

**Qualitative themes for likes, dislikes, and recommendations for online peer support groups**

| Question   | Themes                               | Sample Quotes   |
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| What do you like about participating in online support groups? | Convenience                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Doesn't add additional stress of financial burden or travel expenses or physical effort to get there...too much for a single working 63 year old like me.”</li> <li>• “Because it can be 24 hour support.”</li> <li>• “Don’t have to travel anywhere, comfort of being home.”</li> <li>• “With the virus, it is a safe alternative, practical, and in the comfort of my own home.”</li> <li>• “Convenient, always there, relieves loneliness and feeling alone.”</li> </ul>   |
|  | Anonymity                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I can hide behind my keyboard.”</li> <li>• “I don’t have to let other people in my life know.”</li> <li>• “Not having to see any one.”</li> <li>• “I am very introverted and have no interest in attending an in person support group.”</li> <li>• “I also have the choice not to have my camera on and to just listen if I'm not feeling up to sharing. This is a much better option for me due to my anxiety and chronic illness.</li> <li>• I would not attend groups if an online option wasn't available because I cannot always get out of the house, either due to high anxiety or fatigue and pain.”</li> <li>• “Easier to discuss difficult problems than with people face to face.”</li> </ul>  |
|  | Compassionate Camaraderie            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Receive and give encouragement.”</li> <li>• “Easier to reach people with similar experiences. It's also easier to start these conversations surrounding mental health or shared experience because unlike face-to-face conversations, you can avoid the small talks or conversation-openers, which makes it easier to just go straight to the point about these topics.”</li> <li>• “Creating a network of honest people with integrity.”</li> <li>• “Feel less defective because I think that I'm a good listener to those people who need to talk. I can vent to people who actually understand and validate and listened to me.”</li> <li>• “Finding people who have experienced the same things helps me to know I'm not alone.”</li> </ul> |
|  | Sharing Hope and Helpful Information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I can share my experience, strength, and hope. When I participate, I'm there to learn from others, but will share too.”</li> <li>• “It is a way to give back once I have experience in a subject. I also learned more so I guess it is survival using curiosity!”</li> <li>• “Learning more, finding resources for me and trying to find someone for my daughter to connect to. I want to hear</li> </ul>   |

people's experiences with various medications and alternative treatments. I want to know the latest therapy.”

- “Support, to learn, find out how to be supportive in return. To reach out to others. To hear their stories makes me feel not so alone and also maybe I can help them.”
- “It provides emotional support, it lets me know how others manage or cope, it provides me with a means to help others.”

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What do you not like about participating in online support groups?

Impersonality

- “Lack human connection when on screen.”
- “It is still impersonal and leaves you feeling let down.”
- “Can't read body language... too impersonal.”
- “It's nice to talk in person with someone.”
- “Not personable. Never the same people. Feels superficial and lacks a sense of connection in person groups have”
- “You can't ever get a real hug from someone online.”
- “Don't know the people in the group. I do not benefit from support groups.”
- “I do not know the other person.”
- “I like to see people and I feel like technology gets in the way. I prefer to be able to feel the energy in the room.”
- “It might be necessary in pandemic, but I liked going to small setting in person and presence of others was comforting.”
- “Just not personal and I don't like to give information about myself to unknown people.”

Uncertainty

- “Don't know who really is on the other side. Hard to know if you can trust other people.”
- “Fear of rejection, being laughed at.”
- “I am afraid I will be just speaking with other individuals who have not been successful in their recovery and continue to struggle tremendously.”
- “I find they trigger my anxiety or sense of peace.”
- “I think there could be fake profiles.”
- ““Group dynamic changes often, which makes me nervous.”
- “Questions about validity of people acting as authorities.”

Unkindness

- “I get afraid of people that might be dishonest or predatory.”
- “Sometimes people aren't really there for support there and they are to judge.”
- “There is always those people that get into the group just to harass or try to make us feel worse about what we are dealing with.”
- “Others bullied and berated me”
- “Trolls”
- “Negativity or sexual content.”

- “There’s always a few people that bully and denigrate the experiences of others. I didn’t share much because I didn’t want to become a target.”
- “Without proper facilitation/mediation, they get out of hand.”

- Unhelpfulness
- “It can easily degenerate into unhelpful ‘pity parties’. I’m also very sensitive and can get sidetracked trying to help others with their problems, and feel like mine aren’t that bad so I end up not sharing enough of mine. Then I come away feeling worse, not better!”
  - “It’s way too dramatic and eventually becomes the opposite of any kind of support.”
  - “People tend to ruminate on the negative which is understandable but I feel they are stuck and often angry.”
  - “Same stories over and over. People stuck in the medical model and do not believe recovery is possible. I do not leave support groups feeling like I benefited from it. People who have pity parties or hog the conversation. I do not get enough new information from them that helps my recovery.”
  - “Some people just want a pity party or to vent.”

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| <p>What would enhance your experience of participating in online support groups?</p> | <p>Improved Privacy Controls</p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I wish it was anonymous.”</li> <li>• “Being able to video chat, even anonymously (not giving my name out, etc.)”</li> <li>• “Better privacy at home and ability to ensure no one hassling me about my personal boundaries.”</li> <li>• “Strong privacy controls and commitment to maintaining user privacy.”</li> </ul>  |
|  | <p>More Formal Structure</p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “A focus on a certain subject, state of being, or symptom and seeing it through.”</li> <li>• “A schedule.”</li> <li>• “Better times to meet.”</li> <li>• “Filters or tags that can help me find the people whom I have shared experiences with.”</li> <li>• “A closed group that is time limited so no new members until opens for intake then closes for 6 week block again?”</li> <li>• “I appreciate structure like the principles of support at NAMI meetings.”</li> <li>• “If it were specifically for age groups it would be better (i.e., caregivers of children under 18 that have mental illness)</li> </ul> |
|  | <p>Group Facilitation or Moderation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Good administrators to facilitate/mediate, allowing participation for all”</li> <li>• “Have an experienced facilitator to encourage discussion.”</li> </ul>  |

- “A peer support worker facilitating groups.”
- “Consistent facilitators with adequate training and skills. Plus training for online specific communication skills.”
- “More structure to maximize use of precious time...need more organized leadership...moderators need to be organized and have clear focus...otherwise it's a waste of everyone's time.”
- “Not have just one person dominate the conversation.”
- “If people could remember that those of us with mental health/emotional issues are particularly sensitive to harsh, negative remarks. It just isn't the place for debate - it could end up very tragically for someone.”

Increased  
Diversity and  
Specificity of  
Topics and  
Content

- “More help with resources”
  - “More resources and factual information”
  - “I like weekly blogs and news by experts as well as good writing about mental health issues.”
  - “Discussing new information about mental illness, new recovery methods. People with high intellect, people highly motivated to recover. Less small talk. A group with people at advanced stages of recovery.”
  - “A more personalized experience and a large community.”
  - “Finding some with mature people in it.”
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