



New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse

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Ways that Self-Help Group Members Can Provide Mutual Support Between Meetings

1. **Circulating a List of Selected Members' Phone Numbers** - Members are asked if any would volunteer to be available if another member needs to talk to someone between meetings. Usually, after they give permission, their names and home phone numbers are printed on a piece of paper that is available at meetings. It is updated as needed. A few groups set a time limit to individual calls, e.g., that a phone call shouldn't go longer than 5 or 15 minutes.
2. **Networking Members** - introducing a new member to a group member with a similar situation, age, or disability, and suggesting they talk. Often done by those who serve as "greeters" at group meetings.
3. **Sponsor/Buddy System** often used at AA and other 12-step weekly meetings, but can be adapted by others. A new member, who requests a sponsor, is matched with an experienced group member who is available to talk with that person and assist him or her as needed. It can be time-limited. In some groups, matches are kept with persons of the same sex.
4. **"Telephone Tree"** - Often used to alert members to a pressing, time-sensitive or action-needed issue, e.g., legislative alert, or to cancel meeting because of bad weather. Requires a coordinator and volunteers. When needed, the Telephone Tree coordinator phones the Telephone Tree volunteers with the information. Each of them have preassigned section of a list of members' phone numbers which they call.
5. **Correspondence Network** - Interested members join a correspondence circle, wherein one member starts it by writing a letter telling their experience, indicating what they have learned about coping with the problems and what they seek to learn. Letter goes to next member in the circle (circles are often 6 to 8 members), who adds his or her own experience in a letter, and then can also comment on the earlier letter(s). Letters are kept in a folder and move on, circulating a second or sometimes third time around as an added set(s) of letters are developed. The national Well Spouse self-help organization uses this system (they call it "Round Robin") for their regular group members who are interested, and also to link together more isolated members.
6. **Newsletter** - If you develop one, remember to make your newsletter as "interactive" as possible, providing members with opportunities to share their stories, insights, and information on resources and events, e.g., you could have an "Ask & Answer" column wherein members ask and reply to questions in an on-going way, a "My Story" column written by members, or a "Lessons Learned" column with contributions by members.

7. **Visitation Program** - upon request, members usually visit potential new members, often in hospital or at their home, to learn about the group and the condition. The group will indicate that they have a "visitation program" available. Visitors are often matched by age, sex, and other related factors. Visitation programs have guidelines similar to groups ("Don't give medical advice," etc.); better ones have training. A related but different form of visitation is the "**Sunshine Committee**" where members phone or visit regular members who are unable to attend meetings because of illness.
8. **Group/Organizational Liaisons** - members volunteer to be your group's liaison to another related self-help group or agency - to attend their meetings, read their newsletter, and/or be in phone contact as needed - to report back to your group about their news/activities, e.g., if yours is a specific illness group, being the liaison person to a general disability group. Can also include serving on an agency advisory committee, planning board or council.
9. **Public Education Activities** - members work together on educating people about your group's issues in the community (e.g., health fairs, ribbon campaigns, etc.), in schools, in the press, and speaking engagements before community service organizations, church groups, etc..
10. **Advocacy Activities** - where members work together for legal or social change, or to reform specific government or agency procedures. They do this in different ways, e.g., demonstrations, letter writing, speaking at hearings, developing and distributing flyers, participating in a coalition, or by working on advisory councils or boards.
11. **Social Activities** - that bring members together to share a potluck lunch or dinner, a holiday party, picnic, or go out for entertainment together.
12. **Development of Community Center Programs** - A few groups, like those for mental health consumers, have started self-help center programs that provide activities and opportunities for discussing issues. Similarly, for those persons with disabilities, there are a few Independent Living Centers in the State that have an actual center where people can go for activities.
13. **Online Computer Exchanges** - Increasingly members of local face-to-face groups can and do participate in online mutual help groups through online message boards and e-mail discussion groups available 24 hours a day, as well as chat rooms too. To learn how to start a free Yahoo e-mail support group, call the Clearinghouse.

Know of another good one? We would be grateful if you would kindly share it with us. We would add it and credit you and/or group. Just contact Ed at 1-800-367-6274 from inside NJ, 973-326-6789 from outside NJ, or just send an e-mail: ed@selfhelpgroups.org