

Women's groups and wellbeing

women's **health** west

FACT SHEET No.

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fact sheet

If you're feeling sad, depressed, worried or anxious, or if you are coping with difficult situations in your life and feel you have no one to confide in, there are many places you can go for help to try and increase your wellbeing. These include talking to family or friends, counselling, support from your GP and/or medication, regular exercise and various alternative health practitioners.

Some women have also found **women's groups** very helpful. The following comments come from women who took part in a Well-Being for Women in the Western Region Group that focussed on emotional and mental wellbeing.

Groups build women's confidence

"The group helped me get over being scared in groups." – Ruby

"Saying 'no' and feeling comfortable – I got that from the group." – Lesley

"I was scared to go ... also that whole thing about whether I deserved to go ... I decided it was important for me to go because I could contribute." – Lara

Groups expand women's horizons

"Women's groups have that nurturing quality ... extend women's horizons ... expand their view of available choices and give them hope. That's why women get depressed – lack of choice and hope." – Barbara

"The topics we covered in the group were helpful in challenging the way I think about things." – Carol

"Having come to the group has made me more aware of ways to try and help myself." – Maree

"The group was like a stepping stone ... all of a sudden the depression lifted." – Ruby

Getting rid of guilt

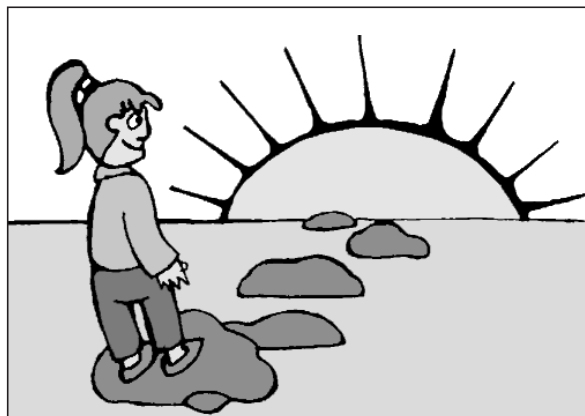
"Before coming to the group I often worried that I should have done things differently ... just realising that there are other women ... and that things go wrong for other people ... that it's life that things can go wrong and it's not necessarily one person's fault." – Susan

"The group has given me a sense of achievement and made me realise I am different ... I've been feeling guilty about certain ideas ... suddenly I've realised that I'm too scared to open my mouth about things ... being different is hard ... but this is who I am." – Lara

"Not taking so much blame ... sometimes I will think of having come to the group and say to myself – 'well, it's not all your fault'" – Susan

Sharing and support

"Often part of the depression is the isolation – if you're seeing a GP and counsellor, that's good but they're isolating things, so it's essential to be in a group as long as its not something where you all reinforce how depressed you are." – Ruby



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“The aim of the group is not to get through everything we're supposed to ... the aim is being there for ourselves and sharing.”

– Lara

“While the group was going, it was like I had a bit of a community. As soon as the group finished, I thought what else can I do – a diving block to something else” – Ruby

“It's good for women to get together in groups. Some women don't know how they should be treated – they only know how their mother was treated – maybe she was sexually abused or hit – they need to hear that it can be different for other women.” – Lesley

“In women's groups, you can really be yourself and express your inner feelings ... sometimes when we speak to professionals we're too scared to say what we want to say ... because they might think we're stupid ... I don't think we want answers ... we aren't expecting group leaders to tell us... – Lucy

Compiled by Heather Clarke and women from a Well-Being for Women Group at Dousta Galla Community Health Service.

This group is based on feminist and narrative therapy approaches and has been offered at the Dousta Galla Community Health Service since the mid-1990s. It is promoted as a support and discussion group for women of all ages, around issues affecting women's emotional and mental health. The group is facilitated by two community health staff, and has two stages: an initial ten-week program, and an ongoing monthly group. The program includes sessions on self-care, self esteem, communications, assertiveness and stress management.

More about women's groups

Women's groups may be a helpful alternative to some of the more traditional responses to women's emotional difficulties, such as individual medical or psychological treatment. Women's groups are based on the idea of bringing women together so they can talk with and listen to other



women who are facing similar difficulties in their lives. This can be a very helpful way of highlighting that they themselves are not the 'problem'.

Women's groups are often run at community health centres and neighbourhood houses. They are generally time-limited, running for a set number of weeks, and will often focus on a particular issues such as increasing self-esteem, dealing with family violence or sexual abuse, or overcoming depression and anxiety.

Groups for Women in the West

There are many different kinds of groups available, including groups for:

- ◆ local women to support each other
- ◆ women with disabilities
- ◆ women affected by family violence or sexual abuse
- ◆ mothers/young mothers
- ◆ women from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds
- ◆ young women, and
- ◆ hobbies, sports and social groups.

For more information about groups in your area, contact the Community Services department of your local council, or your local community health centre, neighbourhood house or settlement service. Some groups are very popular, so you may need to go on a waiting list.

Women's Health West has details and contact of many groups, particularly those for women affected by family violence. Contact us on 9689 9588 or info@whwest.org.au for more information.