



# Supporting your community by supporting others.

How to host a mental health support group in your  
community.

Children's  
Mental  
Health  
Matters.org  
A MARYLAND PUBLIC  
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

An Initiative of **mhamd**  
MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND

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# Welcome!

We are Angie and Christina with The Mental Health Association of MD.

Please introduce yourself and tell us:

- 1) Why are you here today?
- 2) What is your experience with support groups?

# Agenda:

- Community needs
- Types of support groups
- Style
- Advertising
- Logistics
- Tools

# What are the needs of your community?

## 1. Start With Listening

- Hold informal conversations with people in your community
- Ask open-ended questions like:
  - “What mental health challenges do you see around you?”
  - “What kind of support would be helpful?”
- Listen for repeated themes — stress, isolation, grief, parenting struggles, etc.

# What are the needs of your community?

## 2. Use Surveys or Questionnaires

- Create a simple, anonymous survey (Google Forms works well)

- Ask about:

Biggest mental health concerns

Preferred meeting times

Barriers to attending support groups

What type of support they'd find helpful (peer support, education, coping skills, etc.)

- Keep it short so more people respond.

# What are the needs of your community?

## 3. Talk to Local Professionals

- Reach out to Counselors, School staff, Faith leaders, Healthcare providers, Social workers
- Ask what trends they're seeing — anxiety, depression, substance use, caregiver burnout, etc.
- They often have a bird's-eye view of community needs.

# What are the needs of you community?

## 4. Identify Gaps in Current Services

- Ask:

What support groups already exist?

Who is being served — and who is not?

Are there long waitlists for therapy?

- Gaps often point directly to unmet needs.

# What are the needs of you community?

## 5. Consider Barriers

- Understanding needs also means understanding obstacles:
  - Transportation
  - Childcare
  - Cost
  - Stigma
  - Scheduling
  - Lack of awareness
- Your support group can be designed to reduce these barriers.

# Types of Support Groups

## Why Caregiver Support Groups Matter

- Reduces caregiver stress
- Builds confidence and skills
- Creates a sense of community
- Helps parents feel less alone
- Improves family communication and resilience

# Types of Support Groups

## 1. General Parent Support Groups

Open to any parent or caregiver of a child with emotional or behavioral challenges

Provides a space to share experiences, reduce isolation, and build community

Often peer-led and focused on mutual support

## 2. Condition-Specific Parent Groups

These groups focus on a particular mental health or developmental need, such as:

Anxiety, Depression, ADHD, Autism spectrum needs, Mood disorders, Trauma-related challenges

Parents get targeted information, strategies, and shared experiences from others facing similar issues.

## 3. Behavioral & Emotional Regulation Support Groups

- For parents of children who struggle with big emotions, outbursts, or self-regulation
- Focus on understanding behavior, building routines, and learning supportive responses
- Often includes skill-building discussions

# Type of Support groups

## 4. Trauma-Informed Parent Groups

- For caregivers of children who have experienced trauma
- Helps parents understand trauma responses, build safety, and support healing
- Emphasizes connection, patience, and predictable routines

## • 5. Parent Skills & Education Groups

- Teaches practical tools such as communication strategies, coping skills, and positive behavior supports
- Often based on structured programs (e.g., parenting workshops, psychoeducation groups)
- Helps parents feel more confident and equipped

# Support Group Styles

## 1. Peer-Led Support Groups

- Facilitated by people with lived experience
- Focus on shared understanding and mutual support
- Often informal and discussion-based
- Builds community and reduces stigma

## 2. Professionally Facilitated Groups

- led by a counselor, social worker, or trained facilitator
- More structured and guided
- Often includes skill-building, education, or activities
- Helps keep conversations safe and focused

# Support Group Styles

## 3. Psychoeducational Groups

- Teach information and practical skills
- Topics may include coping strategies, communication, stress management, or understanding emotions
- Often includes handouts, activities, or short lessons
- Great for families who want tools and guidance

## 4. Process or Discussion Groups

- Open conversation guided by a facilitator
- Members share experiences, challenges, and successes
- Focus on emotional expression and connection
- Less structured, more relationship-based

# Support group Styles

## 5. Activity-Based Support Groups

- Use creative or hands-on activities to support emotional expression
- Examples: art, journaling, music, movement, crafts
- Especially effective for children or people who struggle with verbal sharing

## 6. Skills-Focused Groups

- Teach specific skills such as:
  - Emotion regulation, Mindfulness, Social skills, Problem-solving
- Often uses structured exercises and practice

# Styles of Support Groups

## Open vs. Closed

### Open Groups

- Members can join at any time
- Each session stands alone
- Good for communities with changing schedules or high need
- Works well for drop-in support

### Closed Groups

- Same members for the entire duration (e.g., 6–8 weeks)
- Builds trust and deeper connection
- Allows for progressive learning or long-term projects

# Styles of Support Groups

## Virtual, Hybrid or In Person:

### Virtual / Online Support Groups

Held through video platforms, increases accessibility for busy families or rural communities, Can reduce stigma and increase comfort

### Hybrid Groups

Mix of in-person and virtual options, Offers flexibility, Helps reach more people with different needs

### In Person

Stronger Sense of Connection Safe, Supportive Environment, Reduced Feelings of Isolation, More Engaging Activities, Improved Communication, Stronger Group Cohesion, Shared physical space helps groups bond more quickly, Encourages consistent attendance and commitment, Fewer Technology Barriers, Opportunities for Community Resource Sharing, Natural Social Interaction, Enhanced Accountability

# Advertising Your Support Group

*If you build it, they will come...Eventually*

## 1. Know Your Audience

- Identify who the group is for (parents, teens, caregivers, children, etc.)
- Tailor your message to their needs and concerns
- Use language that feels welcoming, not clinical

## 2. Create Clear, Simple Messaging

- State the purpose of the group\*
- Highlight who it's for
- Include when, where, and how to join
- Emphasize confidentiality and a safe environment

## 3. Use Multiple Outreach Channels

- Community centers
- Schools and school counselors
- Libraries
- Faith organizations
- Local nonprofits
- Pediatricians or family doctors
- Social workers and case managers

\*These places often have bulletin boards or newsletters.

## 4. Leverage Social Media

- Post in local Facebook groups
- Share on Instagram or community pages
- Ask partners or organizations to share your post
- Use simple graphics or flyers to catch attention

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# Advertising your Support Group

## 5. Partner With Local Organizations

- Mental health agencies
- Youth programs
- Churches
- After-school programs
- Health departments

\*They can help spread the word and build trust.

## 6. Use Flyers and Posters

- Place them where families already go:
- Grocery stores
- Coffee shops
- Parks
- Community centers
- Schools
- Keep the design clean and friendly
- Include a tear-off tab or QR code for easy access

## 7. Offer a Personal Touch

- Word of mouth is powerful
- Ask supporters, teachers, or community leaders to share information
- Provide a short “blurb” they can easily pass along

## 8. Highlight the Benefits

People respond to what the group offers, such as:

- Connection
- Support
- Coping skills
- A safe space
- Reduced isolation

\*Make these benefits visible in your advertising

# Advertising your support group

## 9. Make It Easy to Join

- Provide a simple sign-up process
- Offer a contact number or email
- Clarify whether it's free, drop-in, or requires registration

## 10. Be Consistent

- Post reminders
- Share updates
- Keep your messaging steady so people see it more than once

Don't get discouraged!

# Logistics and Tips

## 1. Choose an Accessible Location

- Pick a space that feels safe, private, and welcoming
- Ensure it's easy to find and has clear signage
- Consider parking, public transit, and ADA accessibility

## 2. Set a Consistent Schedule

- Choose a regular day and time (e.g., every Tuesday at 6 PM)
- Keep sessions the same length (usually 60–90 minutes)
- Consistency builds trust and improves attendance

## 3. Prepare the Room Layout

- Arrange chairs in a circle or semi-circle to encourage connection
- Provide a table for materials, sign-in sheets, or refreshments
- Make sure the space feels warm, not clinical

## 4. Establish Clear Group Guidelines

- Confidentiality expectations
- Respectful communication
- Participation is optional
- No interrupting or judging
- These help create emotional safety

## 5. Have Materials Ready

- Sign-in sheet (optional)
- Pens, paper, or journals
- Handouts or worksheets (if using them)
- Tissues, water, or light snacks
- A simple agenda or outline for the facilitator

## 6. Plan for Privacy

- Close doors or use a private room
- Avoid spaces where others can overhear
- Consider white noise machines if needed

# Tools

Be on the lookout for an email with these helpful tools.

- Sample power point on Self Care
- Support Group idea cards
- Interactive Moments for virtual support groups



**Thank you for joining us today!**