone. In fact, Principle #3 is all about *Supporting Your Bloom*. A blooming group is one way to do just that. Surrounding yourself with other Night Bloomers who have set the intention to bloom in the dark is very motivating. It's also reassuring to know that you're not the only Night Bloomer out there—sometimes it can be hard to see each other when you're in the darkness of your own loss and grief. Not only does a blooming group help you to build your “garden of support,” but it also provides you with the opportunity to be a support for others during their difficult time. The research shows us that helping others is one of the best ways to improve our emotional well-being.

Who can attend a Blooming Group?

Blooming groups are for Night Bloomers! That means you need to have experienced something in your life that has created “the dark” for you. That might be the loss of a loved one, an illness, being laid off, bankruptcy, trauma, divorce, or another type of stress or adversity. But to join a blooming group, you need to have done more than experienced an adversity—you also have to want to bloom in the dark! Maybe that goes without saying, but it’s important that even if group members aren’t sure blooming is possible for them, there is at least a desire to find out.

Facilitators of the groups will need to use discernment when deciding whether to create a group composed of just one gender or one type of loss or a group restricted to a certain age range. There are pros and cons to narrowing membership. Some people will feel most comfortable in a more homogeneous group and the discussion will necessarily be narrowed to certain themes. However, people often benefit from the diversity of perspectives and life experiences found in more heterogeneous groups.

How many people can be in a group?

A blooming group can be as small as two Night Bloomers, but I would suggest a minimum of three to four members. Although having two members makes for a very intimate group and reduces the challenges that can arise with scheduling for a larger group, groups of this size can be a little more unstable. If one person is absent or decides to stop participating, the group ceases to exist. Although you can technically have as many members as you like, my suggestion is to limit the group to about eight to ten people. Any more than that makes individual participation more challenging. Shy members have a harder time speaking up in very large groups, and it can be difficult to stay within the time parameters while having everyone share. In my opinion, the ideal group size is around four to six members. This size allows for ample individual participation, but it is also not threatened by the occasional absence of a member or two.

How often should we meet?

I recommend meeting twice a month. Weekly meetings are certainly not discouraged, if members would like to meet that often. My experience is that despite enthusiasm, people are busy and often can’t commit to meeting on a weekly basis. Every other week is usually doable.

Once a month isn't as ideal as twice a month, as it can be harder to form an intimate and supportive group when that much time goes by between meetings. And if someone misses a meeting, they have to wait two months to participate again.

If it is not possible for members to meet in person twice a month, groups can consider having one face-to-face meeting per month and one online group per month. There are lots of free video conferencing platforms available for these purposes, such as Zoom or Skype.

How long are the groups?

I recommend groups meet for an hour and a half each time they come together. A group of two members may not need this long and a group of ten might want to extend to two hours. Regardless of the size of the group, I would suggest not going beyond two hours. Delving into these deep and emotional issues can be tiring emotionally and physically (blooming is hard work!). Limiting the group to an hour and a half or two hours helps keep the space supportive rather than draining.

The total length of time, from the formation to the conclusion of the group, can be a little challenging to determine. Some groups might like to commit to a one-year process, where they discuss one blooming principle per month. This works nicely, as there are twelve principles. Others might feel intimidated by the idea of making a one-year commitment and might rather create a six-month group. Still others might find one year not long enough.

My suggestion is to commit to one year, meeting twice a month. The group can always decide to extend after the year is complete, and members that can't continue for whatever reason are free to stop whenever they choose. I found a year to be a realistic timeframe for my own blooming process—not too short and not too long. Most of us need at least a year of good, solid support to get through our blooming process, and a twelve-month group helps to ensure we'll have that.

What is the structure of a blooming group?

I will provide some suggestions for the group structure, but I want to preface these suggestions by saying the group exists for you and the structure should reflect what works best for you. Remember, the purpose of the group is to support the blooming process of the individual members. That means whatever structure best supports your blooming process is the best structure for your group. If you find a structure that works better for you than what I suggest below, I'd love to hear about it!

My suggestion is to meet twice a month for a year. In the first meeting of the month, the group discusses one of the twelve blooming principles: what it means to each member, how it applies to their lives, any questions members might have about the principle or any of the prompts suggested for that principle, and so on. For example, in Month One you'd discuss the first blooming principle, in Month Two you'd discuss the second blooming principle, and so on. Any remaining time in the first meeting of the month can be devoted to discussing what is coming up for you as you are completing the writing prompts (see ideas for the second meeting of the month).

The second meeting of the month is devoted to discussing what's coming up for each of you as you complete the writing prompts and blooming activities—in other words, what insights, ideas, surprises, growth, setbacks, and questions are surfacing as a result of your writing and blooming. You can also each share some of your answers to the blooming check-in questions at the end of each chapter. Although you will be discussing your writing, I recommend not reading your written responses during the group. This can be time consuming and not an effective way to use the time and support of the group. Rather, use this meeting time to discuss what's coming up for you, what you're learning, what themes and patterns you're noticing, how you're applying the material, and how you're blooming.

It's important to note that some members will need to spend longer than one month on certain principles, while others may find themselves moving through the material more quickly. The only wrong way to go through *Night Bloomers* is to go through it at someone else's pace! The goal is for each member to bloom, not for each member to adhere to a specific schedule.

The suggested structure above allows for members to proceed through the material in *Night Bloomers* at different paces. Regardless of where a member is at, the first group of the month can still cover the blooming principle of the month. In this way, all twelve principles will be introduced over the course of a year. The discussion that follows the introduction of the principle in the first meeting of the month and the discussion in the second meeting of the month can be about any of the principles or any of the writing prompts. Members don't need to be at the same place in the book or in their blooming process to benefit from the discussion, support, and insights shared by other members. Group facilitators can emphasize this at the beginning of the group, and periodically throughout the process.

How do I find people to form a blooming group?

The only requirement for joining a blooming group is identifying as a Night Bloomer and wanting to bloom in the dark. So, to start a blooming group, you need to find other Night

Bloomers. This means finding others who have gone through or are currently going through some sort of life upheaval, stressor, or adversity and who want to be part of a group that will support them in thriving during their difficult time. To find others who would be interested in this opportunity, you can try a number of different strategies. I'll suggest a few, but feel free to come up with your own ideas, too. And if you find an idea that works well, let me know!

- ❖ You can ask your friends if they'd like to be part of a blooming group or if they know anyone in their social circle who might benefit. All of us know at least one person who is going through a tough time, and usually more than one.
- ❖ You could give a friend or two you think might benefit from the group a copy of *Night Bloomers* and suggest starting a group together.
- ❖ You can post a notice on Facebook or your other social media accounts letting friends know about your desire to start a group. You could also ask them to reshare your post on their accounts.
- ❖ You can ask to make or post an announcement in other groups and organizations you belong to, such as a faith organization, a community group, a mom's group, your gym, or your yoga class.
- ❖ If you are in therapy, you can ask your therapist if he or she might be interested in facilitating a group, or if you could leave a notice in the waiting room for other clients to see and contact you as the group facilitator.
- ❖ If you aren't in therapy, you can reach out to local clinical practices and ask the therapists the same questions listed above.
- ❖ You can start a group using the website Meetup.com, which is a great way to meet other local people with similar interests. There are lots of other groups, such as divorce support groups and grief groups, on Meetup.com. A blooming group in your area would be a great addition.

You are welcome to use any of the language in this Blooming Group Guide in your posts, announcements, and marketing materials.

Can new members join after the group has started?

The answer to this question will be up to your individual group. Some groups prefer to be "closed," in that they do not accept new members after they begin. Other groups prefer to be "open," meaning new members can join at any time or at set times throughout the duration of the group. There are pros and cons to both ways of doing things. It is best to talk through these preferences with your members when the group is first forming, to create a sense of safety and transparency in how the group will operate.

Who should facilitate the group?

Again, there are a few ways to do this. You can have one facilitator or two co-facilitators who oversee the group logistics and help to get the conversation going or get back on track during the group meetings. Usually the facilitator is someone who has a passion for starting the group and is motivated to see it through to the end. Another option is to alternate who facilitates the group each week, so that each member has a turn at leading the group. In this case, there is still usually a point person who oversees logistics, such as scheduling, sending reminders, finding a place to meet (unless it rotates based on the facilitator of the week), and generally overseeing the functioning of the group.

Are there guidelines the group should keep in mind?

There are a few guidelines I share at the beginning of every group I run. I find doing so helps make the group a safe place and sets expectations for how members show up from the get-go. The first is confidentiality. In order to create a safe and supportive environment within the group, I ask everyone to keep all information shared by other members in strict confidence. They are welcome to share their own experience with others, but they are asked to keep what others share to themselves.

The second guideline is mutual respect. To ensure that members feel comfortable sharing their genuine thoughts and feelings within the group, all members are asked to treat one another with courtesy, respect, and dignity. Treating others with kindness and compassion promotes well-being for the whole group.

The third is the “I pass” rule. While members are encouraged to participate in group discussions, at no time should anyone be asked to reveal information that he or she is uncomfortable sharing. By saying “I pass,” the group member’s wish to be silent at that time will be honored.

The very first group meeting is a good time to share these guidelines, as well as to solicit other ideas for guidelines from your group. By having some sort of informal acknowledgement, such as everyone raising their hand to show agreement, the group establishes its own set of norms and expectations for participation.

Is there a fee for being in the group?

No! Blooming groups should be free to all members. The only cost involved is purchasing the *Night Bloomers* book, so that members can be doing their blooming work and writing exercises between meetings.

Where should we meet?

There are lots of possibilities for meeting places. You might meet in the facilitator's home each time or rotate so that you meet at some or all of the members' homes throughout the year. You could also meet in a church or another place of worship, a private room at a local library or community center, or a quiet coffee shop. The main requirement for your space is that it is quiet and relatively private. You will be sharing sensitive and emotional things with one another. You want a space that feels safe, secure, and confidential. A place where you won't be disturbed and where you won't be disturbing others.

What resources do we need?

The resources needed are minimal. Each member should bring their copy of *Night Bloomers*, their blooming journal, and a pen. Someone might also want to bring some Kleenex. And cookies.

I would love to hear about your blooming group! You can reach me at www.DrMichellePearce.com and on Instagram at bloomwithdrnichelle. If you post on your Instagram account about your group, please be sure to use the hashtag #NightBloomers and tag me, too. Let's create a blooming revolution together!