

Motivating People Toward Better Mental Health Care Through Education

Guidebook Study Group

Learning about late life mental health can be fun. Gathering interested peers to seek education, share experiences and talk about real life challenges is a great way to journey toward positive mental health.

Starting a Guidebook Study Group is a unique way to bring people together to learn and discuss issues of mental health in later life. Using the free “Mental Health in Later Life: A Guidebook for Older Adults and the People Who Care for Them” as the book for study, groups can meet as they please to talk about the information in the book and share their own ideas and strategies for positive mental health.

Starting a Guidebook Study Group is as easy as this:

- 1) Contact the Mental Health Association of Maryland at 443-901-1550 x 210 and have a free copy of the guidebook sent to all the people who will be participating in the Guidebook Study Group.
- 2) Agree on a time and location for the group to meet. (The timeframe may be as long as you'd like. A two hour time period is ideal. Some groups may want to divide the book into sections and meet several times. This approach seems to help in jump starting support groups.) The number of participants is completely up to you. Groups as small as 5 and as large as 20 have enjoyed the benefits of the Guidebook Study Group however a group size of 8-12 allows for a good balance of exchange and comfort.
- 3) Begin the event with an agreement on ground rules. Some recommended rules include:
 - ✓ Stories and experiences shared during the group time may be sensitive and are not to be shared with others outside of the group experience. Ensure privacy.
 - ✓ Each group member deserves respect – participants need to remain non-judgmental and supportive of each other. The group should be a safe place to learn and share.

- ✓ Use sensitive language. Negative stigma surrounding mental illness comes from negative stereotypes and false assumptions that are perpetuated through stigmatizing language. Such language may be unintentional – don't scold group members for unintended offense. Instead, use language as an opportunity to explore underlying myths or misinformation that creates barriers to mental health care.
 - ✓ Everyone should have the time and freedom to share in the discussion – group members should ensure that no one dominates the conversation and that more quiet members have equal opportunity to talk.
 - ✓ If there is not a member of the group who is familiar with mental health issues, designate a participant to seek professional consultation on questions or issues that require clarity or follow-up. Such follow-up may be available through the Mental Health Association of Maryland at 443-901-1550 x 210.
 - ✓ Group members should be allowed to volunteer other rules that will benefit the group and experience of the individuals who are participating.
- 4) Enjoy the experience as it unfolds! If people want to turn the group into an ongoing support group, there are many resources to help facilitate that transition.

You may obtain free copies through the Mental Health Association of Maryland at 443-901-1550 x 210. A pdf of the Guidebook and further mental health information is available on Maryland's Mental Health and Aging website, www.mdaging.org .

Questions regarding guidebook content, study group development or help with mental health problems may be directed to Kim Burton, Director of Older Adult Programs for the Mental Health Association of Maryland –

443-901-1550 x 210 or kburton@mhamd.org