

# carer support groups

**One of the most important parts of being a carer is looking after yourself. Carer support groups are one way of doing that. This fact sheet is designed to tell you what carer support groups are, how they work and why carers often nominate them as the best type of help available.**

## **Q. What is a carer support group?**

A carer support group is a group of carers who meet on a regular basis to discuss their caring situation, have some 'time out' from caring. Carers often exchange tips and advice on how to deal with varying situations and usually know of local services, which can be of assistance. Carer support groups are one of the few carer-specific services available.

As a carer, you have different needs from those of the person you are caring for. Talking to other carers at a support group often helps carers recognise that their needs are just as valid as those of the person they are helping to support.

## **Q. What are the benefits of attending a carer support group?**

- ✓ **being with people who understand the pressures of caring** – most probably many of your friends, family and the health professionals you encounter don't **really** understand what it's like being a carer. Many are well-meaning and want to give 'helpful advice' but don't truly understand the situation you're in. People at carer support groups are like yourself; they **do** understand what it's like being a carer – the rewards and the demands. By talking to these carers, you will find that you're not the only one feeling the way you do and this can be quite a relief.
- ✓ **getting emotional support** – carers often experience emotions such as sadness, depression, guilt, exhaustion, frustration, anger, irritability and so on. Sometimes carers feel that they should not express such emotions because they are not 'acceptable' and they feel they should be 'coping better'. Almost every carer feels these emotions at some time. They are a perfectly normal reaction to the situation you're in. Carer support groups allow you the opportunity to talk about these emotions.
- ✓ **making new friends** – often carers lose touch with friends and family because of changed circumstances and as demands on their time increase. This can lead to isolation and sometimes feelings of loneliness and perhaps depression. Getting out to a support group can expand your social network and can help break that cycle as well as assist with improving your overall sense of well-being.

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- ✓ **getting information** – support group co-ordinators keep members up-to-date with developments in policies, entitlements and special carers' events. They may also arrange guest speakers on topics of interest.

## Q. What about our privacy?

Carer Support groups respect confidentiality and discussions of personal situations must not be discussed with others outside the group.

## Q. Are there different types of support groups?

- ✓ Yes. Some are specifically for carers who are caring for someone with a certain disability such as dementia or mental illness etc, others are for parents of children with a disability, however many are open groups for carers with all different caring circumstances.
- ✓ There are support groups for Aboriginal carers.
- ✓ There are support groups for carers from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Also keep in mind that support groups are like any other type of group; it may take a few sessions before you feel that you 'belong'. If you don't feel happy in a particular group, you can always try a different one.

## Q. How often do carer support groups meet?

Most groups meet once a month for a couple of hours and usually at the same location. However some groups do vary the days, the times and, in rural areas, the location.

## Q. Where is my nearest carer support group?

- ✓ Contact the **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636** for details of your local carer support group or to request a printed listing of support groups in your region.
- ✓ Contact the **Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre** on **1800 059 059** for details of any additional carer support groups that they may support. They will also help you organise respite care and transport if required, so you can attend.
- ✓ Alternatively, contact the disability association that supports the person you care for, ie Stroke Recovery Association, Autism Association, Mental Health Association etc, as they can also give you details of their carer support groups

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**Q. Does it cost anything to attend a carer support group?**

No. The groups are free, although some ask for a small contribution for refreshments.

**Q. What if I need transport to get to a support group?**

Again, try the group's coordinator first or alternatively contact the **Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre** on **1800 059 059** or the **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636** to find out about your transport options.

**TIP:**

If you wish to discuss any aspect of carer support groups, please call the **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636**.

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