

Is a Support Group Right for Me?



By Merry McGowen

Is a support group going to benefit me or is it just another event to put on my calendar – another event I don't really have time or energy for but I will end up feeling obligated to attend?

Realistically, most of us are already as busy as we want to be, so we aren't inclined to want to join another activity unless we can identify with that event having substantial benefits for us.

Consider these benefits of support groups:

- -A support group is a place to get together with others who are in similar situations and usually facing similar difficulties. For caregivers, it might mean that everyone attending is also a caregiver and truly understands the commitment of caregiving and the unique demands on time, energy & emotions, etc that it requires. For others, a support group might be a place to meet with individuals who are struggling with the symptoms of a similar chronic condition like MS, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, or diabetes to name just a few.
- -It's an opportunity to discuss common problems and to hear about solutions that others have discovered or worked through. Some of the best and most creative solutions come from talking about and working things through with others.
- -In a support group, the opportunity is available to share experiences and negative feelings without feeling guilty. Because other members of the group are in similar situations, they are better able to identify with, understand and validate even those feelings.
- -A support group can also be a social outlet. If you are a caregiver or someone with a chronic condition, your ability to attend social functions may be limited. Having to limit those connections can lead to isolation. Attending a support group offers the opportunity to build new relationships to enjoy.

If you have been reluctant to attend a support group because you don't like to talk in front of groups, it's important to know that there aren't any requirements that you must share personal things. For some people, more is gained from listening to others in the group talk than by joining in the conversation.

Interfaith Caregivers offers a variety of support groups. Caregiver Connections focus on educating and supporting caregivers. Parkinson's support groups are available to present education and offer support to people with Parkinson's and their caregivers. These groups are offered in several locations in Martin & Faribault County. See page 3 for dates, times and locations or contact the Interfaith office at 526-4684.