**Tips for the Helping Professional**

*Exploring your role in the world of self-help*

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In self-help initiatives, people with a common life challenge share experiences and emotional support. They also exchange practical strategies and information about other supports in the community. Self-help is a recognized health promotion strategy that can be complementary to other forms of support. Following are some tips on how professionals can draw upon and contribute to the world of self-help.

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1. **Educate yourself through the experience of self-help**

   Many self-help/mutual aid groups are happy to have visitors who want to find out what takes place during a self-help/mutual aid group meeting. Attending a group related to your field of interest and/or relevant to your client/patients’ needs, can be an excellent learning experience.

2. **Make referrals to self-help groups**

   Self-help/mutual aid groups may be an effective supplement or follow-up to other forms of treatment and support. Assess whether your client/patient is ready for this experience. A person is not a good candidate for a self-help/mutual aid group if they are in active crisis, suicidal, actively using drugs/alcohol or feeling unable to conform to the behavioural expectations of the group. A person may be a better candidate if they are ready and able to both give and receive support with others who share a common concern or issue.

3. **Prepare your client/patient for the self-help/mutual aid group**

   You can contribute to the success of your client/patient’s experience by making sure they are fully informed about what to expect when they attend a self-help/mutual aid group: what will take place, and what will be expected of them. Make sure they understand the difference between a professionally led group and a member-led self-help group.

4. **Share your expertise with a self-help/mutual aid group**

   Self-help/mutual aid groups rely on outside resources to provide expert advice and/or professional assistance on special topics or concerns related to their group. You can offer your assistance as a guest speaker, consultant, or phone contact.

5. **Offer practical support to a self-help/mutual aid group**

   Helping a group find meeting space, providing free use of meeting space, fax, phone or photocopying and/or donating supplies such as paper or coffee are all examples of in-kind help that can really contribute to the success of a group.

6. **Promote referrals to a self-help/mutual aid group**

   If you know the group and feel comfortable, allow members to put up flyers on your office notice board or advertise in your newsletter. Tell your colleagues about the group and how they can make referrals. If you have visited the group, share your experience with your colleagues. On a broader basis, you can find out what kind of referral and resources are available at your local self-help centre and refer clients or colleagues there.
7. **Spread the word about the value of self-help/mutual aid**

Share your experiences with your colleagues. Invite representatives of a self-help group to speak to your staff team. Have the group members participate in special events like fairs, forums, etc. Introduce your colleagues to members of the group.

8. **Help start a new self-help/mutual aid group**

Introduce clients/patients who you know have a common concern and/or an interest in starting a new self-help/mutual aid group. Help them organize their first meeting and/or put them in touch with someone else who can support them.

9. **Help a group make the transition from professionally led to a (member-led) self-help/mutual aid group**

In professionally led groups, you can identify opportunities to make the transition to a self-help/mutual aid group and nurture the potential leaders. You can help members learn about self-help/mutual aid models and train them on the skills needed to carry out this process.

10. **Stay connected with local self-help centres, organizations and networks**

Local self-help centres and organizations can be an excellent resource to you and your clients/patients. They can: provide information about existing self-help/mutual aid groups, be a source for up-to-date research about self-help/mutual aid, support a new or ongoing self-help/mutual aid group with their development issues, or offer skill training opportunities for yourself, your clients/patients, your staff and/or your colleagues.

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**For More Tips and Resources:**

- If you are not sure of your role within a group: in the spirit of self-help, ask the group!
- For more resources about self-help and the role of the professional, contact the Ontario Self-Help Network, oshnet@selfhelp.on.ca, (416) 487-4355.

The Ontario Self-Help Network is a program of The Self-Help Resource Centre, funded by the Health Promotion Branch of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The Self-Help Resource Centre is a United Way member agency. Visit our website at [www.selfhelp.on.ca](http://www.selfhelp.on.ca).