

Resolution on Self-help Support Groups

Proposed to: The American Psychological Association

From: SCRA and Supporters

A self-help support group is defined as:

A voluntary, self-determining, and non-profit gathering of people who share a condition or status; members share mutual support and experiential knowledge to improve persons' experiences of the common situation.

Whereas 18 percent of Americans have used self-help support groups sometime in their lifetime (1,2);

Whereas self-help support groups have been shown to substantially improve symptoms, increase health-promoting behaviors, complement other treatments, and reduce distress among people with a variety of chronic conditions, including asthma / COPD / emphysema (3) , sickle cell (4,5), heart disease (6,7), mental illness (8-11) , scoliosis (12), diabetes (13, 14), and HIV (15);

Whereas self-help groups are effective for people of diverse ages, genders, backgrounds, and life situations, although they do not benefit all people in all circumstances equally (12, 16-21);

Whereas self-help support groups are used and effective across a wide range of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and settings, both within the US and internationally (4, 13, 22-29);

Whereas psychologists have documented the effectiveness of self-help support groups in reducing the costs of medical and psychological treatment (9, 30-33);

Whereas individuals utilizing self-help and peer-support services experience significantly reduced rates of re-hospitalization compared with non-users (10, 34-38);

Whereas doctors and other clinicians report that patients in self-help support groups better utilize their time in clinical appointments (30, 39), are better able to collaborate effectively with their treatment providers (40, 41), and are more likely to be adherent to prescribed medications (42);

Whereas people taking part in self-help support groups report enhanced satisfaction with the professionally delivered behavioral and mental health services they also receive (43-45);

Whereas self-help support groups for parents have been shown to increase social support (46-49), reduce parenting stress (46, 48, 50), reduce child maltreatment (48, 51,52), increase parents' self-esteem (46, 48), improve caretaking abilities (48, 53), and increase parents' positive affect (47, 48);

Whereas self-help support groups provide tangible social support, peer validation, and valuable coping and other skills to people with serious mental health problems (54-58) and can make an important difference between a person being disabled by a mental illness or living with it successfully (42, 45, 59, 60);

Whereas self-help support groups for depression can be as effective as more costly treatments such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (61);

Whereas self-help support groups for smoking cessation have increased rates of tobacco abstinence (62);

Whereas self-help support groups for bereavement have been shown to reduce stress, depression, and anxiety, while helping participants make new friends and begin new activities (63-66);

Whereas self-help support groups have been shown to be effective substance abuse recovery methods (16, 67-79), even reducing criminal behavior associated with substance abuse (72, 80);

Whereas self-help support groups increase caregivers' resources and reduce caregiver stress (81-85);

Whereas self-help support groups provide opportunities and benefits that improve outcomes for those providing support as well as those receiving it (9, 60, 86-89);

Whereas self-help support groups help erode stigma attached to physical and mental health conditions by changing the attitudes of families, communities, and health workers (90, 91) and by helping the people affected better cope with and respond to stigma (92); and

Whereas self-help support groups increase people's sense of empowerment (9, 21, 29, 43, 87);

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herefore, be it resolved that the American Psychological Association will:

- 1) Include information about the effectiveness of self-help support groups and how to find them on its website and via other venues to get this information to the public;
- 2) Advocate that self-help support groups be included as a health promoting intervention in the American Psychological Association's healthcare reform priorities;
- 3) Ensure that self-help support groups be included as a health promoting intervention in other American Psychological Association policy work with federal, state, and local governments;

- 4) Recommend that psychologists provide information about self-help support groups, assist clients in locating these services, and support clients in joining with others to start new support groups where and when needed;
- 5) Promote the inclusion of information about self-help and its evidence base in psychology training programs;
- 6) Actively support research establishing evidence-based practices regarding self-help support groups;
- 7) Advocate that self-help support group centers be widely established to promote the awareness, utilization, development, and understanding of self-help support groups in the areas they serve and to provide them with meeting space and organizational assistance.

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