

DBSA Support Groups: An Important Step on the Road to Wellness



**Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance**

We've been there. We can help.

You Are Not Alone



With more than 23 million people in the United States affected by depression or bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression), no one with these illnesses has to feel alone. DBSA support groups, a service of local DBSA chapters, are places where people with depression or bipolar disorder and those who care about them can share experiences, discuss coping skills and offer hope to one another.

The first place I found 'shelter from the storm' was at my DBSA support group meeting, where I bonded with new, accepting friends and found role models who gave me faith that recovery was possible.

—DBSA support group participant and activist Larry Fricks, speaking at the White House unveiling of the Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health

Why attend a DBSA support group?

DBSA support groups provide the kind of caring and assistance that is important to lasting recovery. DBSA support group participants say that their DBSA groups:

- Provide a safe and welcoming forum for mutual acceptance, understanding and self-discovery.
- Give them the opportunity to reach out to others and benefit from the experience of those who have “been there.”
- Motivate them to follow their treatment plans.
- Help them understand that mood disorders do not define who they are.
- Help them rediscover strengths and humor they may have thought they had lost.

The members of my DBSA support group reached out to me, and made me realize that I was not alone. If not for the support that I received from this organization, I probably wouldn't be here...

—DBSA support group participant

What benefits do DBSA support groups offer?*

Benefits	Survey participants benefiting to some or great extent
Provide interpersonal support	98.2%
Help to cope with problems and crises	96.7%
Help to make better decisions	95.1%
Help to understand medications and treatment	93.7%
Help become more willing to take medications and cope with side effects	85.7%
Motivate to follow doctor's instructions	85.6%
Help to better communicate with doctor	85.4%
Make treatment plan less complex	68.9%

* DBSA support group survey of 2,049 people from 190 cities in 38 states and the District of Columbia.

Can DBSA support groups help people maintain better mental health?

- People who had been attending a DBSA group for more than a year were less likely to have been hospitalized in the past 12 months.
- The longer people had attended a DBSA group, the less likely they were to have stopped medication against medical advice, and the fewer barriers to treatment adherence they experienced.
- More than half of the people who were not adhering to their treatment plans when they began attending their DBSA groups became more adherent over time with continued group attendance.

Thank you so much for being there for me during these dark times. Attending the support group meetings has been a real lifeline for me and I am so grateful that they are there and available to us.

—DBSA support group participant



What happens at a DBSA support group meeting?

Self-help: DBSA support group meetings focus on mutual aid and strategies for living the fullest life possible. Participants continually seek to provide hope, reassurance and encouragement to one another. By sharing experiences, insights and ideas, people get peer-to-peer support from others who have “been there.” DBSA groups meet regularly and are completely free of charge.

Acceptance and safety: Participants make the group a safe place by fostering a supportive, trustworthy, respectful, non-judgmental atmosphere. All those attending have an opportunity to share strategies, tips, and experiences that can help others cope successfully with depression or bipolar disorder. Participants have the common goal of wanting to live successfully with their illness, and do not criticize the choices other group members make. Rather, they encourage each other to learn from the experiences shared and make their own informed decisions.

Confidentiality: What happens at a DBSA support group stays within the group. No one may reveal information about the people attending the group or what is said during the meeting. Exceptions to this policy are made only when the safety of an individual is in danger.

Peer leadership: Each support group meeting is facilitated by someone with depression or bipolar disorder or a family member. The facilitator guides discussion, provides focus to the group and helps ensure that group principles/rules are followed. Facilitators are oriented in group leadership, receive guidance and resources from DBSA staff, and have the opportunity to attend leadership training sponsored by DBSA.

DBSA support groups are run by volunteer leaders of local DBSA chapters. These chapters also provide other services to the community. Many chapters host educational meetings, lead advocacy efforts, coordinate outreach efforts and more. Getting involved in chapter activities has proven to be helpful to thousands of DBSA participants.

If it weren't for the DBSA support groups I'd probably still be hurting myself and locking myself away for hours. Your group has taught me other ways of expressing myself. I'm starting to love myself again, and be happy with who I am.

—DBSA support group participant

What does *not* happen at a DBSA support group meeting?

Therapy or treatment: Group attendance is a valuable supplement to professional care (whether that care includes medication, talk therapy or other treatment methods) but is not a substitute for it. Group participants do not seek to diagnose one another. DBSA, its chapters and its support groups do not endorse or recommend the use of any specific treatments or medications. Each individual should work with his or her own health care professional(s) to determine his or her best possible treatment plan.

A lecture by an expert: Although some meetings feature guest speakers or special lectures, most DBSA groups are of the “share/care” variety, in which everyone is encouraged to share, if they wish to.

A religion or a 12-step group: Group participants are not compelled to accept any particular set of beliefs or to follow any particular list of “steps”. It is understood that each person’s path toward wellness is unique.

A “pity party”: While participants often share the challenges of their lives and the feelings of hopelessness that accompany depression and bipolar disorder, groups focus on day-by-day coping, not on self-pity.

I found my DBSA support group at a very low point in my life. Through this and other support networks, I have ‘gotten my life back together’ for the most part. I struggle with the illness on a daily basis, but I am functioning and again have hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

—DBSA support group participant

How can I find a DBSA chapter?



Phone: When you call (800) 826-3632 or (312) 642-0049, during regular business hours (8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Central time), someone will refer you to a chapter in your area and send you free educational materials if you would like them. After business hours, you may leave a message and your call will be promptly returned.

Internet: At DBSA’s website, www.DBSAlliance.org, you can browse a listing of chapters by state or search by zip code. You can also find information about mood disorders, download brochures, take a screening test for depression or bipolar disorder and much more.

Start a chapter: DBSA can help you establish a chapter in your area, if there is not a chapter near you, or if you are seeking a special group (such as teens only). Simply contact our Chapter Relations staff at one of the numbers listed above, or e-mail chapters@DBSAlliance.org, and we’ll be glad to help you get started.

Nothing has a more important impact on the lives of people with mood disorders than our support groups. Meeting others who have gone through the same shadows and come out on the other side is priceless. It restores hope, faith and sometimes life itself.

—DBSA Board Chair William P. Ashdown

What else can people do to help?



People with mood disorders and their loved ones:

- Let others know about your DBSA chapter and support group
- Offer to explain the support group to people who are attending for the first time, or accompany them to their first meeting
- Tell your health care provider(s) about the chapter and support group and encourage them to refer others

Health care providers:

- Refer your patients or clients to a DBSA chapter
- Post information about DBSA support group meetings and contacts in your area
- Distribute DBSA educational materials
- Assist or advise a chapter in your area
- Help your patients or clients start a chapter

Chapter Interest Indicator

Please Print or Type

- Yes, I am interested in establishing a DBSA chapters in my area. Please send me a start-up kit.

I understand that the purpose of a DBSA chapter is to share information and mutual support related to participants' experiences with depression or bipolar disorder, and that the primary participants in support group meetings are persons diagnosed with one of these disorders or those who believe they may have a mood disorder. Meetings are open to the public and free of charge.

PROPOSED AREA TO BE SERVED (CITY/CITIES AND STATE)

SPECIAL INTEREST, IF ANY (E.G., TEENS, DUAL DIAGNOSIS)

My contact information:

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

TELEPHONE

FAX

E-MAIL

Others who will assist me:

NAME

NAME

Please mail form to DBSA, fax form to
(312) 642-7243, Attn: Chapter Relations
or fill out a form online at
www.DBSAAlliance.org/InterestIndicatorForm.asp

CUT ON DOTTED LINE



Please help us continue our efforts.

We hope you found the information in this brochure useful. Your gift will help us continue to assist people with mood disorders in finding, forming and maintaining chapters and support groups. Please call (800) 826-3632 or visit www.DBSAlliance.org for more information.

Yes, I want to make a difference. Enclosed is my gift of:

\$100 \$50 \$20 Other _____

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

FAX E-MAIL

Check (payable to DBSA) Money order
 VISA MasterCard AmEx Discover Card

ACCOUNT EXP. DATE

NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CREDIT CARD

SIGNATURE (REQUIRED)

- I wish my gift to remain anonymous.
- Please send me ____ donation envelopes to share.
- I'd like details on including DBSA in my will.
- I have enclosed my company's matching gift form.
- I'd like to receive more information about mood disorders.
- Please send all correspondence in a confidential envelope.

If you would like to make your gift a Memorial or Honorary tribute, please complete the following:

In Memory of/In Honor of (circle one):

PRINT NAME

Please send an acknowledgment to:

RECIPIENT'S NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

Please send this form with payment to: **DBSA**
730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501, Chicago, IL 60610-7224 USA

Questions? Call (800) 826-3632 or (312) 642-0049.

Credit card payments may be faxed to (312) 642-7243.

Secure online donations can also be made at www.DBSAlliance.org.

DBSA is a not-for-profit organization. Your contributions may be tax deductible. For more information, please consult your tax advisor.

Thank you for your gift!

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DBSA does not endorse or recommend any specific treatment or medication for mood disorders. For advice about specific treatments or medications, individuals should consult their physicians and/or mental health professionals.



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

We've been there.
We can help.

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is the leading patient-directed national organization focusing on the most prevalent mental illnesses. The organization fosters an environment of understanding about the impact and management of these life-threatening illnesses by providing up-to-date and scientifically-based tools and information written in language the general public can understand. DBSA supports research to promote more timely diagnosis, develop more effective and tolerable treatments and discover a cure. The organization works to ensure that people living with mood disorders are treated equitably.

Assisted by a Scientific Advisory Board comprised of the leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders, DBSA has more than 1,000 peer-run support groups across the country. More than four million people request and receive information and assistance each year. DBSA's mission is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

(Previously National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association)

730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501

Chicago, Illinois 60610-7224 USA

Phone: (800) 826-3632 or (312) 642-0049

Fax: (312) 642-7243

Website: www.DBSAlliance.org

Visit our updated, interactive website for important information, breaking news, chapter connections, advocacy help and much more.

Your Local DBSA Chapter

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____