



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

DBSA Support Groups: *An Important Step on the Road to Recovery*

You Are Not Alone

With more than 21 million people in the United States affected by depression or bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression), no one with these illnesses has to feel alone. DBSA support groups are places where people with mood disorders and those who care about them can share experiences, discuss coping skills and offer hope to one another.

The members of my DBSA support group reached out to me and made me realize that I was not alone. If not for the support that I received from this organization, I probably wouldn't be here....

— DBSA support group participant

Why attend a DBSA support group?

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

- Provide a safe and welcoming forum for mutual acceptance, understanding and self-discovery.
- Give them the opportunity to reach out to others and benefit from the experience of those who have “been there.”
- Motivate them to follow their treatment plans.
- Help them understand that mood disorders do not define who they are.
- Help them rediscover strengths and humor they may have thought they had lost.

How can DBSA support groups help people maintain better mental health?

- People who had been attending a DBSA group for more than a year were less likely to have been hospitalized in the past 12 months.
- The longer people had attended a DBSA group, the less likely they were to have stopped medication against medical advice, and the fewer barriers to following their treatment plan they experienced.
- More than half of the people who were not following their treatment plans when they began attending their DBSA groups became more motivated to do so over time with continued group attendance.

What happens at a DBSA support group meeting?

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 who have “been there.” 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, nonjudgmental 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.

Peer leadership: Each support group meeting is facilitated by someone with depression or bipolar disorder or a family member. The facilitator guides discussion, provides focus to the group and helps ensure that group principles/rules are followed. Facilitators receive guidance and resources from

DBSA staff and have the opportunity to attend leadership training sponsored by DBSA.

Other services: Most groups offer free educational materials about mood disorders, and many maintain lending libraries, publish newsletters, provide information on area mental health services or are involved in outreach or advocacy in their local community.

I think the reason I was depressed for so long was that I felt excluded from everything, even my family. Finding people who accept you for who you are – I can't put a price tag on that.

— DBSA support group participant

What does *not* happen at a DBSA support group meeting?

Therapy or treatment: Group participation is a valuable supplement to professional care (whether that care includes medication, talk therapy or other treatment methods) but is *not* a substitute for it. Group members do not seek to diagnose one another, and DBSA and its support groups do not endorse or recommend the use of any specific treatments or medications. Each individual should work with his or her own health care professional(s) to determine his or her best possible treatment plan.



A lecture by an expert: Although some meetings feature guest speakers or special lectures, most DBSA groups are of the “share/care” variety, in which all are encouraged to share, if they wish to.

A religious meeting or a 12-step group: Group participants are not compelled to accept any particular set of beliefs or to follow any particular list of “steps.” It is understood that each person’s path toward wellness is unique.

A “pity party:” While participants often share the challenges of their lives and the feelings of hopelessness that accompany mood disorders, groups focus on day-by-day coping, not on self-pity.

How can I find a DBSA support group?

Call us. When you call (800) 826-3632 or (312) 642-0049, during regular business hours (8:30 A.M.–5:00 P.M. Central Time), someone will refer you to a group in your area and send you free educational materials if you would like them. After business hours, you may leave a message, and your call will be promptly returned.

Visit us online. At www.DBSAlliance.org/findsupport, you can browse a listing of support groups by state or search by zip code. You can also find information about mood disorders, download brochures, take a screening test for depression or bipolar disorder and much more.

Or start a group in your area. DBSA can help you establish a group, if there’s not one near you, or if you are seeking a special group (such as women only). Simply contact our Chapter Relations staff at one of the numbers listed above, or send an e-mail to startup@DBSAlliance.org. We’ll be glad to help you get started.

I found my DBSA support group at a very low point in my life. Through this and other support networks, I have “gotten my life back together” for the most part. I struggle with the illness on a daily basis, but I am functioning and again have hopes, dreams and aspirations.

— DBSA support group participant

Does DBSA offer online support groups?

Yes, DBSA offers live, real-time support group meetings on the Internet for people living with mood disorders, their friends and family. Online support is ideal for those who live too far from their local DBSA group, have limited mobility or simply wish to remain anonymous. Led by volunteer peer facilitators, these meetings follow the same format and guidelines as DBSA’s in-person support groups. Each group meets once a week, and consumers and loved ones may attend as many sessions as they’d like. Registration is required, but there’s no charge to register or participate. To learn more, or to register, visit www.DBSAlliance.org/OSG.