

# Support and Resources

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"A few weeks ago, as I was speaking about depression to a group of psychiatric patients, I noticed a tear trickling down the cheek of a woman. When I finished, she looked at me and said, 'I thought I was the only one. Now I don't feel alone. You have just saved my life.'"

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"Involving family members is crucial. If only people with the illness are involved, there's not enough stability to keep the group going."

## Self-Help Groups

Self-help groups are often critical in dealing successfully with bipolar disorder. They can provide support for those who have been diagnosed with the condition as well as their families and others close to them.

Self-help groups can be sources for:

- ◆ **Information**  
Current knowledge about the disorder and its treatment is often shared, and brochures and information booklets are available. Some self-help groups publish newsletters.
- ◆ **Emotional support**  
In these groups, people share their experiences, strengths and hopes.
- ◆ **Helping others**  
Practical advice and tips about how to live with bipolar disorder abound.
- ◆ **Socializing**  
These groups help alleviate the isolation and loneliness that often accompany bipolar disorder.
- ◆ **Advocacy**  
Through efforts to educate the public and promote awareness of bipolar disorder, self-help groups fight the stigma of mental illness, gain needed resources, and lobby for more research funds and changes in government policy.

Self-help groups of various kinds are found in many centres. However, if your community does not have a self-help group that meets your needs, you may wish to consider starting one.

Many self-help groups begin as a result of the efforts of a few people, including those with the illness, one or two family members and a qualified professional or medical advisor.

Here are two excellent resources on how to set up self-help groups.

### *Helping You Helps Me: A Guide Book for Self-Help Groups*

Available from:  
**Canadian Council on Social Development**  
Box 3505  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1Y 4G1

### *Helping Others—Helping Ourselves: A Guide to Starting Mutual Aid Self-Help Groups for Manic Depressive and Depressive Disorders*

Available from:  
**National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association**  
Suite 505, 53 West Jackson Blvd.  
Chicago, Illinois, USA  
60604

**The Depression and Manic Depression Association of Alberta can also help you establish support groups. (Phone 1-888-757-7077 in Alberta).**

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"The magic of a self-help group is the great relief of knowing you are not alone. You meet people who are very much like you and you can speak freely without fear of rejection or ridicule. The magic of the self-help group is feeling accepted and valued."

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"Working to establish a support group in our community was a big part of my recovery from mental illness."

## Suggestions for Starting a Self-Help Group

- ◆ **Don't do it alone**  
Starting a group can be rewarding but demanding and stressful. Sharing the responsibility and assigning tasks avoids "burn-out" and increases the chance of being successful.
- ◆ **Form a core group**  
Once several interested people have been identified, hold a meeting and select a core group or steering committee. Identify the tasks this group will undertake and make a commitment to work together for a specific period of time.
- ◆ **Clarify the purpose of the group and its membership**  
An effective group will develop in response to the needs of its members. Be clear about what the group wishes to do and who should be involved.
- ◆ **Plan the program**  
Determine what types of meetings will be held as well as how they will be organized and led.
- ◆ **Find a place to meet**  
Look for a permanent place for the group to meet. Make sure there is enough space to accommodate the participants. If the large group is to break into special interest areas (e.g., newcomers, family members), try to find a place that has individual meeting rooms.
- ◆ **Publicize the group**  
Identify and follow up on ways of informing potential members of when and where the group meets. Identify a contact person to answer inquiries.
- ◆ **Share the leadership**  
Once regular meetings are underway, gradually reduce the involvement of the core group. A self-help group belongs to all of its members. Rotate tasks such as leading meetings, making coffee and setting up the room. Integrate new members into the group by encouraging their participation in group tasks as well as in discussions.

Adapted from: National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association. *Helping Others—Helping Ourselves: A Guide to Starting Mutual Aid Self-Help Groups for Manic Depressive and Depressive Disorders.*

# Community Resources

## Hospitals

People who live with bipolar disorder need to be aware of where and how to gain access to a hospital if the need arises. Many hospital admissions occur through the emergency department. Some acute-care hospitals have a psychiatric ward in which severely ill or suicidal patients receive care. Smaller hospitals may have designated psychiatric beds. Psychiatric hospitals provide short-term and long-term care as well as out-patient programs.

## Mental Health Clinics

Mental health clinics, where therapists and physicians are available to provide care and counselling, exist in many communities. To find the centre nearest to you, check your phone book.

## Distress or Crisis Lines

This service is provided on a 24-hour basis in many communities. The telephone number is usually located on the first page of the telephone book.

## Suicide Prevention Services

Many communities have specialized services aimed at preventing suicide. The telephone number is usually located on the first page of the phone book.

## Community Organizations

Many agencies, religious organizations and other community groups are available to provide services to people with mental illness, including:

## Clubhouse - Peace River Prospect Place - Edmonton Touchstone Place - Wetaskiwin

- These facilities provide comfortable drop-in centres for mental health services consumers.

For information contact the Schizophrenia Society or the nearest public health unit.

## Consumers Network

- speaks on mental health issues based on their experiences.
- provides support to other consumers.
- advocates improved services for people with mental illness.

Located in several areas throughout Alberta. For further information phone Edmonton (482-6576).

## Depression and Manic Depression Association of Alberta

- provides support groups several nights per week, 52 weeks of the year in Edmonton. Consumers and/or support persons are welcome.
- travels to educate schoolchildren and adults about the disorders, and to help establish support groups.
- provides training for professionals.
- can refer you to the support group closest to your community. For information, call 1-888-757-7077 (in Alberta).