



Depression and Bipolar  
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# Chapter Conflict Management Guide

## Chapter Conflict Management Guide

### Communication is Key

*Q: What is conflict management?*

*A: The art of using the means available to you to address disharmony between opposing viewpoints...*

DBSA Chapters will inevitably face conflict among chapter leaders, chapter participants, and even people unaffiliated with DBSA. No matter a person's affiliation, conflict is part of everyday life. The important thing, however, is that you have the knowledge, skills, and mindset to be able to effectively manage conflict when it arises.

Expertly managing conflict would mean that a person understands themselves completely, as well as the very nature of human interaction. That is a big order to fill, but the good news is that even non-experts can learn the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to manage their personal conflicts effectively.

### Is Conflict Good or Bad?

The word "conflict" almost always conjures negative, angry, and problematic thoughts. Much of your past experience with conflicts may have resulted in sadness, lost friendships, or even violence. However, if you use a conflict management technique called re-framing (explained later; essentially looking at a situation from another perspective) you can see the concept of conflict from a different perspective.

Imagine you're involved in a conflict, but the person who is disagreeing with you is raising valid questions. It actually may benefit everyone to address the issues they are presenting (however, many people will see this as a negative situation). Using this re-framing idea with conflict management, you will find that conflict can be a welcome tool for healthy organizations. When there are opposing viewpoints, often better solutions are the result.

Conflict, if managed appropriately, can be a valuable tool in the development of any DBSA chapter.

## The Stages of Group Development

Groups (like DBSA chapters) have a normal pattern of development. From the day they start to long into their existence, groups of people can be observed traversing this pattern of development and experiencing four stages of growth. Not all of the stages are easy, but they are normal and include the necessity to manage conflict. In fact, you'll notice that conflict is *expected*.

### Groups that Work

Adapted from: "[Groups that Work](#)," Gerard M. Blair, accessed July 20, 2015. Gerard M Blair is a Senior Lecturer in VLSI Design at the Department of Electrical Engineering, The University of Edinburgh.

In an article entitled, "Groups that Work," Gerard M. Blair explains the four stages of group development. It is common to view the development of a group as having four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing.

**Forming** is the stage when the group first comes together. Everybody is very polite. Conflict is seldom voiced directly, mainly personal, and definitely destructive. Since the grouping is new, the individuals will be guarded in their own opinions and generally reserved. This is particularly so in terms of the more nervous and/or subordinate members who may never recover from the conflict. The group tends to defer to a large extent to those who emerge as leaders.

**Storming** is the next stage, when chaos breaks loose and the leaders are seemingly attacked. Factions form, personalities clash, no-one concedes a single point without first fighting tooth and nail. Most importantly, very little communication occurs since no one is listening and some are still unwilling to talk openly. This may seem a little extreme for the groups to which you belong, but if you look beneath the veil of civility at the seething sarcasm, invective, and innuendo, perhaps the picture will come more into focus.

Then comes the **norming**. At this stage the sub-groups begin to recognize the merits of working together and the in-fighting subsides. Since a new spirit of cooperation is evident, every member begins to feel secure in expressing their own viewpoints and these are discussed openly with the whole group. The most significant improvement is that people start to listen to each other. Work methods become established and recognized by the group as a whole.

And finally: **performing**. This is the highest level, where the group allows a free, frank exchange of views. The group supports its members and their decisions. The group's performance has been increasing to its highest level. This elevated level of performance is the main justification for struggling through the group process.

### A note on conflict and mood disorders...

Depression and bipolar disorder are conditions that could potentially challenge the conflict management process. That is only true, however, if we choose to "frame" them in that way. When trying to manage conflict, there are countless outside factors to consider that can be challenging, including:

- Mood disorders
- Personalities
- Cultural backgrounds
- History between individuals
- Formal titles/roles
- Language barriers
- Physical illnesses that divert concentration
- Environmental factors that divert concentration
- Listening skills
- Etc.

While all of these factors can be challenging, the reality is that they exist for *everyone* who manages conflict. Therefore, mood disorders, while they are one challenge that you may face, are only a small factor in conflict management. The good news is that you can still effectively manage conflict whether or not you or the people you are working with are affected by mood disorders.

## **10 Tips for Preventing Conflict**

The first step in successfully managing conflict is working to prevent it altogether. Here are ten tips to remember to help you prevent the challenges of conflict before they arise.

**1. Gossip: just say no:** No one trusts a gossip. Gossiping is a great way to signal to your group members that you're not caring or professional, and more importantly, may violate the rules of group confidentiality.

**2. Praise: always in short supply:** If you use someone's idea or work product, grant them credit, and announce their contributions publicly. You'd hope for the same courtesy from them.

**3. Don't burn bridges:** Everyone gets angry or occasionally says something they wish they had not. When this happens to you, go back the next day and apologize. It takes courage to apologize. Also, accept an apology when offered.

**4. Communicate:** Be open and honest. Rumors feed on themselves in the absence of reliable information. Regularly communicating with co-leaders and group participants about what you're working on is the key to preventing people from jumping to the wrong conclusion when, say, you need to miss a meeting.

**5. Forego public shame and blame:** Public humiliation is not a positive way to force another into more productive habits. People will make mistakes and appreciate discussing concerns in private.

**6. Talk to everyone:** Cliques form quickly. It's okay to have a select group of people you talk to most often, but be careful not to close out others. Involving everyone is so important, especially in the self-help arena.

**7. Include the group in group decisions:** A democratic process in DBSA chapters has proven to be an effective manner with which to govern the group's decisions. Not many things can cause more conflict than one person making all of the decisions for others. Sometimes it may seem as though you are being helpful by taking responsibility for a decision. Always make sure that all stakeholders are considered and included in the decision-making process

**8. Give constructive feedback often:** This tip is similar to tip #2, above, but deals more with feedback that might not be full of praise. Constructive feedback means more than telling someone when they've done something wrong. It means making positive suggestions that

are future oriented. Stop conflicts before they start by providing constructive feedback along the way.

**9. *Intentionally seek participants outside the “inner circle.”*** Most groups, including DBSA chapters, have an inner circle of participants that are always there, always volunteer, and everyone knows. If you are a part of this inner circle you may sometimes find that you only interact with people within this group. Avoid conflict by intentionally seeking out those participants that are beyond the inner circle of leaders, and grow your relationships with them.

**10. *Have agreed upon policies for conflict management in place:*** Every chapter should have an agreed upon policy in place for removing a disruptive participant from chapter activities and removing a member of the board/leadership of the chapter. If these policies are in place beforehand, conflicts that arise can be much easier to manage (see “Policies that Solve Problems” later in this document).

## 5 Ways People Deal with Conflict

(This section adapted from an article entitled, "Conflict - An Essential Ingredient for Growth" by Susan Pilgrim, Ph.D.)

Individuals use a variety of styles in conflict situations. When looking at conflict management, the persons involved, the importance of the issue, emotional states, and desired outcomes may all come into play. Managing conflict has to do with one's willingness to be cooperative (helping others get what they want) and one's assertiveness (getting what they want). Everyone uses, to some degree, five styles when dealing with conflict:

**1. Avoiding** - When individuals avoid conflict, they often withdraw and detach themselves from the issue. They are not willing to assert their own wants, nor do they want to help others get what they want. For example, they tend to look the other way when other individuals are discussing chapter politics or ways to equalize the work load.

**2. Accommodating** - When your chapter participants accommodate others in order to avoid conflict, they will do whatever they can to help the other person get what they want, often to their own detriment. They give in to demands, even unreasonable ones, to avoid disagreement. For example, a chapter volunteer may choose to do someone else's job rather than suggest that the responsible person complete it.

**3. Competing** - When your chapter participants compete to be right, their primary interest is in resolving the conflict their way. They have no interest in helping others get what they want. They become very defensive of their position and have difficulty understanding the reasons others don't see things their way. A competing person may insist that everyone else drop what they're doing so their project can be completed in their time frame. Those who compete often take advantage of those who accommodate others.

**4. Compromising** - When chapter participants compromise in order to resolve a conflict, they are willing to give and take with others. They want both parties to be either satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome. Compromising is frequently used because it is expedient and both parties make concessions. For example, a chapter volunteer designing a newsletter may want the newsletter printed on blue paper, while another is adamant about printing on yellow. So they both may give up their first choices and select a second color that they both marginally agree to use.

**5. Collaborating** - When chapter participants collaborate, they are interested in seeing that everyone's wants and needs are met fully. These volunteers tend to consider themselves a team. They work creatively and are solution-oriented. The outcome of the conflict often leads to one that neither party expected was possible prior to the collaboration.

## **The 4 Real Enemies in Conflict**

(This section is adapted from a chapter entitled, *Chapter 13 -- Conflict Management Skills* by Gregorio Billikopf Encina of The University of California Agricultural Issues Center, 2001.)

When thinking about conflict management, it is easy to see the person or persons that you are interacting with in a conflict situation as foes or enemies. It is easy to fall into this trap. The real enemies in a conflict are not the people we are interacting with however; the four real enemies are listed below

1. Our first enemy is the natural need to want to explain our side first. After all, we reason, if they understand our perspective, they will come to the same conclusions we did.
2. Our second enemy is our ineffectiveness as listeners. Listening is much more than being quiet so we can have our turn. It involves a real effort to understand another person's perspective.
3. Our third enemy is fear. Fear that we will not get our way. Fear of losing something we cherish. Fear we will be made to look foolish or lose face. Fear of the truth ... that we may be wrong.
4. Our fourth enemy is the assumption that one of us has to lose if the other is going to win; that differences can only be solved competitively.

Remember that people are not the enemy in conflict situations – re-frame that assumption, using the four enemies listed above, and you are on your way to resolving any conflict.



## How to Manage a Conflict

If you are ever faced with a conflict, it helps to have a plan. Below is a suggested pattern to follow when you are challenged by a situation that needs conflict management. There are three essential elements to effectively managing a conflict.

1. The Right Attitude
2. The Right Words
3. The Right Results

### 1. The Right Attitude

“Attitude is everything,” someone once said. Indeed, in conflict management it is the first necessary element to getting positive results. You must enter into any conflict with the right state of mind, the right expectations, and the right motivation for mutual success and satisfaction.

Earlier you read about the 5 Ways People Deal with Conflict. The fifth on that list, “Collaboration,” is the result that this how-to section can achieve. Approach a conflict with the attitude that expects collaboration and mutual satisfaction once the conflict is past.

#### Welcome Conflict (Re-Frame the situation)

Re-framing happens when you choose to set aside your current perspective (or lens that you see the world through), and re-frame the situation. Imagine a panoramic painting of a rural American landscape. This large painting includes an open field of wheat waving in the breeze along the right hand side. In the sky along that same right-hand side of the painting, the sun shines brightly down upon the flowing stalks. Along the left side, there is a farmhouse and red barn, with trees lining the furthest left edge of the painting. Moving in from the left edge of the landscape are dark storm clouds that threaten severe weather.

Now, imagine the only picture frame that you have is half the size of the painting. Depending on where you place the frame the displayed portion of the painting tells a very different story. Where is your frame?

Conflict is both inevitable in a DBSA chapter, and is a sign of a healthy DBSA chapter. If a conflict arises, enjoy the opportunity to exchange creative ideas, and practice your conflict management skills. Choose to re-frame your assumptions that conflict is necessarily negative. Conflict is the only way anything has ever been changed for the better.

#### “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

This phrase was coined by Stephen Covey in his book The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. It is the first (and possibly most important) tactic that you should employ when working to manage a conflict. Stopping to listen to the concerns or needs of the other person, and then digging deeper to get a thorough understanding of their wants and needs before you blurt out your side is an important skill to learn. This takes having an attitude of

understanding and genuine concern for the other person. You both have needs and wants, and you both want to be understood.

### **Focus on needs rather than positions**

Often in conflicts people take positions. It is like their views are founded in concrete, and their ears turn off. They have a position, and they are sticking to it. If we focus on our respective positions, it can be hard to get anything accomplished. Instead, have the attitude of wanting to fulfill needs, not pre-determined positions. Both parties have needs; the way to manage any conflict is find a way to fulfill everyone's needs.

### **Think "Win/Win"**

This is another phrase made popular by Covey in *"The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People."* This phrase encapsulates the attitude of collaboration. Many people enter into conflicts assuming that it must end up with one person winning, and the other person losing. If you understand that there is another option – win/win – then you will have an attitude that can be highly effective.

## **2. The Right Words**

Attitude is the first element to effectively managing conflict, but knowing what to say can be the hardest part. The following suggestions are not meant to be a script for dealing with a conflict situation, instead they are guidelines for you to incorporate into your own language. Using the right words in a conflict management situation takes practice. Keep these guidelines in mind, and you will find that using the right words is important to maintaining positive, healthy, collaborative relationships

### **Use "I" Language**

Just as in support group settings, "I" language is the way that you should communicate in a conflict management setting. Using the word "You" can lead to blame and a lack of focus on needs. Be sure to keep the conflict about the issue, and not the person. You can do this by saying things like, "I feel ...," "I think...," "I want..." This is preferable to saying, "You make me angry when you..." Blaming, and making it about the person can be counter-productive.

### **Ask Open Ended Questions**

Again, it is important to get a full understanding of the other person's needs and wants before moving on, so asking powerful, open ended questions in a positive, helpful tone is crucial. Here are some questions that may be helpful to ask: "What do you think about...? How does that affect you? I understand, tell me more about that... I'm very interested in your concern, how can I help? How do you feel about...?"

### **Never Interrupt**

Oftentimes conflicts arise simply because a person needs to feel like someone is listening to them. There is no better way to make a conflict worse than to interrupt someone when

they are trying to be understood. Resist the urge to interrupt when faced with a conflict. Again, seek first to understand, then to be understood.

### **Check your Understanding by Affirming and Restating**

Verify that you're accurately hearing each other. When they are done speaking, affirm that you think you understand them, and ask the other person to let you rephrase (uninterrupted) what you are hearing to ensure that you are hearing them correctly. To understand them more, ask more open-ended questions. Avoid why questions -- those questions often make people feel defensive. Make sure you are 100% sure that you understand their concerns and needs.

### **Turn it Around**

“What would make this situation better?” “How can we improve this situation in a way you believe we can both accept?” “I feel like we both understand each other, now how do you think we can find a way to fill both of our needs?” Saying something like this, can turn this conflict around and place the responsibility for solution in both of your hands. Often conflict continues because we focus on the problem, and not on finding solutions.

### **3. The Right Results**

Once you have entered into a conflict management situation with the right attitude, and you have used positive, affirming, solution-oriented language, then you can move toward results that are positive for all parties involved.

### **Agree to Disagree**

Acknowledge the fact that conflict exists. “It seems like we have two different viewpoints, so let’s work together for both of our needs.” Again, conflict isn’t necessarily a bad thing if it is framed appropriately. Agree with the other party that you both have different perspectives, and what is important is that you try to accomplish both of your objectives without sacrificing anything on the way there.

### **Brainstorm Multiple Solutions**

Many people enter into a conflict situation with an assumption that there is one right and one wrong solution. To move forward, take some time to constructively brainstorm all of the possible ways to resolve the conflict. All ideas are good ideas; some will be better than others. Write them all down and don’t judge the ideas. You’ll find that there are more solutions than any of you ever imagined. Working together to find all of the possibilities can create dramatic results.

### **Find points of Agreement to Build Upon**

After brainstorming, find something that you both agree upon (even the smallest thing), and work together from that starting point. Even if it is the minutest detail, use that point of agreement as a place to begin building your agreement together.

**Build a Plan Together to Move Forward**

The best resolutions to conflicts are those that are built together. Sit down and talk about ways to address both of your concerns. Build a plan, a timeline, and goals - whatever it takes to build consensus and resolution.

## **Communication – The engine that drives conflict management**

(This section is adapted from a web article entitled “*Communication Skills*” by Norman Schultz, a Research Assistant with the Conflict Research Consortium at The University of Colorado.)

Effectively managing conflicts really boils down to using sound communication practices. Basic communication skills and a basic understanding of the communication process can be extremely helpful when managing conflicts in your life.

### **Non-Verbal Communication Tips**

#### **Body Position**

Be certain that your body is in a listening posture. Lean in to the speaker slightly, to indicate your interest. Sit or stand facing the person directly to indicate that you are open to what they have to say.

#### **Smile Sincerely**

There is no better tool in the world than a sincere smile. Enter into a conflict situation with outward signs of your positive, solution-oriented frame of mind. Smile because you know that you’re going to meet the needs of everyone involved without sacrificing anything along the way.

#### **Eye Contact**

Look people in the eye. Show respect for the speaker by offering your full attention and focus. (Some cultures actually regard eye contact as disrespectful, so be sure to use this technique with appropriate audiences.)

#### **Nod with affirmation**

Physically indicate that you are listening and hearing what the other person is saying. Nod your head affirmatively, but be careful to not overdo it.

#### **Pause to think before talking**

Silence for a moment can be an indicator that you are thoughtfully considering the other person’s point of view. Pausing can also serve as a great opportunity for you to formulate your thoughts.

#### **No crosses**

Crossed arms and legs indicate a closed mind. Keep a listening posture. Welcome the thoughts of the other person.

## More on Communication

Norman Schultz, a Research Assistant with the Conflict Research Consortium at The University of Colorado says, "Communication problems in a conflict situation can form an escalating cycle: poor communication exacerbates conflict, and conflict subsequently diminishes the quality of communication."

Schultz suggests that people learn and exercise good communication skills, which can be broken down into five main areas of concern.

## 5 Communication Areas of Concern

*From Norman Schultz*

**1. The Communicator:** The one actually doing the communication is responsible for making themselves clear, avoiding hostile, misleading, or ambiguous content. Of course, this assumes the person actually wants to give their listeners access to the real message. Deception is sometimes chosen as a means to mislead and manipulate others, though that is not a constructive way to resolve a conflict.

**2. The Receiver:** A communicator's best efforts are foiled when those on the receiving end don't listen well. Poor listening may be caused by an overly competitive attitude, holding prejudices, preconceptions, or bias, or simply giving in to the tendency to hear only what one wants to hear. In the current age of information overload, we all tend to tune out others from time to time. Therefore, in reality, nearly all of us can work on being better listeners, all the more so if we become involved in a conflict.

**3. The Message:** The content of the message can directly relate to how easily it is communicated and how accurately it might be received. Great care must be taken when the content is technically complex, when it is an idea that is being introduced for the first time, or when it has controversial, emotionally charged implications. Where language barriers exist, care must also be taken to make sure subtleties are captured to the greatest possible extent - a difficult challenge considering that sometimes things just don't translate well between languages.

**4. The Means of Communication:** The medium of communication is more important than might be recognized at first. For example, most of us have used e-mail: you might have noticed (perhaps by paying the price of accidentally offending someone) that emotions and subtleties such as sarcasm or irony don't come through well via e-mail. Most would agree that face-to-face communication is the most comprehensive, including the important factors of voice inflection and body language. Yet face-to-face communication isn't always practical. Sometimes it might not even be desirable. Letters may seem a bit formal, but they also might take the "sting" out of an otherwise inflammatory communication. When any means is used, the limitations must be taken into account.

**5. The Communicating Environment:** When people are engaged in a calm and rational exchange, one's environment seems to be taken for granted. Yet when the mood is heated, where hostilities and mistrust are apparent, these take their toll on communication. It can be quite important to change the way or even what we communicate, depending on the environment in which it is presented. Sometimes it might be better to wait until the group's collective mood changes, especially when offering controversial ideas.

## **Policies that Solve Problems**

As suggested in an earlier section, having policies in place before conflict arises is a great way to ease the frustration that can potentially be caused by conflicts. These policies should be created and agreed upon by the whole group, so that when they need to be enforced, everyone understands the expectations, processes, and consequences.

Here is an example of a policy for coping with problematic situations originally written by one of our own DBSA chapters. This is only one example of a policy that you could write.

### **A sample policy for “Coping with Problem Situations during Support Group Meetings”**

It is important to be aware that some disruptive behaviors can be symptomatic of depression and bipolar disorder:

- denial
- irritability
- paranoia
- feelings of persecution
- frustration
- rage
- fear
- negativity

To some degree facilitators must be able to deal with this disruptive behavior, however there is a point when the behavior of one person is too disruptive to be tolerated. Often disruptive behavior is episodic and will pass; in fact, this individual could become an asset to our chapter. We encourage candid speech and try to provide a safe place to deal with feelings.

Following are some problem situations and suggested interventions:

#### **Monopolizing the Meeting**

After a reasonable amount of time talking:

- Interrupt the person to clarify the focus of the topic.
- Request comments or sharing of similar experiences from other group participants.
- Remind the group that time is limited for each person to enable all participants to participate.
- Ignore participants who repeatedly raise their hands to speak. You may need to directly explain to participants, who repeatedly raise their hands to speak, that they have had an opportunity to express their views and that others need time to do so.



### **Arguments between Participants**

- Intervene before the argument escalates or is too intense.
- Maintain neutrality.
- Emphasize the right to disagree and/or the need to compromise.

### **Crying Participant**

- Allow the expression of emotion with a matter of fact attitude.
- Don't imply that crying is inappropriate or disruptive.
- Provide an empathetic response, a tissue, and if appropriate, a touch on the person's hand or shoulder.
- Be patient to allow the person to collect their thoughts in case they want to continue sharing.
- If appropriate, encourage others to share times when they felt in despair.

### **Someone Leaves the Group in Anger**

- Assess the need for an immediate response.
- If indicated, ask two people to accompany the person to inquire if there is something that will help. Or, you can excuse yourself, ask someone to join you, and ask the group to continue until your return or turn the group over to a back-up facilitator.

### **Disruptive Participant**

If a participant is acting out physical or verbal aggression, it may be frightening to other group participants.

- Confront the person and set limits or boundaries for their behavior.
- As a last resort, ask the participant to leave the group temporarily until he can better control him/herself.
- See DBSA's Chapter Crisis Response Guide for more information on how to deal with an individual who is acting in a violent or threatening manner.

### **Gossiping or Violating Confidentiality Guidelines**

If this occurs during group, interrupt the discussion and restate the guideline. Outside the group, discuss the problem in private with the participant.

### **Abuse of Telephone or Email Lists**

Abuse of telephone lists occurs when calls or messages are made at inappropriate times or a person refuses to stop contacting people who have asked them not to.

- Emphasize the appropriate use of the list in the group.
- Confront the individual in private about complaints made by others.
- Ask the participant to stop contacting others.

## **Policy for the Removal of a Board Member**

Another policy to consider including in your chapter's official documentation is one that allows the chapter (collectively) to remove a board member if he or she is excessively problematic. Every organization deals, at one time or another, with individuals in elected or appointed positions that are not fulfilling their responsibility. Planning beforehand for such an occurrence can help your chapter hold yourselves and your leaders accountable for their responsibilities.

Through all of this, it is important to maintain a compassionate, understanding, and helping attitude. Remember, all of us have difficulties at one time or another. Support combined with accountability can be a fine line to walk, but it is a goal for your chapter to shoot for.

Below is an article from Board Cafe, published by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, in partnership with the Volunteer Consulting Group (of New York). The article addresses removing a board member from the leadership of a nonprofit organization. It is provided as a reference for you to consider.

### **Removing a Board Member**

Occasionally, a board member needs to be removed from the board. In some cases, a conflict of interest or unethical behavior may be grounds to remove an individual from the board. In other cases, the behavior of a board member may become so obstructive that the board is prevented from functioning effectively.

Strongly felt disagreements and passionate arguments are often elements of the most effective boards (and genuine debate); and arguing for an unpopular viewpoint is not grounds for board dismissal. But if a board member consistently disrupts meetings or prevents the organization from working well, it may be appropriate to consider removing the individual from the board.

Although board member removal is rare, organizations should provide for such removal in their bylaws. The following four strategies can be used to remove troublesome board members:

**1. Personal Intervention:** One-to-one intervention by the board president or other board leadership is a less formal solution to managing problem board members. If a board member has failed to attend several meetings in a row, or has become an impediment to the board's work, board presidents can meet informally with the board member in question. In person or on the telephone, the board president can request a resignation. Examples: "I respect your strong opinion that we have made the wrong hiring decision. But we can't continue debating the issue. If you don't feel you can wholeheartedly help us try to make the decision a success, I'd like you to consider leaving the board." "I'm having a hard time managing board meetings with your frequent interruptions and I am worried about losing board members due to the kinds of criticisms you make of them in meetings. I think it would be best if you would take a break from the board . . . you could resign now, and later,

when there's a different board president, talk with him or her about your re-joining the board."

**2: Leave of absence:** Make it possible for individuals to take a leave of absence from the board if they have health, work, or other reasons why they cannot participate fully during the current term. A board member can maintain formal membership (but not, for example, be included for purposes of determining a quorum) if he or she is on disability leave or taking a six months leave. Suggesting a leave of absence to a board member who is, for example, failing to do tasks he or she agreed to do offers a gracious exit and allows the board to assign tasks elsewhere.

**3. Term Limits:** Many boards establish term limits, such as two-year terms with a limit of three consecutive terms. In such a situation, a board member cannot serve more than six consecutive years without a break from the board. After a year off the board, an individual can once again be elected to the board. Proponents feel that term limits provide a non-confrontational way to ease ineffective board members off the board. Additionally term limits help the chapter share leadership and benefit from new ideas as new members join the board.

**4. Impeachment:** Organizational bylaws should describe a process by which a board member can be removed by vote, if necessary. For example, in some organizations a board member can be removed by a two-thirds vote of the board at a regularly scheduled board meeting.

### **Conclusion**

Conflicts within a chapter are normal and to be expected. Each chapter can minimize the effects of conflict by reading this guide and preparing policies (such as a policy for removing disruptive participants or board members) proactively. Leaders should be well-versed in their Chapter's policies, and these policies should be also shared with participants. Clear and transparent expectations can help facilitators and group participants have a more rewarding experience.

## DBSA Chapter Functions

# DBSA Chapter Fundamentals

## DBSA Chapter Outcomes

DBSA Chapters exist to *improve the lives of people living with mood disorders* on a local level. These chapters engage in four major functions to achieve this mission:

- **Support**  
The chapter offers consistent, comfortable, welcoming peer-led support services to their community that help people successfully manage their disease.
- **Education**  
The chapter provides scientifically sound, wellness-based educational programs and resources to community participants, and does not promote a specific medication, business, treatment or provider.
- **Community Outreach**  
The chapters receive and actively reach out to community members in need of chapter services. The chapter publicizes relevant community and chapter opportunities, and maintains communication lines for interested parties.
- **Advocacy**  
The chapter actively advocates for personal self-care and works with local advocacy agencies, as available, to help improve the lives of people living with mood disorders.

Through the four chapter functions, the exemplification of our chapter principles, and the dedication to our mission, policies and guidelines, DBSA chapters work toward the following outcomes:

- Help people live successfully with their condition.
- Provide emotional support and the wisdom of experience to peers, families, and friends.
- Build self-esteem and empower participants to actively improve their life, and the lives of others affected by depression or bipolar disorder.
- Eliminate discrimination and stigma related to depression and bipolar disorder.
- Reach all individuals in the community affected by depression or bipolar disorder with opportunities for support and empowerment.
- Educate chapter participants and the public -- through programs and resources -- about mood disorders.



## DBSA Chapter Principles

- **Focus on self-help**  
Each person has the ability to help themselves. Together we all know more than one of us alone. Everyone has value and something to add to the group process. Each of us is the authority on what we need.
- **Peer-leadership**  
We are all equals. Our chapters are governed by our participants, and our support groups are led by people living with a mood disorder or their friends/family.
- **Confidentiality**  
No one may publicly reveal information about the people attending chapter activities or what is said during a support group meeting. Exceptions to this policy are made only when safety is of concern.
- **Safety and Acceptance**  
Chapter activities and support groups are welcoming to all and foster a nurturing atmosphere.
- **Consistency**  
Chapter services are offered at consistent times and places for the comfort of participants.
- **Accessibility**  
Support groups are free of charge, and all activities are accessible to anyone who can benefit from them.

## Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

## DBSA Support Group Guidelines

- **Share the air**  
Everyone who wishes to share has an opportunity to do so. No one person should monopolize group time.
- **One person speaks at a time**  
Each person should be allowed to speak free from interruption and side conversations.
- **What is said here stays here**  
This is the essential principle of confidentiality, and MUST be respected by all.
- **Differences of opinion are o.k.**  
We are ALL entitled to our own point of view.
- **We are all equal**  
We accept cultural, linguistic, social, and racial differences and promote their acceptance.
- **Use "I" language**  
Because we do not participate in support groups as credentialed professionals, *We do not INSTRUCT or ADVISE.* We however do share from our own personal experiences. We are unique individuals, and only we know what is best for our own health (along with our doctor's recommendations). Example: "In my experience, I have found..."
- **It's o.k. not to share**  
People do not have to share if they do not wish to.
- **It's everyone's responsibility to make the discussion groups a safe place to share**  
We respect confidentiality, treat each other with respect and kindness, and show compassion.

