Self-Help Groups

Some people love self-help groups, some don't. Such groups include Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Cocaine Anonymous (CA), SMART Recovery, Dual Diagnosis, Rational Recovery, Secular Organization for Sobriety (SOS), Gamblers Anonymous (GA), Sexaholics Anonymous (SA), Emotions Anonymous, Al-Anon, Alateen, Parents Anonymous, and Co-Dependents Anonymous.

* ***If you've never tried self-help groups, you owe it to yourself to check them out.***

* ***A group may help.*** Anything to support your recovery is worth doing. A self-help group can give you a community of people who are struggling as you are, education about substance abuse, hope for the future, and wisdom from people who have recovered.

* ***If you've tried a group and don't like it, try other groups*** to see if you can find one you like. The culture of each group is different. There are also a lot of specialty groups: meetings for women, gays, combat veterans, beginners, nonsmokers, and others. Meetings also have different formats, such as speaker meetings, step meetings, and discussion meetings. Discover what works for you.

* ***If you don't like the spirituality of twelve-step groups, try alternatives*** such as SMART Recovery, Rational Recovery, or SOS. Many people who don't like AA like these, because they take a rational rather than spiritual approach and do not view addiction as a lifelong disease.

* ***Set a weekly goal that's realistic for you, and then stick to it.*** Better to promise yourself two meetings a week and go, than to promise yourself seven and not go at all.

* ***Remember that self-help groups are designed to focus only on addiction, not PTSD.*** Use the groups for what they can give, and don't feel that you need to talk about your PTSD unless it is welcome there. Many people don't understand PTSD, so don't be surprised by that.

* ***Sometimes you may hear people take an antimedication stand*** ("Using Prozac is just as bad as using cocaine") or an antitherapy stand ("All you need is AA"). This is not the official policy of self-help groups, and you can ignore that advice.

* ***Some people with PTSD have difficulty with self-help groups*** because they can't be around a lot of people due to social fears or paranoia, because they get drawn into unhealthy relationships with people there, or for any number of other reasons. If you've really tried to get involved in self-help and still don't like it, that's okay. No one should make you feel bad or wrong for not going. It is a personal choice, and there are many paths for healing.

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