

What are Community Support Groups?

In a **support group**, members provide each other with various types of help, usually nonprofessional and nonmaterial, for a particular shared, usually burdensome, characteristic. The help may take the form of providing and evaluating relevant information, relating personal experiences, listening to and accepting others' experiences, providing sympathetic understanding and establishing social networks. A support group may also work to inform the public or engage in advocacy.

History

Formal support groups may appear to be a modern phenomenon, but they supplement traditional [fraternal organizations](#) such as [Freemasonry](#) in some respects, and may build on certain supportive functions (formerly) carried out in (extended) [families](#).

Other types of groups formed to support causes, including causes outside of themselves, are more often called [advocacy groups](#), [interest groups](#), [lobby groups](#), [pressure groups](#) or [promotional groups](#). [Trade unions](#) and many environmental groups, for example, are interest groups. The term *support group* in this article refers to peer-to-peer support.

Maintaining contact

Support groups maintain interpersonal contact among their members in a variety of ways. Traditionally, groups have met in person in sizes that allowed conversational interaction. Support groups also maintain contact through printed newsletters, telephone chains, internet forums, and mailing lists. Some support groups are exclusively [online](#) (see below).

Membership in some support groups is formally controlled, with admission requirements and membership fees. Other groups are "open" and allow anyone to attend an advertised meeting, for example, or to participate in an online forum.

Management by peers or professionals

A **self-help support group** is fully organized and managed by its members, who are commonly volunteers and have personal experience in the subject of the group's focus. These groups may also be referred to as *fellowships*, *peer support groups*, *lay organizations*, *mutual help groups*, or *mutual aid self-help groups*.

Professionally operated support groups are facilitated by professionals who do not share the problem of the members,^[1] such as social workers, psychologists, or members of the clergy. The facilitator controls discussions and provides other managerial service. Such professionally operated groups are often found in institutional settings, including [hospitals](#), [drug-treatment centers](#) and [correctional facilities](#). These types of support group may run for a specified period of time, and an attendance fee is sometimes charged.^[1]

Types of support groups

In the case of a [disease](#), an [identity](#) or a pre-disposition, for example, a support group will provide information, act as a clearing-house for experiences, and may serve as a [public relations](#) voice for sufferers, other members, and their families. Compare [Mental Health Stigma](#), [Mensa International](#) and [gay pride](#), for example.

For more temporary conditions, such as bereavement or the problems of ex-[cult](#) members, a support group may veer more towards helping those involved to overcome or move "beyond" their condition/experience.

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