

Peer Support Groups and Group Therapy: A Comparison

A support group setting is one where members can do just that – offer support and show understanding and empathy because of shared experiences. Since everyone in the group is a peer, there is no expert. There is no right or wrong. Each individual should feel safe enough to say what s/he feels and/or thinks and be accepted by the group.

Besides being able to vent in a support group, there is the opportunity to see that one's emotions are the same as others', not abnormal or shameful. Emotions just are. This can be liberating.

Support sessions also provide an ideal setting for problem solving. Other people's perspectives, resourcefulness and creativity are invaluable when a group member is feeling stuck and needs practical suggestions.

Finally, a support group is a social event. People should come away feeling they have met with old and new friends and had a pleasant experience. If a support group does nothing else, it should provide an opportunity for connection, creating time to counteract the isolation in which many peers live.

Objectives of a Peer Support Group:

- Offer support through understanding and empathy
- Share insights about similarities of experiences
- Solve problems by using the combined wisdom of group members
- Celebrate good times and be there during bad ones

Objectives of a Therapy Group:

- Observe and interpret behavior in the group to provide insight
- Analyze relationships within the group to facilitate interpersonal change
- Provide professional analysis of interactions and responses



Important: We do not do therapy in NAMI peer support groups.