

# 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 21 million people in the United States living with depression or bipolar disorder, no one with these conditions needs to feel alone. DBSA support groups are places where people with mood disorders and those who care about them can share experiences, discuss wellness skills, and offer hope to one another.

## Why attend a DBSA support group?

DBSA support groups provide the kind of sharing and caring that is crucial for a lifetime of wellness. DBSA support group participants say that their 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 wellness 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.



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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

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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 alive.

– DBSA support group participant

## What benefits do DBSA support groups offer?

Benefits*	Number of 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%

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



## How 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.
- With continued group attendance, people felt more motivated to follow their treatment plan.

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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 free of charge.

**Acceptance and Safety:** Participants make the group a safe place by fostering a supportive, trustworthy, respectful, nonjudgmental atmosphere. All those attending have an opportunity to share strategies, tips, and experiences that can help others live successfully with depression or bipolar disorder. Participants have the common goal of wanting to find and maintain wellness 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 safety is of concern.

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

**Other services:** Most groups offer free educational materials about mood disorders and many maintain lending libraries, publish newsletters, provide information on area mental health services, or are involved in outreach or advocacy in their local community.

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I think the reason I was depressed for so long was that I felt excluded from everything, even my family. Finding people who accept you for who you are—I can't put a price tag on that.

– DBSA support group participant

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

**Therapy or Treatment:** Group participation 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 members do not seek to diagnose one another, and DBSA 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-and-care variety, in which all are encouraged to share, if they wish to.

**A Religious Meeting 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 mood disorders, groups focus on day-by-day coping, not on self-pity.

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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 support group?

**Visit us online:** At [DBSAlliance.org/FindSupport](https://DBSAlliance.org/FindSupport), you can browse a listing of support groups 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.

**Call us:** 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 group 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 returned promptly.

**Or start a group in your area:** DBSA can help you establish a group, if there's not one near you. Simply contact our Chapter Relations staff at (800) 826-3632 x156, or send an e-mail to [startup@DBSAlliance.org](mailto:startup@DBSAlliance.org). We'll be glad to help you get started.



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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.

– Former DBSA Board Chair William P. Ashdown

## Does DBSA offer online support?

Yes, DBSA offers live, real-time support group meetings on the Internet for people living with mood disorders, their friends and family. Online support is ideal for those who live too far from their local DBSA group, have limited mobility, or simply wish to remain anonymous. Led by peer facilitators, these meetings follow the same guidelines and a similar format to DBSA's in-person support groups. Registration is required, but there's no charge to register or participate. To learn more, or to register, visit [DBSAlliance.org/OSG](https://www.DBSAlliance.org/OSG).

# Help spread the word about peer support

**If you are someone with a mood disorder, or a loved one, you can:**

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

**If you are a health care provider, you can:**

- Refer your patients or clients to a DBSA group.
- Post information about DBSA support group meetings and contacts in your area.
- Distribute DBSA educational materials.
- Direct people to [DBSAlliance.org](https://DBSAlliance.org) for detailed information on mood disorders or to find a support group.
- Assist or advise a DBSA support group in your area.
- Help your patients or clients start a DBSA support group.

# Help others find support

We hope you found the information in this brochure helpful. If you would like to support DBSA's mission, please consider making a donation by calling (800) 826-3632 or by visiting [DBSAlliance.org/Donate](https://DBSAlliance.org/Donate).

DBSA does not endorse or recommend the use of any specific treatment, medication or resource mentioned in this brochure. For advice about specific treatments or medications, individuals should consult their physicians and/or mental health professionals.

This brochure is not intended to take the place of a visit to a qualified health care provider.

# Chapter Start-Up Guide Request

**Yes, I am interested in establishing a DBSA chapter in my area.** I understand that the main purpose of DBSA chapters is to share information and offer mutual support related to participants' experiences with depression or bipolar disorder. I also understand that the primary participants in support group meetings are persons diagnosed with one of these conditions or those who believe they may have a mood disorder, as well as their friends and family. Meetings are open to the public and free of charge.

**Please send me a Chapter Start-Up Guide**  
(select one)

in electronic form via email (preferred)

as a hard copy via postal mail

**Proposed area to be served:**

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**My contact information:**

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

E-MAIL

**Do we have permission to share your contact information with others in your area** who are also interested in starting a DBSA chapter in the community?

Yes  No

**How did you hear about DBSA?**

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**Please return this form to DBSA**

Attn: Chapter Relations

Fax: (312) 642-7243

**You can also fill out this form online at**  
[DBSAlliance.org/Startup](http://DBSAlliance.org/Startup)

All information provided is held in strict confidence and at no time will be distributed to outside organizations.





**DBSA**

We've been there.  
We can help.

Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

**The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)** is the leading peer-directed national organization focusing on the two most prevalent mental health conditions, depression and bipolar disorder, which affect more than 21 million Americans, account for 90% of the nation's suicides every year, and cost \$23 billion in lost workdays and other workplace losses.

DBSA's peer-based, wellness-oriented, and empowering services and resources are available when people need them, where they need them, and how they need to receive them—online 24/7, in local support groups, in audio and video casts, or in printed materials distributed by DBSA, our chapters, and mental health care facilities across America.

Through our extensive online and print resources and our more than 700 support groups and nearly 300 chapters, DBSA reaches millions of people each year with in-person and online peer support; current, readily understandable information about depression and bipolar disorder; and empowering tools focused on an integrated approach to wellness.

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### **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance**

55 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 490

Chicago, IL 60604

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

Fax: (312) 642-7243

**DBSA**lliance.org

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Please visit [DBSAlliance.org](http://DBSAlliance.org) to connect with support and for detailed information about the conditions and treatment of, and helpful wellness tools for, mood disorders.

## **Your Local DBSA Group**

DATE

TIME

LOCATION

QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT