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The Power of Peer Support

VEDA SUPPORT GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Theme: Finding Strength, Understanding, and Connection Through Shared Experience

Suggested duration: 60 minutes

A Note to Facilitators: This discussion guide includes more questions than most groups will be able to cover in a single meeting. You are not expected to address every questio n. Select the topics most relevant to your members, allow conversations to develop nat urally, and consider spreading the discussion across two or more meetings. The goal is meaningful connection, not completing the outline.

Purpose

Living with a vestibular disorder can be an isolating experience. Symptoms are often invisible, difficult to explain, and misunderstood by people who haven't experienced them. Connecting with others who understand can provide validation, practical coping strategies, encouragement, and a sense of belonging.

This discussion invites group members to reflect on how peer support has helped them navigate the challenges of living with a vestibular disorder. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate the connections they've made and recognize the ways they support one another.

Goals

By the end of the discussion, participants will have had an opportunity to:

- Reflect on how peer support has influenced their vestibular journey.
- Share practical strategies and lessons they've learned from other group members.
- Explore how peer support helps them communicate their needs and advocate for themselves.
- Recognize the value of social connection, encouragement, and mutual understanding.
- Identify ways they can continue supporting one another.

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1. Welcome and Opening Reflection (5–10 minutes)

Facilitator introduction:

"Living with a vestibular disorder can sometimes feel like navigating a world that doesn't understand what you're experiencing. Friends, family, coworkers, and even healthcare providers may struggle to understand how dizziness, imbalance, fatigue, and other symptoms affect everyday life.

"One of the most powerful things about a support group is that you don't have to explain everything. You're surrounded by people who understand because they've been there, too.

"Today, we're going to talk about the power of peer support—what we've learned from one another, how these connections have helped us cope, and why being part of a community matters."

Opening question:

- Think back to when you first joined a support group. What brought you here, and what were you hoping to find?

Optional follow-up: Has what you get out of the group changed over time?

2. The Power of Feeling Understood (10 minutes)

One of the most important benefits of peer support is validation—knowing that your experiences are real and that you're not alone.

Discussion questions:

1. Have you ever felt that people in your life didn't understand what you were going through? How did that affect you?
2. Can you remember a moment in a support group when someone shared an experience that made you think, "That's exactly how I feel!"?
3. How has connecting with others who have vestibular disorders changed the way you think about your own symptoms or experiences?

Optional follow-up prompts:

- Has being part of a group helped you feel less alone?
- Has hearing other people's stories helped you feel more confident in your own experiences?
- What does it mean to have a place where you don't have to explain or justify your symptoms?

Facilitator tip: Encourage members to share specific moments of connection. Sometimes a simple acknowledgment—"I've experienced that, too"—can be deeply meaningful.

3. Learning from One Another: Practical Coping Strategies (10–15 minutes)

Support groups offer something unique: the collective wisdom of people who have learned to navigate everyday life with vestibular symptoms.

Discussion questions:

1. What's one practical tip or coping strategy you've learned from another group member that has made a difference in your daily life?
2. Have other people's experiences inspired you to try something new, approach a challenge differently, or become more confident in managing your symptoms?
3. What's something you've learned through your own experience that you'd like to share with someone who is newly diagnosed?

Optional follow-up prompts:

- Strategies for managing fatigue, brain fog, or sensory overload.
- Navigating grocery stores, restaurants, travel, or social events.
- Balancing activity and rest.
- Preparing for medical appointments and communicating with healthcare providers.
- Learning to ask for help or make accommodations without feeling guilty.

Facilitator tip: Encourage practical examples while reminding participants that what works for one person may not work for another. Support groups are places to exchange experiences, not prescribe treatments. Medical decisions should be made with qualified healthcare professionals.

4. Finding Your Voice: Communicating with Others (10 minutes)

Because vestibular disorders are often invisible, explaining their impact to others can be challenging. Hearing how other group members navigate these conversations can help people find the words and confidence to advocate for themselves.

Discussion questions:

1. Has being part of a support group helped you find better ways to explain your vestibular disorder to family, friends, coworkers, or employers?
2. What have you learned from others about asking for help, setting boundaries, or requesting accommodations?
3. Have you become more comfortable speaking up about your needs since connecting with other vestibular patients?

Optional follow-up prompts:

- What do you wish your loved ones understood about your condition?
- Have you found a helpful analogy or phrase that makes your symptoms easier to explain?
- How do you respond when someone says, "But you look fine"?
- Have you learned ways to communicate your needs without feeling that you must apologize for them?

Facilitator tip: This topic may bring up painful experiences of being dismissed or misunderstood. Allow space for those feelings while encouraging members to share approaches that have helped them communicate more effectively.

5. Connection, Encouragement, and Hope (10 minutes)

Peer support isn't just about exchanging information. It's also about building relationships, celebrating progress, and finding encouragement during difficult times.

Discussion questions:

1. How has being part of this group affected your sense of connection with others?
2. Have other group members helped you find hope or motivation during a difficult period?
3. Has supporting someone else in the group helped you feel more confident, capable, or connected?

Optional follow-up prompts:

- Have you developed friendships or meaningful connections through peer support?
- How does it feel to celebrate progress with people who understand how significant even small accomplishments can be?
- Has hearing about someone else's progress changed your expectations about your own future?
- What have you gained from helping others, rather than only receiving support?

Facilitator tip: Emphasize that peer support is a two-way relationship. Even members who are still struggling have valuable experiences and insights to share. Also acknowledge that hope doesn't always mean symptom improvement or recovery. Sometimes it means finding new ways to live a meaningful life despite ongoing challenges.

6. Closing Reflection: What Peer Support Means to Me (5–10 minutes)

Bring the discussion full circle by inviting participants to reflect on what they've gained and what they hope to carry forward.

Closing questions:

1. If you could describe what this support group means to you in one word or phrase, what would it be?
2. What would you tell someone who is hesitant to join a vestibular support group?
3. What's one thing you appreciate about this group or its members?

Optional closing activity:

Invite each participant to complete this sentence:

"Because of peer support, I..."

Examples might include:

- "...know I'm not alone."
- "...have learned to advocate for myself."
- "...feel more confident managing my symptoms."
- "...have found people who truly understand."
- "...know I have something valuable to offer others."

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Suggested facilitator closing remarks:

"Thank you for sharing your experiences today. Every person in this group brings something valuable—whether it's a practical tip, a word of encouragement, a listening ear, or simply the reassurance that someone else understands.

"Peer support doesn't make vestibular disorders disappear, but it can change how we experience them. It reminds us that we don't have to navigate these challenges alone.

"Each of you contributes to making this group a place of understanding, connection, and hope. That's the power of peer support."

Additional Guidance for Facilitators

Keep the conversation inclusive. Some participants may be attending for the first time and haven't yet experienced the benefits of peer support. Invite them to share what they hope to gain from the group. Others may have had mixed experiences with support groups; their perspectives are valuable, too.

Balance participation. Encourage quieter members to contribute without putting them on the spot. Gently redirect participants who dominate the conversation so everyone has an opportunity to speak.

Make room for difficult feelings. Not everyone will feel hopeful or positive about their vestibular journey. Allow participants to express frustration, grief, or uncertainty without feeling pressured to find a silver lining.

Avoid comparisons. Remind participants that vestibular disorders affect people differently. No one's experience is more or less valid because of their diagnosis, symptom severity, or recovery progress.

Respect privacy. Reinforce the group's confidentiality expectations. Members should not share another person's story outside the group without permission.

Keep the focus on peer support. While discussion of symptoms and treatments may naturally arise, gently bring the conversation back to what members have learned from one another and how those connections have helped them.

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Adapt to your group's needs. You do not need to cover every question. Choose the topics that resonate most with your members and allow conversations to develop naturally.