



## **WHEN SOMONE WANTS TO JOIN YOUR SUPPORT GROUP**

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) has a list of Support Groups all over South Africa. Many of the Groups have different focuses from Depression/Anxiety, Bipolar Disorder, Bereavement/Loss, HIV/AIDS, Postnatal Depression, OCD and more. We can refer callers to the closest Group to them, relevant to the type of Group they are looking for.

It is important to know that a Support Group is not the same as Group Therapy. And that a Support Group would never be our first line of intervention when a distressed caller asks for a referral. We would always want them to first seek professional help and receive one-on-one support from a Mental Health Practitioner who can give them a professional diagnosis if necessary. **Support Groups are there to offer supplementary support for callers who are already managing their Mental Health.**

The majority of SADAG's Support Groups are run by patients for patients. As our Support Groups don't replace therapy, we do not require our Support Group Leaders to be Mental Health practitioners; rather, Leaders are there to create a safe environment where people who have gone through similar experiences have a place to share, and feel supported, where they won't face judgement or stigma.

When someone reaches out and wants to join a Support Group, it is important to gather as much information about the person as possible. Before referring them on, or welcoming them to your Group, it is important to be mindful about the following:

- What kind of a Support Group the person wants to join, because there are different kinds of Support Groups meeting different needs.
- Where the person lives, is the Support Group in their area, if the Group is online, does the caller have access to data and a smart device?
- Have they been diagnosed? By who? Are they on medication or taking some sort of treatment? (Remember a Support Group is never the first line of treatment)
- NB! If the patient is Bipolar, have they received a formal diagnosis by a professional?
  - It is important to find out if they are on medication or attending therapy. (This is to ensure the safety and well-being of the Group, the Member and the Support Group Leader.)
  - If they are not on medication, how long ago did they stop taking it? How are they managing without it? How would they describe their Mental Wellness over the past 6 months?
- The caller is in a mental space where they are looking for maintenance, support and networking with other people who have been through similar challenges.

It is important to think about how you would feel if the person you were referring to the Group arrived at your door, asking for help. If you feel inept to help the person adequately, likely, they may not be a good fit for your Support Group, or perhaps they need further help and intervention.

A Support Group is a place where a person can feel welcome and can come for extra support, advice and encouragement. It is an environment created by Support Group Members to discuss emotions, battles, personal experiences and positive outcomes. Therefore, it is important to know no one is less important in a Support Group and everyone has something equally important to contribute and share.

If you feel the person needs professional help/assistance/one-on-one support, provide them with SADAG's contact details, or let a member of the SADAG team know, or if you can get permission from the person, you can arrange for us (SADAG) to call them (especially in the case that the person was referred to you by a SADAG Counsellor, as we don't want to send them from pillar to post, which could result in them feeling even more hopeless or helpless). If you feel uncertain about whether someone would benefit from a Support Group please feel free to email [SupportGroups@anxiety.org.za](mailto:SupportGroups@anxiety.org.za) to discuss further and then get back to the caller.