

NEW JERSEY SELF-HELP GROUP CLEARINGHOUSE

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POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

While well established groups usually have developed structured exercises to help members share their experiences, strengths, hopes, coping skills, and practical information, other groups simply plan initial group discussions on the basis of their members' common needs and interests. Consider just surveying the members and have them select those discussion topics that interest them the most. Then members can take turns on different days to introduce a chosen topic by giving a brief summary of the issue and then introducing discussion questions. If they need to prepare, they can read up on the topic or ask other members about their experiences or perspectives. Topics could range from education to advocacy issues, but the most important point is that the topic be based on the needs of your members.

Discussion can also be based on discussion questions, determined by members beforehand. Here are some suggested questions that can be used for a particular health problem or disability. They would need to be revised for other types of issues. Members may want to review them and select those they would like to schedule for a particular day. On the day or night of the discussion, individuals could go "round-robin." taking turns answering.

Remember that the purpose of asking these questions is to help individuals share, think about, and learn from each other's experiences and insights. There are no right or wrong answers, only answers reflecting the different personal experiences and views that people have in coping with their stresses and challenges. It's important that the group shouldn't be too large, to be sure to allow each person the opportunity to talk. If it is too large, consider breaking into smaller groups.

1. Who has been supportive to me in helping me deal with this condition? What have they done or said that has helped me the most?
2. Who has been least supportive? What have they done or said that has not helped?
3. What did I used to think about people who had this problem before I knew I had it? What's the most important point that the public should know about this that they don't know now? How can or should they best be taught?

4. How did I feel and react when I was first told that I (or another family member) had ____? How has my attitude changed with time and experience?
5. What was my family and friend's reaction to the news that I had ____? How did it differ from what I expected? From what I wanted?
6. How do people react to me when they learn that I have ____? Have I been able to shape people's reactions to me? How?
7. What would I say in a note or a letter to someone (or his or her spouse/family) who was facing what I have faced?
8. What is the worst problem that I must face because of this?
9. Who is the easiest person to talk to about this? Why? Who is the hardest person to talk to about this? Why?
10. If I am seeing a doctor, what could I tell him/her to better help me?
11. Generally, how has my life changed? What new values and priorities do I have now that I did not have before?
12. In what ways does the life event or illness control my life? In what ways have I learned ways to regain control of my life?
13. For what in my life am I most grateful? What do I now like most about my life?
14. What long-term goals have I set for my life? What is the major goal and how do I plan to reach it?
15. If I have learned anything special about life or human nature because of my situation, what is it?