

# How to start a self-help book club

From the Shelf Help Club

So you've decided to start a self-help book club. Hooray!

We can tell you from experience that bringing people together and supporting them to connect and share and read more will be super rewarding, but hosting any event brings its own set of challenges and so we've designed this cheat sheet to help set you up for success, and make running your club as easy and impactful as possible from the very beginning.

Before you choose a name, send out the invitations or even decide on book #1, first we invite you to consider the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, HOW and - very important - the WHY of your book club. Take some time to reflect on the 6 questions shared here and use your answers plus the tips we've shared to:

- 1. Choose a name for your book club, and**
- 2. Create a guide or - if you're feeling creative - a manifesto for your club**

A big benefit of being a club creator is that you get to build something that works for you and suits your life and values. The insight gained through this reflection process will help people understand what you and the club are all about and act as a useful 'north star' for you and the members to follow as your club develops.

It will also be something you, personally, can return to anytime you want to make sure you're staying true to your original plan/vision....

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## STEP ONE: THE WHO

Ask yourself; who do you want in your group? Who do you want to be sharing your story with? Do you have an existing network you would like to spend more time/discuss bigger issues with? Or are you looking to make new friends? How many people do you want in the club (we suggest 6-10 as a nice number)? Will you cap numbers? Will children/teenagers be allowed? Do you want it to be exclusive eg women-only? Or do you want a variety of guests (highly encouraged for different perspectives)? Can people bring friends? Do you want a co-host (we recommend this as a way to take the pressure off - especially useful when just starting out)? Worried you don't know enough people? Get creative and consider your social, work and extended (friends of friends) networks as well as your immediate circle of family/friends. Identifying the 'who' is a great way to come up with a name for the club eg Norwich Self-help Lovers.

## STEP TWO: THE WHAT

What will you read? Self-help YES, but unless you're an official Shelf Help Club Host you don't need to be reading the same book as the Shelf Help community. You may decide to let members take it in turns to choose the book. And/or you may decide to get super niche depending on your area of interest and expertise eg books on positive psychology, spirituality or career change? NB older titles and paperbacks are cheaper if that needs to be considered, but zeitgeist-y new titles are a good way to whip up interest and join a larger conversation. Another WHAT worth considering is what the structure of the book club events will be; will you share prompts to encourage people to share their thoughts on specific areas of the book and stay on topic, like we do in the Clubhouse meetups? Or do you prefer a more informal talk with people taking it in turns to share their opinion? For the first book we suggest choosing a title that has had a big impact on you and that you feel able to talk around quite freely (people can be quite shy at the first couple of events so as the Host it's important that you can make them feel at ease and the best way to do this is by sharing your own story).

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## STEP THREE: THE WHERE

Where will you meet? We encourage face-to face meetups (vs online) wherever possible as we are all craving this kind of connection right now, but maybe Zoom will work better for you and your network.

In real life a calm, quiet and quite private environment works well. Cafes, libraries, well-being venues and any places that like to foster community will often give you a free meeting space as well as promote the club to their own customers/community if they are allowed to come along. Other things to consider: a location as central and easy to get to as possible (parking, public transport etc). Do you want there to be space to socialise before/after the book chat? Do you want food/drinks to be available (we've learned that pubs/bars aren't usually a good fit, but private rooms in restaurants can work well, especially if meeting earlier in the week).

## STEP FOUR: THE WHEN

When will you meet; what will be the day/time/frequency of meetings? Monthly meetups work best in our experience (we read a new book every 2 months so this means 2 meetups/book). But a weekly lunch break or after school or Saturday morning before yoga may work better for you and your friends.

Whatever you decide re the day and time, CONSISTENCY is really important to keep admin down and motivation and attendance up eg every last Monday of the month at 7pm. (And try not to get into the habit of moving the dates/times when one or two members can't make it).

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## STEP FIVE: THE HOW

How will you promote the book club (if needed) and how will you communicate the next book titles/meetup details to both existing and (if relevant) potential members? Social media has been a brilliant way for us to attract more members, but not everyone sees every post so email is important for us too. A Whatsapp group works well (and is a nice way to keep everyone connected and engaged between meetups). Some of our Hosts use sites like Meetup and Eventbrite to advertise their meetups - great for meeting new people and recruiting new members (NB some event sites do charge fees to post but we've found that charging a small amount for the book club to cover this can actually improve accountability) and some of our Hosts prefer the old-school method of flyering local shops, libraries, work notice boards etc.

## STEP SIX: THE WHY

The most important part of creating anything is the INTENTION behind it. And so, last but not least we want you to ask yourself WHY you want to start a club?

Anyone can start a book club, but to run a self-help book club requires a little more. A little more care, a little more understanding, a little more courage and vulnerability as you invite and support people to share their own stories as you also share yours.

Most of our Hosts (including founder Toni) started their meetups as a way to find like-minded people to share their journeys of self-discovery with. Maybe you need some accountability to read more/do the tougher personal development work? Maybe you want to get deeper with your existing friends? We find that getting clear on your why is the best way to get inspired and motivated to create a brilliant club, especially when you're able to share this why with your members.

We hope these 6 steps have inspired you to get busy starting your own self-help book club and can't wait to see where this takes you. Stay in touch!