



NAMI Support Groups: What to Expect

It is completely natural to feel vulnerable, raw, exposed, or dependent when first considering attendance at a support group. The decision to attend a support group can give rise to questions and discomfort before walking through the door. We hope after reading this fact sheet you feel more comfortable trying out a local support group in your community!

Where can I find a meeting?

An updated calendar of NAMI (and other) mental health support groups can be found on our website at <http://namiseattle.org/support-groups>. You may also contact our Helpline at (206) 783-9264 or helpline@namiseattle.org to request a copy.

How much does it cost to attend a NAMI support group?

NAMI support groups are completely free and donations are not expected. NAMI is committed to providing free services and programs to all who need them.

Do I need to sign up in advance?

No; however, it is usually recommended that you reach out to the phone number or email address provided for each group before attending for the first time. That way you can confirm that the group will be meeting on the date you plan to attend (meetings are occasionally cancelled due to holidays, illness, or other factors). It will also give you the opportunity to ask the facilitator any questions you have beforehand.

Who will be at a NAMI support group meeting?

Our support group calendar specifies who is welcome at each support group. Some groups are for individuals with a specific mental health condition or experience, some are for family and friends of someone with a mental health condition, and some are open to anyone with a connection to someone experiencing a mental health condition. If it is not clear from the description whether a particular group is appropriate for you, you are welcome to contact the group facilitator in order to clarify.

Who leads the group?

Our support groups are led by trained peer volunteers who are also a member of that particular support group. Their role is to help guide the meetings so that they are as useful and supportive as possible for all attendees. Group leaders might share resources, or describe what worked or did not work for them in the past, but always in the role of a peer and not an expert.

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Is this the same as group therapy?

No. Group therapy is run by a mental health professional, such as a therapist or counselor. In a support group all participants – including the facilitators – are treated as equals. No one attends as, or acts as, a therapist, expert or clinician.

What usually happens first?

- Someone will greet you and share how the group is set up.
- You may be given a nametag so that everyone can remember names.
- There is a sign-in sheet asking for basic information; this is to help NAMI Seattle keep a count of how many people attend our support groups. You are *not* required to share any information you're uncomfortable sharing. NAMI Seattle will not share your information with anyone.
- As the group begins, someone will read the group guidelines.
- Everyone is given an opportunity to briefly introduce themselves (you may decline if you are uncomfortable sharing).

Do I need to disclose my story or situation?

No. No one is required to speak. Everyone has the option to decline to speak. If you do choose to share, your information will never be shared outside of the group. You may use only your first name if this makes you more comfortable.

Why should I attend a support group? (adapted from

<http://www.harmonyplace.org.au/downloads/Manual%20-%20How%20to%20Create%20and%20Sustain%20a%20Support%20Group.pdf>)

- To decrease isolation and stigma, to find community and understanding.
- To share information, keeping each other up to date on news.
- To find role models, and to act as a role model for others. Meeting others who are struggling with similar issues and making progress in their lives can be inspiring and encouraging.
- To get new ideas about how to overcome challenges.
- To have a safe place to talk about deeply personal issues, experiences, problems, thoughts, fears, and achievements.
- To gain support and assistance on your recovery journey.
- To reduce anxiety, increase hope, and help your sense of overall well-being.

The mission of NAMI Seattle is to fulfill the unmet mental health needs within our community through referral, support, education, and outreach.