

DBSA Support Groups: An Important Step on the Road to Recovery



**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 affected by depression or bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression), no one with these illnesses has to feel alone. DBSA support groups are places where people with mood disorders and those who care about them can share experiences, discuss coping skills and offer hope to one another.

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

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 DBSA 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 treatment 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.

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 here....

— 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.
- The longer people had attended a DBSA group, the less likely they were to have stopped medication against medical advice, and the fewer barriers to following their treatment plan they experienced.
- More than half of the people who were not following their treatment plans when they began attending their DBSA groups became more motivated to do so over time with continued group attendance.

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 completely 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 cope successfully with depression or bipolar disorder. Participants have the common goal of wanting to live successfully with their illness 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 the safety of an individual is in danger.



Peer leadership: Each support group meeting is facilitated by someone with depression or bipolar disorder or a family member. The facilitator guides discussion, provides focus to the group and helps ensure that group principles/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.

**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/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.

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?

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 Daylight 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 promptly returned.

Visit us online. At www.DBSAlliance.org, 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.

Or start a group in your area. DBSA can help you establish a group, if there's not one near you, or if you are seeking a special group (such as teens only). Simply contact our Chapter Relations staff at one of the numbers listed on the previous page, or send an e-mail to startup@DBSAlliance.org. We'll be glad to help you get started.

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 volunteer peer facilitators, these meetings follow the same format and guidelines as DBSA's in-person support groups. Each group meets once a week, and consumers and loved ones may attend as many sessions as they'd like. Registration is required, but there's no charge to register or participate. To learn more, or to register, visit www.DBSAlliance.org/OSGhome.

What else can people do to help?

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.
- Assist or advise a support group in your area.
- Help your patients or clients start a support group.



Request for Chapter Start-Up Guide

- 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 and bipolar disorder. I also understand that the primary participants in support group meetings are persons diagnosed with one of these disorders 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 e-mail
 as a hard copy via postal mail

Proposed area to be served: _____

My contact information:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

PHONE _____

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? _____

Please return this form to DBSA:

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Attn: Chapter Relations
730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501
Chicago, IL 60654
Fax: (312) 642-7243
You can also e-mail your information to
startup@DBSAlliance.org

CUT ON DOTTED LINE

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

Please help us continue our efforts.

We hope you found the information in this brochure useful. Your gift will help us continue to assist people with mood disorders in finding, forming and maintaining support groups. Please call (800) 826-3632 or visit www.DBSAlliance.org for more information.

Yes, I want to make a difference. Enclosed is my gift of:

\$100 \$50 \$20 Other _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

FAX _____

E-MAIL _____

Check or money order (payable to DBSA)
 VISA MasterCard Discover AmEx

ACCOUNT NUMBER _____

EXP. DATE _____

NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CREDIT CARD _____

SIGNATURE (REQUIRED) _____

- I wish my gift to remain anonymous.
- Please send me _____ donation envelopes to share.
- I'd like details on including DBSA in my will.
- I have enclosed my company's matching gift form.

If you would like to make your gift a Memorial or Honorary Tribute, please complete the following:

- In memory of/In honor of (circle one): _____

PRINT NAME _____

- Please send an acknowledgment of my gift to: _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

Please send this form with payment to:

DBSA, 730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501, Chicago, IL 60654-7225 USA

Questions? Call (800) 826-3632 or (312) 642-0049.

Fax credit card payments to (312) 642-7243.

Make secure online donations at www.DBSAlliance.org.

DBSA is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) Illinois corporation. All donations are tax deductible based on federal and state IRS regulations. Consult your tax advisor for details. All information is held in strict confidence and will never be shared with other organizations. **Thank you for your gift!**

CUT ON DOTTED LINE

DBSA does not endorse or recommend the use of any specific treatment or medication mentioned in this brochure.

For advice about specific treatments or medications, individuals should consult their physicians and/or mental health professionals.



We've been there.
We can help.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is the leading patient-directed national organization focusing on the most prevalent mental illnesses. The organization fosters an environment of understanding about the impact and management of these life-threatening illnesses by providing up-to-date, scientifically based tools and information written in language the general public can understand. DBSA supports research to promote more timely diagnosis, develop more effective and tolerable treatments and discover a cure. The organization works to ensure that people living with mood disorders are treated equitably.

Assisted by a Scientific Advisory Board comprised of the leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders, DBSA has more than 1,000 peer-run support groups across the country. Nearly five million people request and receive information and assistance each year. DBSA's mission is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501
Chicago, Illinois 60654-7225 USA
Phone: (800) 826-3632 or (312) 642-0049
Fax: (312) 642-7243
Website: www.DBSAlliance.org

*Visit our updated, interactive website for important
information, breaking news, chapter connections,
advocacy help and much more.*

Your Local DBSA Group

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____