

Opening Our Eyes

The DSG: Why they go, and why you don't

by Nan Dickie

I facilitated a depression support group (DSG) in Salmon Arm for seven years. It was for people who live with clinical depression, bi-polar disorder and/or anxiety. It was about the best thing that had happened for many of us.

At one meeting's check in, I asked participants (who were in various stages of wellness) to respond to the question, "Why do you come to these meetings?" I got an earful, and I'll share lots of them with you:

- "I always thought I was the only one who got as depressed as I get. It's such a relief to be with others who experience what I do. We all share the same language. I don't have to explain myself."
- "When I'm depressed, I hardly ever leave my home. But I make myself go to meetings, and am always glad I went."
- "I live so much in my head at home. I can't do that at a meeting. I have to listen to others, and this is good for me."
- "Even if I'm feeling low when I go to a meeting, I always leave it feeling better than when I came; my outlook changes from negative to positive."
- "There's absolutely no pressure: I can speak if I want to, and I can just listen if that's all I can manage."
- "Everyone is honest; I don't have to worry about what I say, because no matter what I say, I am accepted and respected."
- "I always feel heard and valued; everyone listens; they understand what I am going through."
- "I love the sense of belonging, and having so much support. I don't feel odd or different. I feel I am among friends."
- "Others give me feedback to how they see I'm doing. They may comment if they think I'm going downhill."
- "I like to hear what others are doing to help themselves, and then I try new things myself. I've learned so many strategies and tools from others."
- "I'm learning so much more about my disorder. I'm understanding what "healthy" is like for people who are well."
- "When I'm not well, others remind me that I will get better again."
- "I'm inspired by other people's courage, and it rubs off on me."
- "I like being a positive influence on others in pain; I want to share to help others."

What depressed person wouldn't go to a support group meeting with all these benefits?! You may be surprised. Some people who really want and need support from others come up with one or more **“Yes, but”**s. These are often just excuses. Here are some of them:

- “Yes, but I can't just walk into a room of strangers.” I know how much courage it can take a healthy person to enter a room full of people they don't know. It takes much more courage for someone who is depressed. Each person in our support group had taken this big step—you can too.
- “Yes, but I'm too depressed to go to a support group.” This is exactly when you need the understanding and empathy of peers the most. You are never too depressed to belong at a depression support group meeting.
- “Yes, but I'm not depressed enough to go to a support group.” We don't measure “degree of depression.” If depression is having a negative effect on your personal, work or social life, you are depressed enough. You are wise to not wait until you are desperate to get the valuable support you can receive now.
- “Yes, but what if all I want to do is sit in a corner and listen?” Go for it! There are no rules about where anyone sits—at the table, next to the windows, behind someone else. You are not obliged to say anything while you are there.
- “Yes, but what if someone I know is there? I'd feel so embarrassed and ashamed.” It would be wonderful to know someone there already! That participant would probably come up to you and say, “Welcome, you've come to a great place.” It's called kinship.
- “Yes, but how do I know someone won't blab about me outside the group?” This is a group with integrity; confidentiality is respected, protected and maintained.

Are you, or someone you know, a **“Yes, but...”** person? If so, you (or they) may want to read again my rebuttals to your butts.

There is one more consideration about going to a DSG meeting. In attending meetings, participants are taking responsibility for their own health and healing. We don't blame our lot on a medical system that may fail us, on society that doesn't understand us, or on our brain chemistry that betrays us. We figure things out by sharing what we can do to make life as meaningful as possible. This requires self-honesty, courage and effort.

It is more than worth it. Trust me.
