



Tips on Finding the Right Group for You

Why do it?

People join self-help support groups for 100s of different reasons. And people use groups in different ways as a support to their lives. You may attend a meeting only once or twice... or you may become a regular member. The main message of self-help is: It's up to you!

Abuse, Addictions, Bereavement, Body Image, Cancer, Caregiving, Disability, Employment Related, Ethnocultural, Family/Parenting, HIV/AIDS, Men, Mental Health, Physical Health, Relationships, Seniors, Sexuality, Women, Youth...

Our line-line database contains a list of over 400 self-help and mutual aid groups in the greater Toronto area.

You can search this list by the name of a specific group or by using a key word to see which groups deal with that issue.

www.selfhelp.on.ca

When to contact a group.

You don't need to be sure about joining a group to start looking into what is available. Tell people that you are considering and researching groups. Ask them questions. Ask if you can visit their group to learn more. When you do make phone calls to contact people, remember they are usually volunteers. They may not be able to talk or call you back immediately, so be patient.

Tracking down groups.

Sometimes it is easy to track down a group. But depending on your topic and your community, you may have to be a bit of a detective. Here are the usual places to look:

- Contact your nearest self-help centre. These organizations collect listings and share information about self-help groups in the local community. They may also be able to help you start a group. When you call you have the right to remain anonymous.
- Contact your local community information centre. These centres are becoming more popular as a central database for all types of community and social service organizations. They usually have listings of many self-help groups.
- Look out for listings in community papers and newsletters on topics related to your issue/experience of concern.
- Ask any health professionals or community workers who you know and trust.
- Search the internet. Start with the Self-Help Resource Centre www.selfhelp.on.ca

Shop around.

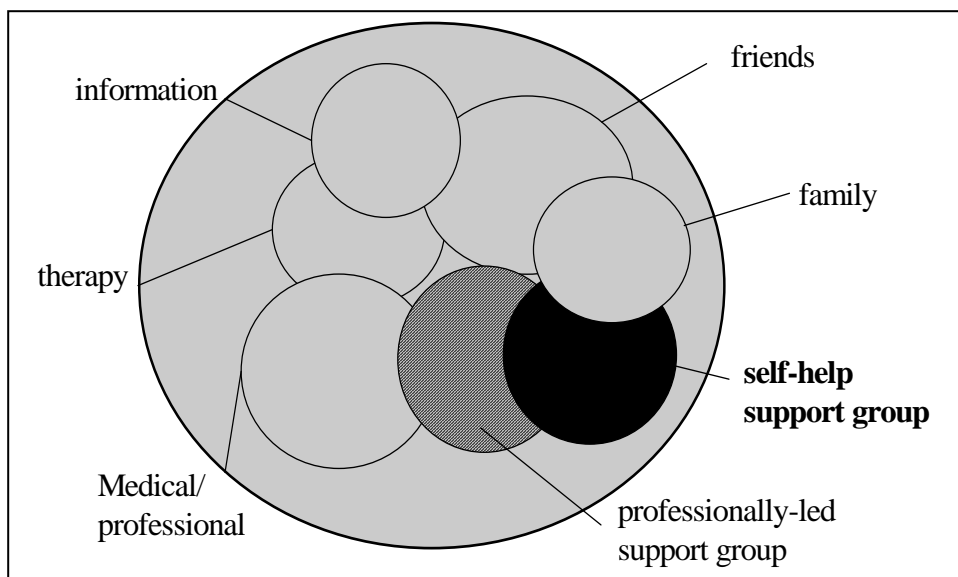
If there is more than one group related to your experience or issue, consider checking out several before making any decisions.

For more information, contact the Ontario Self-Help Network at (416) 487-4355 or (toll-free) 1-888-283-8806.
Email: oshnet@selfhelp.on.ca Website: www.selfhelp.on.ca

Understanding different sources of support:

When you have a challenge in your life, “sources of support” in your community are like the “basic food groups” for your health. Each support can provide you with different benefits; and each has its own limitations.

Self-help support groups are different from professionally-led support groups in several ways.



In most self-help support groups:

- The emphasis is on personal experience
- The aim is mutual support
- Group leaders are volunteers who are also members (they share the common experience of group members)
- Plans and decisions are made by the group as a whole
- Meetings are ongoing

In most professionally-led groups:

- Group leaders are paid professionals (e.g. social workers or healthcare providers)
- Group discussions are guided by formal educational materials
- Decision-making is led by the facilitator
- The group has a limited duration (e.g. 8 weeks)

Evaluate the benefits and limitations of different forms of support. Then choose the one(s) that best fit your needs and desires.

Evaluating a group: *Is this working for me?*

Once you have visited or joined a group you may want to evaluate your experience. Every group and every individual is unique. No group will offer you everything, but it is worthwhile to consider what you like best, and what you would like to change in a group (this evaluation can be an individual and/or a group process). Depending on your conclusions, you might work to make improvements within the group, or look for support elsewhere.

Components of a good group:

- ✓ I feel safe to open up and talk.
- ✓ I feel supported.
- ✓ I learn, give, and receive.
- ✓ I make friends.
- ✓ I can be a leader too.
- ✓ I can leave the group or rejoin when I want to.
- ✓ I feel safe to address feelings of tension or conflict when they arise.
- ✓ There is discussion of conflict (when it arises).
- ✓ There is change and laughter.
- ✓ Members graduate and celebrate.
- ✓ Membership goes up and down.
- ✓ It feels right for me.