

New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse

In NJ, **1-800-367-6274**, or 973-989-1122 * 375 East McFarlan St., Dover, NJ 07801 * www.selfhelpgroups.org

Finding Guest Speakers for Your Group

First, be in touch with **your members' specific needs and special interests**. Prior to a meeting (you could piggyback it on the meeting notice, if you send one out), ask members to think about it and come to the next meeting with at least one idea of what type of information or speaker they would like to hear. You can always ask them as a group and/or individually.

1. **Contact local hospitals, social services, mental health, social and government agencies** - a few of the larger agencies may be able to provide a listing of possible speakers-topics. Contact the public/community relations department of local hospitals. If you know what type of speaker you want, start at the top by writing a formal letter to the Director or the C.E.O. of that agency, indicating what type of speaker you need. Many Visiting Nurse Services have speakers' bureaus. Also, consider your local Mental Health Association. Call local helplines for suggestions, etc.
2. **Local colleges and universities** – Write or call the chairperson of a specific department, like social work or psychology for dealing with stress, nursing for self-care instruction, etc. (These can also be a possible source of student who may help you with research or other assistance.)
3. **Entitlement service agencies** – Social Security, government financial assistance, and other agencies regarding benefits they provide.
4. **Lawyers**, especially those specializing in legal rights, planning, etc. If your group is interested, an insurance company representative might also speak on estate planning, etc.
5. **Local professional associations**. Ask your local United Way, county council of agencies, etc. for local speakers on subjects like stress reduction in general or specific to your group, a specific type of therapy, medications, choosing a good therapist/doctor, etc.
6. **Alternative health providers** – those who teach meditation, yoga, herbal medicine, etc.
7. **Pharmaceutical company representatives** – possibly have a panel with several representatives) or a local pharmacist on taking medicines wisely.
8. **Phone other self-help groups similar to yours**, ask what type of speakers their members have liked and seek out local speakers who are similar. Consider inviting a representative of a similar self-help group that meets a distance away to come and speak about that group's work, their best meetings, discussion, speakers, and other successful activities they have had.
9. Consider using a **pre-recorded or "canned speaker,"** i.e., playing a tape of a good radio interview or program (less than 25 minutes long), conference presentation, portion of a TV program, or a presentation downloaded from the internet. Or begin a tape library of your own by asking some of your "live guests" if you may tape their presentation for your group's lending library collection.
10. Look over our [Speakers' Bureau](#) list, which describes some potential speakers who have contacted us.
11. Don't forget to **tap your members' contacts and experience**. A member is not only familiar with the potential speaking ability of a person, but also often they may have a personal relationship with that person, which helps that speaker commit to making a volunteer presentation. So ask who in your group knows of a local professional, e.g., a physician, therapist, or lawyer, or another person who is knowledgeable and can be approached?

Others? If you have another suggestion for how to find a good speaker from your own experience, we would be grateful if you would share it with us. Contact Ed at the Clearinghouse or email ed@selfhelpgroups.org