

Support Groups

As a caregiver, you may be feeling alone. You don't have as much time to socialize now that you have to care for your elderly relative, and even your own family may not understand what you are going through. If this sounds like you, you might want to try to find a support group.

Why a Support Group?

Support groups are one of the best places for caregivers to find others like themselves. They can help caregivers bond with each other, socialize and build a network of caring, supportive people. Support groups are important because caregivers can express their emotions in a safe place, and find out that others have gone or are going through some of the same emotions. They are not meant to be group therapy, but they do allow people to understand that they are not alone, and to learn how others have handled similar emotions, crises and problems. Support groups can also allow people to share valuable information and insights into the dynamics of caregiving and specific illnesses or medical conditions.

Kinds of Support Groups

A wide variety of support groups are available for caregivers, although these are difficult to sustain. Some groups are designed for people caring for elders with specific medical, psychological or physical conditions—such as Alzheimer's disease, dementia, diabetes or other illnesses. Others have a more general focus, designed for caregivers of all ages and in all situations. Think about what kind of support you need, and then start looking for a group that can help with that kind of support. Depending on your interests and time, an Internet support group may be an ideal option so you can share feelings and experiences with others while not taking up too much of your time.



Where to Find a Support Group

Support groups spring up in many different locations, and you can look around for the one that best suits your needs. Here are some of the places you might look for a support group:

- **HOSPITAL:** Hospitals often host a variety of support groups, particularly those that focus on a particular medical condition. Check the bulletin boards at your hospital.
- **DOCTOR'S OFFICE:** Ask your doctor if he or she knows of any caregiver support groups in your area.
- **SENIOR CENTER:** Senior centers are a great place to find support groups for caregivers, particularly those focusing on caring for a spouse. Call your local senior center to see what is available.
- **LIBRARY:** Check the local library's newsletter and bulletin boards to see if there are notices of support groups that meet there.
- **NEWSPAPER:** Look under the community section of your local newspaper for information about local support groups, including times, dates and meeting places.
- **CHURCH/SYNAGOGUE:** Churches and synagogues often sponsor or host support groups. Check with your minister, priest or rabbi about these.
- **INTERNET:** Increasingly, the Internet offers a way for caregivers to network with each other—locally, nationally and internationally. Look at reputable websites, like AARP, to find information about support groups that meet in real life and in the virtual world.
- **ASSOCIATIONS:** Organizations like the Alzheimer's Association often sponsor support groups; call the local or national number for the organization that interests you to see if there is information about any local support groups.