



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Mood Disorder Peer Support Groups

These are free, ongoing meetings for people living with depression, bipolar disorder, or related mood conditions, facilitated by trained peers with lived experience rather than clinicians. They rest on a kind of expertise that only comes from the inside: losing weeks to a depressive episode, weighing medication side effects, explaining another absence at work. The group offers that expertise freely. Larger networks include DBSA and NAMI, in person and online.

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

- A strong fit if you want ongoing peer connection and shared coping strategies.
- It works alongside medication and therapy, and replaces neither.
- Not for an acute episode, active suicidal thoughts, or psychosis. In crisis? Call or text 988.

What it's for

Major depression, bipolar I or II, cyclothymia, persistent depressive disorder.

Also people noticing mood patterns who aren't yet diagnosed.

Any stage, from newly diagnosed to many years in. Some groups are diagnosis-specific.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 Weekly or biweekly, 60 to 90 minutes: welcome, open sharing in turn, closing.

2 You're never required to share. Confidentiality is a core ground rule.

3 Talk is warm, frank, and non-clinical: meds, relationships, early warning signs.

Peer support for mood disorders has a growing, encouraging evidence base.

- A 2019 study of 1,000+ DBSA members found longer-term attendees reported **greater gains in wellbeing and self-management**, many citing the group as a key support.¹
- Members value **shared lived experience** above all,² and broader peer-support reviews confirm gains in support, hope, and self-management.³

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

You don't have to talk. Listening counts, especially early on.

Give it two or three. A first impression often misleads.

Track between meetings. A simple mood log anchors your check-ins.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is it open to all mood disorders, or focused on one?
- 2** Is it in person or online, and how often does it meet?
- 3** Is it open ongoing support, or a structured course like NAMI Peer-to-Peer?

Ready to find a group?

Browse 2,000+ therapy and support groups in all 50 states.

Free to browse · No account needed · thegroupguide.com



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

Mood Disorder Peer Support Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Kelly, J. F., Hoffman, L., Vilsaint, C., et al. Peer support for mood disorder: characteristics and benefits from attending the DBSA mutual-help organization. *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2019), 255, 127–135.
- 2 Behler, J., Daniels, A., Scott, J., & Mehl-Madrona, L. Depression/bipolar peer support groups. *The Qualitative Report* (2017), 22(1).
- 3 Lyons, N., Cooper, C., & Lloyd-Evans, B. A systematic review and meta-analysis of group peer support interventions. *BMC Psychiatry* (2021), 21(1), Article 315.

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