



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Serious Mental Illness Peer Support Groups

These are ongoing, peer-led groups for people living with schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder with psychosis, and other conditions that significantly affect thinking, mood, and daily functioning. They work from a recovery framework: people with serious mental illness can and do build meaningful, self-directed lives, and peer connection is central to that. They sit alongside clinical care, not instead of it, often through NAMI, Clubhouse programs, and community mental health centers.

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

- A strong fit for anyone with SMI who wants connection and community.
- It belongs alongside psychiatric treatment, including medication, not instead of it.
- Not for an acute psychotic episode or crisis, which need clinical care first. Call or text 988.

What it's for

Schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar with psychosis, psychotic depression.

People recovering from a first episode and those living with SMI for years.

Run by Certified Peer Specialists, sometimes with a clinician co-facilitator.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 NAMI Connection groups: ongoing, open, facilitated discussion, 60 to 90 minutes.

2 NAMI Peer-to-Peer: a structured 10-session course, about 2 hours each.

3 Clubhouses: a community center with a work-ordered day, not a meeting.

Peer support for serious mental illness has a solid and growing evidence base.

- A 2019 Cochrane review (30 trials, 2,600+ people) found gains in **mental state, social functioning, quality of life, and hope**, with fewer hospitalizations in several trials.¹
- A trial of the Clubhouse model found **employment comparable to intensive case management**, with stronger social integration.² Broader peer-support reviews agree.³

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

- **Come as you are.** Any stage of recovery is welcome.
- **Alongside, not instead.** It complements care, not replaces it.
- **Keep coming back.** Connection builds over time.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1** Is it open ongoing support, a course, or a clubhouse?
- 2** Is it peer-led, or co-led with a clinician?
- 3** Is it in person or online, and how often does it meet?

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

Serious Mental Illness Peer Support Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1** Chien, W. T., Clifton, A. V., Zhao, S., & Lui, S. Peer support for people with schizophrenia or other serious mental illness. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (2019), 2019(6), Article CD010880.
- 2** Macias, C., Rodican, C. F., Hargreaves, W. A., et al. Supported employment outcomes of a randomized controlled trial of ACT and Clubhouse models. Psychiatric Services (2006), 57(10), 1406–1415.
- 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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