



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

DBSA Pocket Facilitator Guide

*A supplemental guide to help
you facilitate recovery-oriented
DBSA support groups.*

View the full DBSA Support Group Facilitation Guide on the Chapter Management section of the DBSA website at www.DBSAAlliance.org.

Important Chapter Phone Numbers

Chapter: _____

Facilitator: _____

Phone: _____

Facilitator: _____

Phone: _____

Professional Advisor: _____

Phone: _____

Chapter Board Member: _____

Phone: _____

Chapter Board Member: _____

Phone: _____

Closest Hospital: _____

Phone: _____

Local Hotline Number: _____

DBSA Support Group Guidelines

DBSA recommends that facilitators begin each group by reviewing these guidelines to help participants learn and commit to the group standards.

■ **Share the air**

Everyone who wishes to share has an opportunity to do so. No one person should monopolize the group time.

■ **One person speaks at a time**

Each person should be allowed to speak free from interruption and side conversations.

■ **What is said here stays here**

This is the essential principle of confidentiality, and **MUST** be respected by all.

■ **Differences of opinion are OK**

We are ALL entitled to our own point of view.

■ **We are all equal**

Accept cultural, linguistic, social and racial differences and promote their acceptance.

■ **Use “I” language**

Because we do not participate in discussion groups as credentialed professionals, **NO ONE CAN INSTRUCT**. We however can share from our own personal experiences. As an example, we cannot say – “you should do X.” we should say: “when I was faced with that problem, I...” Always put things in the context of our own experiences.

■ **It’s OK not to share**

People do not have to share if they do not wish to. Much can be gained by just listening.

■ **It’s everyone’s responsibility to make the discussion groups a safe place to share.**

Respect confidentiality, treat each other with respect and kindness, and show compassion.

What are DBSA Support Groups?



DBSA support groups are gatherings of peers who are there to help each other help themselves. It is important to remember that everyone follows their own unique path to wellness and

recovery, using different tools and different tactics of their own choice. For many people, DBSA support groups are one important part of their wellness plan.

What is the goal of DBSA Support Groups?

Most of us would agree that the main goal of DBSA support groups is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders.

We come together in support groups to share our experiences, learn from one another, gain strength and hope... all with the end-goal in mind of improving our life.

What is recovery?

Recovery from mental illness is a new concept for some people, and for others it is something with which they are very familiar. Recovery means different things to different people.

DBSA uses the following definition when talking about recovery: A full and meaningful life in the community.

Whatever your definition, the premise of recovery is the same. Recovery is more than a reduction of symptoms or being “stable.” It’s about attaining the life you want.



Core Elements of a Recovery-Oriented DBSA Support Group

As you think about what the DBSA support group offers to people, as you think about the values that the DBSA support group truly believes in, think about these statements and consider how you can move the group even closer to achieving these elements in your support groups.

- Provide **hope** in every interaction
- **Empower** others in simple ways
- Use **person-first language**
- Focus on **strengths**
- Promote personal **choice**
- Help everyone leave committed to **action**

The Facilitator's Personal Commitment

It can be helpful to review the following commitment prior to support group meetings to remind yourself of your role and your desires for the group. Take some time to think about what else you would like to include in your personal commitment.

As the facilitator for this DBSA support group, I commit to:

- Listen more than I talk.
- Empower participants to support each other.
- Give and receive support personally.
- Use the DBSA guidelines.
- Be compassionate and understanding.
- Work towards a hopeful environment.
- Ask for help when I need it.
- Leave medical talk to medical professionals.
- Empower the group to focus on recovery-oriented discussions.

- _____
- _____
- _____

*Dream lofty dreams, and
as you dream, so shall you become.
Your vision is the promise of what
you shall at last unveil.*

— John Ruskin



Sample DBSA Support Group Meeting Outline

DBSA support groups are not required to operate according to a rigidly prescribed formula. The sample meeting format shown here incorporates the elements used by many of our groups and is intended to guide you. Try using this as a starting point for your group's discussion of member needs and how your group can be structured to meet those needs.

- Gathering time
- Welcome
- Review what will happen at the meeting
- Review discussion guidelines
- Check-In
- Discussion
- Close the meeting

Detailed Meeting Agenda

Gathering or social time

- Welcomes people ... breaks the ice

Have one or more of your volunteers greet people as they arrive and thank them for coming. Encourage new comers to sign in on the list provided, including telephone and e-mail address, if available. Volunteers can invite guests to have refreshments if these are available and help introduce newcomers to others in the room.

Special note: Keep track of how many people have arrived so that you can quickly and easily decide how many groups you will need to split into. DBSA recommends that you have no more than 10–12 participants in each support group.

Welcome

- Brings people together and gets their attention ... provides a focus point

What you might say:

“Hello, everyone, and thank you for coming to the DBSA support group tonight. We know that it may not have been easy for you to make the decision to attend. My name is Katie, and I’d like to welcome you.”

Add any needed “housekeeping” announcements: where people can pick up materials, location of restrooms and water fountains, when the meeting is scheduled to end, etc. Even if the same people attend the support group regularly, it is important to offer a formal welcome to everyone.

*He who has hope
has everything.*

—Arabian Proverb

Review what will happen at the meeting

- Moves the group to the “business” part of the meeting ... everyone has the same information and knows what to expect

What you might say:

“Now it’s time to review the format and schedule for the meeting. Tonight we will follow a procedure recommended by DBSA and designed to give everyone an opportunity to participate as they are comfortable. First we will check in, when each of us will have an opportunity to introduce ourselves by first name and tell us why you have come to this meeting.”

“After the check-in, we will have a talk about our mood disorders and share experiences, personal feelings, information, and strategies for living successfully with these illnesses. The discussion will last until [time] when the meeting will end.”

“Before we begin to talk with each other, I’d like to review the guidelines for our discussion.”

State the DBSA support group guidelines which are provided at the beginning of this guide. Stating guidelines at each meeting is valuable for many reasons. It insures everyone is responsible for following the same guidelines and helps people learn and commit to the group standards.

This is also the time for the facilitator to outline her/his role. “To facilitate” means “to assist or make easier.” Facilitators, therefore, assist the group by making easier the conversations and sharing that goes on at self-help meetings.

*A weakness is a strength
not yet developed.*

— Benjamin Franklin

Check-in

- A chance for each person to find out who else is at the meeting, and what their issues are ... to know that they're not alone

Each person has an opportunity to introduce themselves by their first name and tell the group why they came to the meeting that day.

What you might say/hear:

- “My name is Mary, AND ...

I think I might be depressed – I'm not sure.”

I'm here to learn more about ... ”

I'm just here to listen.”

I just spent two weeks in the hospital.”

I want to know how I can make my brother stay on his medication.”

I was just diagnosed with bipolar disorder and need more information.”

I just can't go on the way I have been.”

My doctor told me I should come to this meeting.”

My medication just isn't working.”

[Crying]

[Silent]

The facilitator briefly reacts to each person as a way of acknowledging his or her presence. Don't start discussion of specific questions or topics at this time; keep the introductions going. It is natural for some people to want to tell their whole story now, but it is essential that the group facilitator remind each person that this is a check-in time only, and that everyone will have the opportunity to talk more soon.

What the facilitator might say after each person has an opportunity to speak:

- “Thank you, Mary.”
- “We’re glad you’re here.”
- “Thank you for sharing that.”
- “Each of us has a lot of questions. We’ll be talking about [particular subject of interest] more after we’re done checking in.”
- “It took a lot of courage for you to come here tonight – thank you.”
- “No one is required to speak. We’re glad you’re here.”

What else might you say?

- _____
- _____

Open group discussion

■ The heart of why a DBSA support group exists
Sometimes a topic of common concern has been identified during the check-in, and the facilitator can begin discussion using this topic. For example, if several participants have expressed frustration about communicating with their family, the facilitator might say, “It sounds as if a number of us are having challenges in working with our families. As we go around the circle tonight, you are all welcome to address the challenges or successes you have had in communicating with your family along with anything else you’d like to discuss. Perhaps we can determine a number of possible approaches for ourselves in dealing with this concern.”

The facilitator can also begin discussion by asking if anyone would like to be the first to share or just ask the person to their left or right to begin.

Close the meeting

- Brings closure to the session

How to do it:

- Give a 10- or 15-minute notification before discussion is scheduled to end
- Ask members to make any final comments or summaries
- Briefly summarize what has happened at the meeting
- Ask people how they feel the group has helped them and how they will move forward on their recovery journeys before the next meeting. Some sample questions include:
 - What will we take away from the meeting that will help us?
 - What will we commit to doing as we move forward into the week?
 - What new strengths will we explore?
 - What part of our recovery or wellness plan will we work on this week?
- Announce next meeting date/time/place OR (if this is your first meeting) get commitment from attendees to meet again and determine date/time/place
- Encourage new attendees to attend 3 or 4 times before deciding whether a support group is right for them or not
- Encourage attendees to tell others about the group, including their doctor/other mental health professional
- Ask for volunteers to help with the next meeting
- Refer to fact sheets or other information/materials that are provided to participants
- Thank everyone for coming

*One kind word can warm
three winter months.*

—Japanese saying

Discussion Starters

If you're having a hard time getting conversation going during the open group discussion or if you have a consistent group of attendees and they seem to talk about the same topics each time the group gathers, consider asking participants to share their thoughts on a particular topic when it is their turn. Again, no one dictates discussion, but introducing possible topics at the beginning of the meeting is a great facilitator tactic. Some potential topics are:

- Recognizing the signs of a mood disorder
- Talking to a therapist or doctor
- Effects of the illness on family and friends
- Fears members share
- Stigma members face
- Doing things that make you feel good
- Non-medication techniques
- Adhering to your treatment plan
- Relationships

Additional discussion starters:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Tips for Facilitators

During discussion, facilitators do only what their position calls for: facilitating smooth discussion. The main role of the facilitator is to be an active, supportive listener. To do this:

- **Restate** – Members need to know that others have been listening. Restating what others say in other words is the simplest way to let them know you are paying attention.
- **Question** – Ask questions that seek more information or clarify what a member has said: “Maurice, can you tell us more about ... ?”
- **Redirect** – Ask other group members to respond to what has been said: “I wonder if anyone has some thoughts about what Jennifer has just shared.” This can be a good technique for drawing out quieter group members and involving them in the discussion.
- **Reflect** – Identify the feelings that underlie what is being said. This is done in an intentionally tentative way: “It sounds as though ...”
- **Validate** – If you have experienced some of the feelings being expressed by a member, say so and tell them you understand why they feel that way. You can do this without agreeing with someone or condoning unacceptable behavior.
- **Summarize** – Review what the conversation has been about up to the present. This puts things in perspective, refocuses discussion, and shows where discussion can go.
- **Share** – Facilitators shouldn’t forget that they are also group members. They should share feelings and experiences when it is their turn.

*Heal the past; live the present;
dream the future.*

—Anonymous

There is nothing wrong with silence at any time during the discussion. A break in conversation allows people to reflect on what was said and collect their thoughts. Silence sometimes encourages people who haven't talked to speak up.

The facilitator should be prepared to deal firmly but kindly with individuals who are hypomanic, hostile, antagonistic, discouraged, and depressed. Remember that everyone in the group, including you, has experienced difficulty in their lives. Strive to be patient, kind, and empathetic, but remember that the purpose of the meeting is to provide productive support for everyone. If one individual is dominating discussion, for example, it is appropriate for the facilitator to intervene and move on to another member of the group. In this situation you may want to try some of the following statements:

- “It sounds like there’s a lot going on in your life right now. Let’s hear from a few other people and then if we have time at the end of the discussion we’ll come back to you.”
- “I think we’re clear now about your ideas, John. Who else would like to respond?”
- “It seems we’ve moved from the original topic. Is that what we want to do?”
- “Do you have an opinion about that, Jane?”
- “Let’s share the air to make sure everyone’s getting a chance to participate.”

What are some other things you might say?

- _____
- _____

If someone appears to be unable to participate productively in discussion, is in crisis or suicidal, be prepared to summon assistance or make sure that the individual in question gets the help they need from another resource. See the “Handling Problems” section for more information.

Empowering Others Through Good Facilitation

Many of us who get involved in leadership roles have a tendency to be problem-solvers and like to offer advice in order to help people. As a facilitator though, our role is actually to help get out what others need to get out – not to solve their problems or even offer advice. This can be very difficult for many of us – especially if people seem to be asking for our advice. Here are some statements you may want to try using to make sure you’re facilitating conversation rather than giving advice.

- “What experiences have other people here had that Sean might find helpful as he deals with this?”
- “Out of all the problems you’ve talked about tonight, which one is most important?”
- “What are some things you think would help? Does anyone else have additional ideas?”

What are some other things you might say?

- _____
- _____

As you continue to put questions back to the group and the individual you will likely be surprised at how many possible solutions they can come up with. And, added bonus, everyone leaves feeling like they hold the power to change their lives in their own hands!

*If you get up one time more than
you fall, you will make it through.*

— Unknown

Handling Challenges

We are peers. We are not professional counselors. Don't expect to be able to deal effectively with every difficult situation that arises.

The following information is intended to give you some basic information designed to help you handle common challenges within support groups. For more detailed information, please see the DBSA Conflict Management Guide which is available on the Chapter Management section of DBSA's website.

- **If you become overwhelmed or things get out of hand – get help.** Quietly ask another person in the group to go get one of the chapter leaders or another facilitator. Because you are a peer, and not a professional, it is responsible to ask the group to determine how to handle a situation that has gotten out of hand.
- **Jot down problems and share them with other facilitators,** bring them up when meeting with the Professional Advisor.
- **Reference DBSA conflict management tools, crisis intervention tools,** etc. for assistance with challenging situations.

If you determine that a challenging situation, with personal anger involved, is one that should be processed by the entire group (as opposed to something that should be addressed in a one-on-one setting), here are some suggestions to help you facilitate the discussion:

1. **Clarify the issue.** What exactly is each person angry about? Can each person state clearly his or her own viewpoint and how it differs from the other person's? Sometimes a simple misinterpretation is at the root of the problem.
2. **Ensure group back-up support.** If each party in an argument feels some degree of support or understanding from some people in the group the intensity of their anger may be reduced somewhat, as they don't feel so alone.
3. **Encourage "I" Statements.** Speaking from one's own experiences and feelings is more conducive to productive

10 Tips for Preventing Conflict

The first step in successfully managing conflict is working to prevent it altogether. Here are ten tips to remember to help you and the other support group participants prevent the challenges of conflict before they arise.

1. Gossip: Just say no
2. Praise: Always in short supply
3. Don't burn bridges
4. Communicate
5. Forego public shame and blame
6. Talk to everyone
7. Include the group in group decisions
8. Give constructive feedback often
9. Intentionally seek participants outside the "inner circle"
10. Have agreed upon policies for conflict management in place

conversation in a conflict situation than making statements about "you" and "your" behavior. Help the group avoid passing judgment on one another.

4. ***Allow people to finish statements.*** People should be able to complete their thoughts. Often conflicts are resolved simply by letting everyone be heard.
5. ***Keep discussion focused.*** Try not to allow side issues to be brought in unnecessarily, and thereby complicate matters. Try to keep people talking about one issue at a time.
6. ***Encourage and model active listening.*** Occasionally restate what each party is saying, or ask them to do it. People, more than anything else, want to know they're being listened to.

7. ***Take a short break.*** When things feel out of control, it may be useful to ask for a moment or two of silence, or perhaps to encourage a stretch, or a coffee break. A cool-down period can be very helpful.
8. ***Invite others to help out.*** Peer-led support groups are, by definition, led by equal peers. Sometimes it can be helpful to ask another peer to step in for a while and guide the discussion. Often, this change of voice can change the group's attitude as well.
9. ***End the meeting with a "round-robin."*** Whether or not there is still anger in the air, it might be useful to give people in the group a chance to have a "last word" or two about what happened during the meeting, and about what they might want to see happen next time.

*Remember, we all stumble,
every one of us. That's why it's
a comfort to go hand-in-hand.*

— Unknown

Additional Resources for DBSA Facilitators

Be sure to visit the DBSA Chapter Management Website at www.dbsalliance.org/chaptermgmt for more resources such as:

- DBSA Support Group Facilitation Guide
- DBSA Conflict Management Tool
- Articles on support group facilitation
- Transcripts from past DBSA facilitator trainings
- Audio recordings of DBSA facilitator trainings
- Printable copies of the DBSA Support Group Guidelines
- Role-playing scenarios
- And much more!

Books on effective facilitation:

- *Effective Support Groups*. James E. Miller
- *The Zen of Groups*. Hunter, Bailey & Taylor
- *The Art of Facilitation*. Hunter, Bailey & Taylor
- *Self-Help and Support Groups*. Linda Farris Kurtz
- *How to Lead Small Groups*. (Christian small groups)
Neal F. McBride

Recovery Resources

If you're looking for additional ways to make your support group more recovery focused, you may want to consider incorporating some of the following materials into your meetings.

- DBSA brochures, website, calendar, workbooks
- "Pathways to Recovery" by Priscilla Ridgway, et. al.
- "Wellness Recovery Action Plan" by Mary Ellen Copeland
- Participants or other community members personal stories of recovery
- Participant chosen motivational readings, CD's, excerpts, etc.
- Articles about recovery from mental illness

*The indispensable first step to
getting the things out of life is this:
decide what you want.*

— Ben Stein