

## WHAT WE WANT FROM SUPPORTERS

You need lots of support to help you get well and stay well. You need support from friends, family, community, health care providers, and peers. You also give support to those with whom you have mutually supportive relationships.

Supporters are people who:

- care about you
- empathize with you
- affirm and validate you and your experience
- accept you as you are
- don't have you all figured out
- listen to you and share with you
- advocate for you
- enjoy sharing fun and interesting activities with you
- can make decisions and take action in your behalf when you can't do this for yourself
- are willing to follow your predetermined plans

The most valuable thing a supporter can do for us when we are having a very difficult time is to **LISTEN**.

A good supporter knows that unsolicited advice, criticism and judgments won't help and may even make matters worse!

1. Who are your supporters?

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2. List some people who consider you to be a supporter.

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3. What qualities do you most appreciate in supporters?

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# **FIVE STEPS TO DEVELOPING A STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM**

## **1. Become an active member of a support group.**

Support groups provide an opportunity to be with people who have similar problems, people who understand and can be mutually supportive.

They are a wonderful place to make new and lasting friendships.

They counter social isolation.

Basic support group rules assure us that we can feel comfortable in support groups.

They are:

- No criticism or judging.
- Sharing is optional. It is neither encouraged or discouraged.
- What a person talks about is not limited in any way.
- Everything discussed at the meetings and who attends the meetings is strictly confidential.
- Attendance is optional.

## **2. Participate in community activities, special interest groups and church groups.**

The hardest part is going the first time. Give yourself a pat on the back for getting there.

If you see the same person several times, suggest an activity of interest to both of you. If you enjoy being with this person, get together again.

Check your newspaper and listen to the radio for announcements of activities and events which interest you.

### **3. Volunteer!**

Find a worthy organization that needs help and lend a hand. It's an excellent way to meet new people while doing something nice for someone else and building your self-esteem. Many communities have an organization that coordinates volunteer opportunities.

### **4. Keep in touch with friends and acquaintances.**

Always have a plan for your next time to get together. Get together for fun activities – like movies, walks and ball games.

Make regular phone calls, send notes and cards, emails, text messages, and think about joining social networking websites that friends use to keep in touch.

Help them out whenever you can.

### **5. Make mutual support a high priority!**

Be there for others as much as they are there for you. If your supporter is not asking as much of you as you are asking of them, treat them to lunch or some other fun activity, or do them a needed favor.

# **HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS**

**Most people want health care providers who:**

- monitor you closely
- emphasize self-care and personal responsibility
- are willing to explore and try new approaches and use less invasive alternatives
- are willing to use a team approach
- consider individual needs and preferences
- have good listening and communication skills
- care about you
- accept you as you are
- are positive and hopeful
- encourage and understand you
- have compassion
- are friendly, supportive and respectful
- are firm and protective when necessary
- are available and have back-up service
- are up-to-date
- are willing to admit and remedy mistakes

**Steps to finding good health care providers:**

- educate yourself
- ask health care organizations, friends and current health care providers for referrals
- interview providers who might meet your needs before making long term commitments
- explore a variety of approaches, including safe, non-invasive alternatives

This is a very personal task. Don't get talked into working with someone you're not comfortable with.

Your team of health care providers might include:

- medical doctors
- psychiatrists
- psychopharmacologists
- endocrinologists
- allergists
- pharmacists
- therapists or counselors
- social workers
- osteopaths
- chiropractors
- nutritionists
- naturopaths
- homeopathic physicians
- movement, art, occupational or massage therapists

Cost and health care plans can be limiting factors. We need to work together for health care reform.

1. Who are your health care providers?

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2. What are some qualities you value most in a health care provider?

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3. Are there any new approaches or people you are interested in trying out? What or who are they? What steps do you need to take to get this to happen?

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