

Support and Resources

Self-Help Groups

→ "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.'"

→ "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 a self-help group is feeling accepted and valued."

SELF-HELP GROUPS can be critical in dealing successfully with depression. They can provide support for those who have the condition as well as for 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 deal with depression abound.
- **socializing**
These groups help alleviate the isolation and loneliness that often accompany depression.
- **advocacy**
Through efforts to educate the public and promote awareness of depression, self-help groups fight the stigma of mental illness, gain needed resources, and lobby for more research funds and policy 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 began as a result of the efforts of a few people including those with the illness, family members and qualified professionals or medical advisors.

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).

Suggestions for Starting a Self-Help Group

- ➔ *"Involving family members is crucial. If only people with the illness are involved, there's not enough stability to keep the group going."*
- ➔ *"Working to establish a support group in our community was a big part of my recovery from mental illness."*

➔ 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 identify 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, etc.), try to find a place that has individual meeting rooms.

➔ Publicize

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 are depressed need to be aware of where and how to gain access to a hospital if the need arises. Many hospital admissions for depression 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 the prevention of suicide. Check the telephone book for organizations in your area.

Health Care Professionals

Family physicians and other health care professionals are often involved in the treatment of depression.

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).