

## **THE POWER OF SUPPORT GROUPS – THERE’S NO NEED TO FEEL ALONE**

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, CEAP

Have you noticed the self help section of the newspaper? If not, I urge you to take a look at the many ongoing support groups available. Perusing the list of groups reveals a cross section of the challenges people face - addiction, divorce, grief, parenting, depression, mental illness, and physical disease.

Regardless of the type of support group, there is no disputing the power that comes from meeting with like-minded people facing the same challenge. Humans are social beings with a basic need for belonging. In a supportive atmosphere of acceptance and understanding, we find hope as we make connections, get motivated, give and receive emotional and practical support, exchange information, and gain confirmation that our feelings are “normal.” There is comfort in knowing that we not alone. We learn from the experience, strength, and hope of others.

Life is filled with physical and emotional challenges. Unforeseen events interrupt our lives and leave us feeling stunned and afraid, and we grieve our losses. Yet, we can be remarkably resilient, especially when we meet others who understand.

If you or someone you love is experiencing a challenge, discuss your feelings. When we neglect to talk about our feelings and emotions, they fester. At times it is appropriate to feel sad, lonely, or afraid. But, if these feelings are interfering with your life – your work, relationships, or sleep patterns – it’s important to ask for help. Consider talking to a professional or looking for a support group. (It’s OK to go to a group and “just listen.” There is no requirement that you speak, although you may find comfort in sharing your story.)

Every Wednesday at Cancer Alliance of Naples (CAN), I facilitate a free support group for cancer patients, care givers, and cancer survivors. I also facilitate personal growth groups for women.

For more information, call me at 239-404-0862.

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