



Depression and Bipolar
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Chapter Inclusiveness Guide

Inclusiveness in DBSA Chapters

in-clu-sive (ĩn-kloo sĩv) *adj.*-- Recognizing the positive effects of a fair community and demonstrating an understanding of diversity and fairness through compassionate participation in a diverse society. Further, inclusiveness exists in various forms, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, culture, talent, ability and disability, sex/gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, language, socio-economic status, and learning styles.

The Spirit of Inclusiveness

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance's mission is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders. This includes all people living with mood disorders. Inherent in that mission is the spirit of inclusiveness.

An inclusive spirit means more than just saying that DBSA's services are open to anyone. As an organization, DBSA must actively work to not just open the doors to those who may happen to enter, but also put out the welcome mat of outreach to bring in people that wouldn't otherwise feel as though they belonged.

DBSA Values

DBSA's national office and local DBSA chapters state clearly the principles and guidelines by which the organization is guided. These principles and guidelines can be found on the document distributed by DBSA entitled "DBSA Chapter Fundamentals."

Within these principles and guidelines are five statements that speak directly to the topic of inclusiveness. These statements instruct DBSA leadership on the national and local levels on the importance of creating an inclusive atmosphere for chapter activities.

Here are just some of the DBSA statements that apply directly to the topic of inclusiveness:

DBSA Chapter Principles

- Safety and Acceptance: Chapter activities and support groups are welcoming to all, and foster a nurturing atmosphere.
- Accessibility: Support groups are free of charge, and all activities are accessible to anyone who can benefit from them.

DBSA Support Group Guidelines

- We are all equal: Accept cultural, linguistic, social, and racial differences and promote their acceptance.
- Differences of opinion are o.k.: We are all entitled to our own point of view.
- 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.

Why Inclusiveness in DBSA Chapters?

DBSA chapters depend upon the spirit of inclusiveness to operate effectively. Each chapter is open to anyone in the community that is affected by a mood disorder. In order for this to work effectively, DBSA chapters must seem inviting in their location, atmosphere, culture, and presentation.

A key function of DBSA chapters is providing support to people affected by mood disorders. Before support can be administered from person to person, each person involved must feel welcome, comfortable, and accepted by the other(s). The spirit of inclusiveness is vital to the health and operation of a DBSA chapter.

If Not You, Then Who?

You may feel that you are not the right person for the job of being inclusive. You are so busy with the other tasks and responsibilities that is required to run a successful chapter that to add actively working toward inclusiveness can seem like a daunting task.

You must lead by example and set the tone for the group. Many of the great advancements in making the world more inclusive have come from the small acts of one person. You can be that one person in your chapter and community that makes the effort to support all persons affected by mood disorders.

If you fail to make the effort toward an inclusive organization, then who will be the one to do it? If not you, then who?

Many Differences...

Words like inclusiveness, diversity, and multiculturalism are most often associate with race and ethnicity, but it encompasses so much more. Some of the major considerations when working toward an inclusive organization include:

- Ethnicity
- Race
- Gender
- Age
- Disability
- Sexual / Affectual Orientation
- Religions / Spirituality
- Education Level
- Experience Level
- Communication Styles
- Learning Styles
- Socioeconomic Situation
- Cultural Experience
- Etc... (any “differences” from YOU!)

Keeping all of these aspects of diversity in mind, and most importantly, keeping the spirit of inclusiveness in mind through your interactions, conversations, planning, and group dynamics will help everyone feel more comfortable and supported.

Inclusive Language

Using appropriate terminology, and always using “people first” language is a great way to start ensuring an inclusive chapter atmosphere. Cultural labels are a challenging topic no matter how they are approached. Each individual has their own preference of how others refer to them. For instance a gentleman of German heritage, living in New York City may prefer to be called:

- German-American
- Caucasian
- White
- New Yorker
- Northeasterner
- Man
- Person
- Jim

The best, and most inclusive label for this person is “Jim.” As we all have slight differences in skin color, ancestry, geographic origin, gender, etc. we are all also human beings.

Overcoming Bias

Overcoming bias is at the root of becoming an inclusive leader and having an inclusive DBSA chapter.

According to Sondra Thiederman, Ph.D., author of *Making Diversity Work* (2003), bias is an inflexible belief about a particular kinship group.

Essentially, bias is a pre-held, influential belief about something. Within the context of this guide to inclusiveness, bias refers to pre-held, influential beliefs about a particular group. These beliefs become a problem when they stand in the way of others feeling included. Bias is at the core of not being inclusive, and it takes an active effort to overcome this challenge.

Adapted from Thiederman’s book, *Making Diversity Work*, below are six tips toward becoming a more inclusive person by overcoming your own biases. These can be strong tools to help others overcome their biases as well, and when used together, make up a powerful system of becoming a more inclusive leader.

Tip 1: Become mindful of your biases

Most people have biases of one sort or another. It is inherent in the idea of culture that there be certain belief structures set up that are different from other cultures, and with this diversity of belief structures comes a diverse mix of biases.

It is important to not think that having a bias is the same as being a racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. These labels are seldom helpful, and they don't take into account the natural diversity of opinion, background, upbringing, regional association, etc. Using these labels is just another way of being exclusive and demonstrating more bias.

If most people have biases of one sort or another, then the first step in overcoming bias is to recognize it, be mindful of it, and understand that it exists.

Ask yourself some important questions...

- Do I have any biases?
- When do my biases most often arise?
- What groups of people do I have strong biases about?
- Might I have other biases that I am not admitting?
- Do I feel guilty about my biases?

Tip 2: Identify the costs and benefits of your biases

Ask yourself some important questions...

- What am I gaining from having this bias?
- How is this bias benefiting me?
- Does this bias make me generally happier or more upset?
- Am I proud of this bias?
- What am I losing from this bias?
- How is this bias holding me back?
- Is this bias obstructing the mission of our group?
- If I didn't have this bias, how would things be easier?

Tip 3: Figure out where your bias comes from

Bias does not just appear out of thin air. It comes from experience, background, peers, family, media, big events, little events, encounters, trauma, socioeconomic level, exposure, shelter, etc. The pre-held beliefs you may have about a group of people are probably because of experiences that you have had, or the things that you have heard about a small amount of people that fall within the parameters of that group.

Try to identify where your biases come from so you have a better idea of how they have developed in your mind. Examining your own biases (and behaviors that result from these biases) can also help you understand the behaviors and beliefs of others.

Ask yourself some important questions...

- What biases might I have picked up from my close family members?
- What major experiences have I had that might have contributed to my bias?
- Where have I been/lived/traveled that may have contributed to my bias?

- What has the media communicated to me that I might have absorbed; adding to my bias?
- Do I have acquaintances that add credit or discredit my biases?
- What other experiences or influences in my life may contribute to biased beliefs?

Tip 4: Identify commonalities

Biases about groups of people are based on a predication that you do not belong in that group. In other words, the group of people for which you may hold a bias is different from you in some way, or in many ways.

To counteract the separation caused by the differences that you perceive, try to close the gap caused by bias through building a bridge with commonalities that you can observe.

Ask yourself one important question (and keep asking it until you've answered it many times)...

What similarities do I share with these people for which I have some bias?

Tip 5: Commit to trying something new

Eradicating bias is a big job. This guide is not meant to stop bias in its readers once and for all. Instead, the job of halting your own bias must be handled in small steps. Instead of focusing on stopping your biased beliefs, try focusing on starting new behavior.

Commit to trying a new belief out for a while. Choose an inclusive statement, like: "That person is an individual, and just like me, wants to be healthy." Try that small change out, and see if your perspective is altered...even just a little. To eradicate bias, it must be replaced with inclusiveness.

Tip 6: Plan to avoid flare-ups

The first step toward an inclusive chapter is simply planning ahead to make sure your bias doesn't flare up out into the open air. Once you have identified your bias – even the most minor bias – it is important to the health and well-being of your DBSA chapter that you simply plan ahead to avoid bias flare-ups. If you know that you might say something that might be hurtful, identify what that might be and plan to avoid it.

This is easier said than done, but the intention to avoid these flare-ups is powerful tool toward an inclusive group. The most effective way to avoid bias flare-ups is through positive, healthy, and honest communication. Talk to those about whom you may have bias. Learn more about them as individuals. Bias seems to disappear once someone becomes more than a group participant, and shows themselves to be an individual.

Ideal State of Inclusiveness

The mission of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders. All of them.

Ideally, each chapter, event, program, and person involved in DBSA exudes the spirit of inclusiveness. All people are welcome to learn and gain support from the incredible individuals that make up the DBSA community. Ideally, DBSA's local, national, and international work reaches out into every community, every culture, and every person in need regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, etc.

To achieve this ideal state of inclusiveness, work must be done. Work must be done on the national level to promote the ideas, work must be done on the chapter level to reach out into local communities, and work must be done on the individual level to combat our individual biases.

Inclusiveness can be achieved, but it takes a commitment from each person, chapter, and organization to make it so. Are you willing to commit?