# Are Support Groups for Bipolar Disorder Helpful?

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## Are Bipolar Support Groups Helpful?

Recovery from bipolar disorder does take a village. Today, I consider my close relationships to be the glue that holds together my broken pieces. Without them, I would fall apart again. However, it took me quite some time – and a whole lot of unnecessary pain – before I learned the value of human connection. I am no longer under the illusion that I can enjoy continued health and wellness without ongoing support.

Today, in addition to the frequent leisure visits I have with friends and family, I regularly attend support groups. Doing this has kept me well (for the most part!) and has brought unexpected happiness to my life.

Meeting with other people who are living with bipolar disorder shows me how to live with and enjoy life in spite of this condition. I have learned so many coping skills from other people – skills, that I am sure, have saved me from suicide more than once.

So, without further ado, let's talk about bipolar support groups and how they can benefit your recovery journey.

### What is a Bipolar Support Group?

A bipolar support group is a small gathering of people who meet regularly to discuss their common problem (bipolar disorder) while providing support for one another and offering solutions.

A bipolar support group can be led by a licensed mental health professional; such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist, or counselor. The group can also be a peer group, where the leader of the group is an unlicensed volunteer who also struggles with the problem addressed in the group. (Usually, peer leaders have received some training or certification that qualifies them to lead the group.)

### The Benefits of Joining a Bipolar Support Group

There are several reasons to join a bipolar group. Here are just a few:

- Connect with other people who are living with bipolar, build new relationships.
- Learn new coping strategies from other people who have this condition.
- Sharing similar experiences with others helps to lessen feelings of isolation.
- Studies have shown that we thrive when we connect with groups.
- Get information about local resources that can help improve your quality of life.
- People from the group often fellowship after the meeting (coffee, dinner).
- Group members often engage in social activities together (bowling, going to the movies, etc.).
- Gives you the opportunity to be a part of the world around you.
- Helps to reduce the stigma of living with a mental illness.
- Gives you a safe space to process difficult thoughts and feelings.

- Cultivates empathy towards others with bipolar.
- Showing empathy for others paradoxically promotes self-love and acceptance.
- Gets you out of your own head (which can be a welcomed escape!).

These are just a few of the many ways you can benefit from attending a face-to-face bipolar support group.

**How to Find a Bipolar Support Group Near You**

There are several organizations that offer local face-to-face bipolar support groups. Search for a meeting near you:

- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA).
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI).
- Mental Health America (MHA).

You can also go to Google and type “bipolar support groups near me.” This will direct you to the county, state, and local resources that will help you find a bipolar support group in your area.

**Online Bipolar Support Groups Are Available Too**

I will be completely open with you – sometimes I cannot leave the house. It’s just too much out there, and I do not want to. I am content with staying home with my kitties and forgoing the effort that is required to get out in the world and socialize with other humans.

Fortunately, modern technology does not require me to cross the threshold of my front door and go out into the world when I have no desire to do so. There are plenty of 24/7 online forums, chats and groups online that allow me to reach out if I need to when bipolar rears its ugly head.

I am a believer that recovering from bipolar disorder requires us to forge supportive and healthy connections with people who care about us. Also, I would not recommend that you solely utilize online bipolar support groups.

I encourage everyone with this illness to get out and make friends, attend social gatherings, and engage in fun activities with other humans. This can happen in a bipolar support group that meets regularly face-to-face.

Nevertheless, the following online bipolar support groups are available 24/7/365 should you need them:

- HealthfulChat.
- Mental Health America.
- Daily Strength.
- Bipolar Support.
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance.
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

In addition to online chats, there are plenty of open and private Facebook groups that are designed to help those who have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. These provide a platform for people with the illness to reach out for help, ask questions and learn new coping strategies.

**What to Do in a Crisis When You Have Bipolar Disorder**

If you or someone you love is experiencing a mental health emergency, you should always call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. However, if you are in crisis and you simply need help or resources, I strongly recommend texting The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI).

NAMI provides 24/7 support via text message through their Crisis Text Line. All you have to do is text the word “home” to 741741 and someone will respond immediately.

I used this resource once on a particularly bad day. I was feeling really down and having thoughts of suicide. So, I texted, and I was connected immediately to a real person. Her name was Jenny. She was very empathetic and uplifting, and she texted me links to some cool resources that actually helped me.

I was skeptical when I texted, but I must say that Jenny far exceeded my expectations. I feel comforted knowing that I have this resource available to me via text anytime I need help. Sometimes, the thought of actually talking to a person by phone is too much. In these times, texting becomes a preferable method of communication.

**Reach Out and Get Connected**

Sure it may be scary to get out there and attend a bipolar support group. You do not know what to expect. Your anxiety may discourage you from meeting new people. Your mind can manufacture a million reasons to prevent you from reaching out for help.

I encourage you to push past all those reasons and reach out anyway. We should not bear the heavy burden of bipolar disorder on our own, and we do not have to.