



# Support Groups

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## What is a support group?

**Support group:** A group of people with common experiences or concerns who provide each other with encouragement, comfort, and advice.

**Therapy support groups:** A therapy approach in which mental health professionals lead and provide structured treatment in a group setting.

## Support groups allow individuals to:

- Share experiences, thus reducing feelings of isolation and easing emotional burdens
- Express feelings
- Identify/practice coping strategies
- Learn self-care and new ideas for how to care for self
- Create and maintain a sense of hope

## Obstacles to building a protective support group:

- Unclear or lack of group guidelines
  - Little or no enforcement of group guidelines
- Group is too large
- Confidentiality rule is not enforced consistently or at all
- Lack of primary focus of the support group
- Group concludes on a negative note

## To get the most from support groups, participants can:

- Attend on a regular basis
- Contribute to discussions
- Be sensitive to others in the group
- Recognize when a group is not the right fit

# How to organize a group

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## Identify the primary focus of the group

- Examples: Grief, Trauma, Depression, Anxiety

## Decide how the group will be facilitated, such as by a mental health provider or self-run by individuals with relevant experience

## Locate a meeting place

## Establish a meet time

### Establish guidelines for the group (these should be reviewed at the beginning of each meeting)

- How can you create an emotionally safe space?
  - *Discuss confidentiality*
  - *All feelings are okay and do not require negative or positive judgment*
  - *Develop mutual trust*
- Respect the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental boundaries of members
  - *This means the room is a safe space for diverse beliefs*
- General rules:
  - *Turn off all cellphones*
  - *Commit to confidentiality*
  - *Recognize that all feelings are acceptable and do not need to be interpreted, analyzed, or judged*
  - *Respect physical boundaries*
    - *Ask permission to hug or touch*
  - *Listen while people are sharing*
  - *Only one person speaks at a time*
  - *Respect others' opinions*
  - *Ask permission to comment or ask a question in response to something someone has shared*
  - *Foster a safe space for all religious and spiritual belief systems*
  - *Facilitator: Close the group process—thank people for attending, sharing and listening to each other. Remind the group of their commitment to confidentiality.*

## Peer support groups

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Peer support groups tend to be led by someone who has made adequate progress in their own recovery. These groups allow participants to share, listen, learn, support one another, and provide them with the following benefits:

- Mentoring
- Emotional and social support
- Information
- Education
- Practical help

## References

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