



For those in need, help is support group away

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In the last few weeks, we have discussed the history of mental health and how to access appropriate services for you or a loved one. This week, we will talk about support groups available in our area that, at times, can be "underutilized" by our community but which provide a great deal of help and resources for those who do attend.

Support groups are offered to help individuals deal with their own life stresses, mental health or addiction disorders or to learn how to help a friend or a loved who is either in recovery or in need of treatment. To better understand support groups, Mental Health America of Vanderburgh County (MHA) published these "Frequently Asked Questions" in their most recent support group pamphlet. MHA offers mental health support groups that range from bipolar/manic depressive disorder to a grief support group for kids.

Q: How does a support group differ from individual therapy?

A: Support groups are a type of psychological therapy, but meetings are held in small groups, not one-on-one. Formal mental health assessments are not conducted.

Q: Who leads these groups?

A: Support groups can be led by a professional trained in group facilitation, by a peer facilitator (one who has personal understanding of the disorder) or support groups can be social groups without a facilitator.

Q: Are meeting discussions kept confidential?

A: Your privacy is respected. Confidentiality and group rules are outlined at each meeting to ensure a private and non-judgmental environment.

Q: I might not be able to attend all meetings. Can I still join?

A: MHA support groups are ongoing and open-ended. You can join at any time and are always welcome even if you can't attend every meeting.

When searching for support groups in your area, it is important to first decide what kind of group may be best for you or your loved one. Many national organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous have websites that provide information on all the meeting dates and times available in a specific city or those that are available close to the city you have chosen.

To find a specific support group, you may want to use a search engine such as yahoo.com or google.com and type in the search box "Gamblers Anonymous" or "Overeaters Anonymous," and the national sites for these organizations should be the first ones to appear. Generally, each site will have a tab called "meeting directory" or "find a meeting" where you can then choose your city and review the results. The great thing about support groups is that most are provided at little or no cost to the individual interested in attending. Also, many of these groups have long-standing dates and times posted, which allows the individual to find a date that works best.

There are also support groups for friends or family members to learn more about mental health or addiction disorder. Groups such as Al-Anon, designed to help individuals understand problem drinkers, and Friends and Family, a group for friends and family of people with mental illness conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) Evansville chapter, all provide individuals with a better understanding of what the individual suffering from the disorder may be going through and how to help them in their recovery.

As stated earlier, support groups at

times can be "underutilized" by individuals. These groups are rich in knowledge and provide a great forum for better discussion and understanding. We encourage you to learn more about support groups and use these great resources that our community has to offer.

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