

The Value of DBSA Support Groups

DBSA support groups provide the kind of sharing and caring that is crucial for a lifetime of wellness. DBSA groups:

- Give you the opportunity to reach out to others and benefit from the experience of those who have “been there”.
- Motivate you to follow your treatment plan.
- Help you to understand that a mood disorder does not define who you are.
- Help you rediscover strengths and humor you may have thought you had lost.
- Provide a forum for mutual acceptance, understanding and self-discovery.

What is a typical DBSA support group meeting like?

DBSA support group meetings are led by a Peer Group Facilitator.

The first thing the group facilitator will do is review what will happen at the meeting

- Moves the group to the “business” part of the meeting ... so that everyone has the same information and knows what to expect.

What the facilitator might say:

“Now it’s time to review the format and schedule for the meeting. We will follow a process recommended by DBSA that is designed to give everyone an opportunity to participate to the extent they are comfortable. First we will check in. Each of us will have an opportunity to introduce ourselves by first name and briefly tell everyone why we have come to this meeting.”

“After everyone has checked-in, we will talk about our mood disorders and share experiences, personal feelings, information, and strategies for living successfully with a mood disorder. The discussion will last until [time] when the meeting will end.”

The facilitator will state the DBSA support group guidelines. Stating guidelines at the beginning of each meeting is done for a number of reasons. The practice ensures everyone is reminded that they are responsible for following the same guidelines and it helps people learn and commit to group standards.

A weakness is a strength not yet developed.
- Benjamin Franklin

Check-in

A chance for each person to find out who else is at the meeting, and what their issues are ... to know that they are not alone.

Each person has an opportunity to introduce themselves by their first name and tell the group why they came to the meeting that day.

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What you might say/hear:

- “My name is Mary, AND ...
I think I might be depressed – I’m not sure.”
I’m here to learn more about ...”
I just spent two weeks in the hospital.”
I was just diagnosed with bipolar disorder and need more information.”
My doctor told me I should come to this meeting.”
My medication just isn’t working.”
[Crying]
[Silent]

The facilitator will briefly react to each person as a way of acknowledging his or her presence. People who are new to the group or experiencing distress will often want to tell their whole story as part of their introduction. This is natural and when it happens the facilitator will gently remind the person that this is a limited check-in only, and that they will have the opportunity to talk more soon.

What happens next?

Self-help: DBSA support group meetings focus on mutual aid and strategies for living the fullest life possible. Participants continually seek to provide hope, reassurance and encouragement to one another. By sharing experiences, insights and ideas, people get peer-to-peer support from others.” DBSA groups meet regularly and are completely free of charge.

Acceptance and Safety: Participants make the group a safe place by fostering a supportive, trustworthy, respectful, non-judgmental atmosphere.

All those attending have an opportunity to share strategies, tips, and experiences that can help others cope successfully with depression or bipolar disorder. Participants have the common goal of wanting to live successfully with their illness, and do not criticize the choices other group members make. Rather, they encourage each other to learn from the experiences shared and make their own informed decisions.

Confidentiality: What happens at a DBSA support group stays within the group. No one may reveal information about the people attending the group or what is said during the meeting. Exceptions to this policy are made only when the safety of an individual is in danger.

“The first place I found ‘shelter from the storm’ was at my DBSA support group meeting, where I bonded with new, accepting friends and found role models who gave me faith that recovery was possible”
DBSA Board member Larry Fricks, speaking at the White House unveiling of the Surgeon General’s Report on Mental Health

With more than 23 million people in the United States affected by depression or bipolar disorder, no one with these illnesses has to feel alone. DBSA support groups are places where people with depression or bipolar disorder and those who care about them can share experiences, discuss coping skills and offer hope to one another.

Adapted from National DBSA brochure entitled DBSA Support Groups: An Important Step on the Road to Wellness, and Facilitator Guidelines provided by National DBSA - 2006