

Types of Support, Explained: Chats, Groups, and Professional Care

Peer support spaces: how they differ

- **Chat room** — open, usually unmoderated conversation with strangers. Fast and anonymous, but quality and safety vary widely. Not a substitute for moderated support.
- **Online support group** — a scheduled group that meets by video or text, usually with a facilitator or trained host and shared ground rules. More structure and consistency than an open chat room.
- **In-person group** — meets face to face in your community. Takes more effort to attend, but many people find the physical presence and local connection deeper. Child care, transport, and schedule are real factors.

Specific peer support services

- **ShareWell (sharewellnow.com)** — free peer support groups on video, organized by topic, led by trained peer hosts. A strong option when you want real faces and real conversation without cost.
- **NAMI groups (nami.org)** — free, peer-led groups run by local NAMI affiliates. NAMI Connection is for adults living with mental illness; family groups are for loved ones. Structured, established, and widely available.
- **DBSA (dbsalliance.org)** — free, peer-led support groups specifically for people living with depression and bipolar disorder, plus groups for friends and family. Online and in-person options.
- **Supportiv (supportiv.com)** — anonymous, moderated peer support chats matched by topic, available any time. It is a paid service (small fee), with trained moderators in every chat.
- **7 Cups (7cups.com)** — free emotional support from trained listeners over chat, plus community forums. Good when you need one-on-one listening at 2 a.m., though listeners are volunteers, not clinicians.

Professional care: what the words mean

- **Inpatient** — you stay at a hospital or facility, usually for days, for 24-hour safety and stabilization during a crisis.
- **Outpatient** — you live at home and attend appointments or programs. Includes weekly therapy, IOP (a few hours, several days a week), and PHP (full treatment days, home at night).
- **Therapy** — regular sessions with a licensed counselor, therapist, psychologist, or clinical social worker to work on thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and skills. Cannot prescribe medication (in most states).
- **Psychiatrist** — a medical doctor (MD/DO) who specializes in mental health. Diagnoses conditions, prescribes and manages medication, and coordinates with your therapist. Usually shorter, less frequent visits than therapy.

How to choose a starting point

- Need to talk right now, free, anonymous? Try a moderated peer chat like ShareWell groups or 7 Cups listeners.
- Want an ongoing group with structure and peers who share your experience? Try NAMI Connection or DBSA.
- Prefer face-to-face connection? Look for in-person NAMI or DBSA groups near you.
- Struggling to function, or symptoms worsening? That is a sign for professional outpatient care — a therapist and possibly a psychiatrist.
- In crisis or unsafe? Skip the research: call or text 988, or go to the nearest emergency room.

**If you are in
danger right
now**

Call or text **988** for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. If there is immediate danger, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

This guide is educational information only. It is not medical, psychiatric, or crisis advice, and mentioning a service is not an endorsement. If you are thinking about hurting yourself, contact 988 or 911 now.

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