



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) Peer Support Groups

DBSA (Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance) runs free, regularly scheduled peer support groups for people living with depression or bipolar disorder. They are led by trained peers who have personal experience with these conditions, not by a clinician. The point is connection with others who understand mood disorders from the inside. DBSA operates one of the largest networks of mood disorder peer groups in the US, meeting in person and online.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- A strong fit if you want ongoing connection and practical peer wisdom that outlasts a treatment episode.
- Works alongside clinical care. It is not a replacement for medication or therapy when those are needed.
- Not for an acute episode, active suicidal thoughts, or psychosis. In crisis? Call or text 988.

What it's for

For people living with depression, bipolar I or II, cyclothymia, and related mood disorders.

Also for those not yet diagnosed who recognize mood-related patterns in their lives.

Family and loved ones are directed to separate DBSA groups designed for them.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- 1** Most groups meet weekly or biweekly for 60 to 90 minutes. Free and ongoing, no end date.
- 2** Drop in to most in-person meetings without registering. Online groups need a brief sign-up.
- 3** No pressure to share, ever. Members speak voluntarily, and confidentiality is a core rule.
- 4** The peer facilitator keeps things on track but gives no clinical advice or therapy.

DBSA-specific research is limited, but the evidence for peer support is well established.

- A 2021 review and meta-analysis of 40 studies found group peer support brought **significant benefits** for social support, empowerment, hope, and self-management, with the strongest effects on connection and reduced isolation.¹
- A study of depression and bipolar peer groups found members valued the shared lived experience above all else, and said the groups filled a gap professional services did not.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

- | **Listening counts.** You don't have to share to benefit early on.
- | **Keep coming back.** Benefit accrues with consistency.
- | **Try more than one.** A poor fit is information, not failure.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is this group in person or online, and do I need to register first?
- 2** Does it use DBSA's wellness tools, like the Wellness Tracker or Wellness Wheel?
- 3** How large is the group, and how often does it meet?
- 4** Is there a separate group for my family members?

Ready to find a group?

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If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact. Sources on page 2.



Sources

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) Peer Support Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Lyons, N., Cooper, C., & Lloyd-Evans, B. A systematic review and meta-analysis of group peer support interventions for people experiencing mental health conditions. *BMC Psychiatry* (2021), 21(1), Article 315.
- 2 Behler, J., Daniels, A., Scott, J., & Mehl-Madrona, L. Depression/bipolar peer support groups: perceptions of group members about effectiveness and differences from other mental health services. *The Qualitative Report* (2017), 22(1).

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