



## Different Types of Groups

There are many different types of support groups. They can vary according to who they are run by, the area of focus and purpose of the group, size, and their frequency of meetings.

### **Professional or Peer Support**

Some support groups may be run by professional facilitators and may even have a research focus. The professional may be able to assist in contributing information and resources and help with the administrative tasks of setting up a group such as planning meetings, public events, obtaining speakers and advertising for new members.

Peer-support groups are usually started by individuals and do not have a professional facilitator. These can vary from formal to quite informal, and may even be a social group who meet monthly over coffee to debrief and provide emotional support.

Some people prefer groups facilitated by professionals; however, others may prefer a peer environment. People with genetic health conditions often become "experts," in that they know a great deal about the medical, social, and emotional aspects of having a particular disease.

One approach is not better than the other. What is most important is to find a group that suits you and your needs!

### **Community Groups**

Community groups are generally made up of individuals who come together based on common interests in their local area. Community groups can be support groups, but this is not always the case. Community groups often advertise in local papers and through local councils.

### **Online Support Groups**

Online support groups are becoming increasingly popular, and can have many benefits including increased accessibility especially to people who are geographically isolated. They can also be helpful when the topic is particularly sensitive, and being able to interact with others anonymously is preferable.

When joining or starting an online support group, careful consideration of relevance, accuracy of information and privacy issues is required. It is important that personal and identifiable details are not made public.

### **Frequency of Meetings**

How often groups meet depends on the purpose and needs of the members. Large groups with many chapters may have local meetings once a month and annual meetings for the whole organisation. Small groups formed to address a specific issue may meet once a week for a set number of weeks. The life span of a support group depends on its focus and the needs of its members. Some groups are designed to run for a short period of time; others last for many years.

### **Meeting Places**

Support groups can meet anywhere. Many hospitals offer support groups, but groups can also meet in individuals' homes, churches, libraries, or other community buildings. Online support groups also exist, which may be especially helpful for specific conditions, where members are homebound, have limited free time to attend meetings, or don't have a group nearby that meets their needs.

### **Support Group Size**

Support group sizes vary greatly and can range from less than ten to thousands. The optimum size varies depending on the purpose of the group and the needs of the members. Large groups sometimes have goals of raising money, influencing public health policy or educating the public. Emotional support groups are typically small, so that participants can feel safe expressing feelings.

### **Associations**

An Association is similar to a support group in that a group of people ("Members") come together who share a particular purpose or experience. The aim is to combine energy and share resources for reasons such as developing services and programs, or trying to make changes.

Associations are managed by an elected committee or board, the head of which is usually called the President. Members of the board or committee are usually unpaid volunteers.

Associations can become incorporated, which means they must follow a system of rules which is called the Constitution. Non-profit Associations can make a profit but this profit is never distributed to the members. If the Association ceases to exist, any surplus funds must be given away.