

SUPPORT GROUPS

An information sheet for patients, families and whānau



Many people hear the word 'support group' and have a pre-conceived idea about what they are and decide that they are not for them.

The following information will provide more information about what a support group is and highlight some of the benefits of attending.

WHAT IS A SUPPORT GROUP?

Leukaemia & Blood Cancer New Zealand (LBC) support groups are led by a Support Services Coordinator, who is always present to make sure everyone feels included, comfortable and supported.

These groups are an opportunity for people to meet with others who have been affected by a diagnosis of a blood cancer or condition. They are a confidential and supportive place to share your story, express emotions or offer information including practical suggestions and strategies about ways to cope. As an experienced haematology/oncology healthcare professional, the Support Services Coordinator is available to contribute to discussions.

The groups are approximately two hours long and held in an LBC office or similar community room. As well as time to chat, light refreshments are provided and there is always lots of time for laughter.

What are the advantages of attending a support group?

There has been lots of research into the benefits of support groups. Evidence suggests that people who talk to others in a similar situation cope better with the psychological effects of living with and beyond a cancer diagnosis, including experiencing lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression and improved quality of life.

Being diagnosed with a blood cancer or condition can be quite lonely and isolating. It may feel as though friends or family don't understand what you are going through. Meeting others who have the same experience can help reduce these feelings and provide a realistic perspective of what is normal in the circumstances. It can help people adapt to new situations. Everyone in attendance has been affected by a blood cancer or condition and so there is an understanding of worries, concerns and challenges.

There are two main functions of a support group. One is receiving help and support and the other is giving help and support. People who come to the groups may have worries and questions that they would like to speak to others about and may receive support which directly helps with their problem solving, developing new skills and coping strategies or emotional support. However, everyone comes to a group with their own strengths which they can offer to others.

Are there any disadvantages of attending a support group?

Everyone copes very differently with their family members' diagnosis of a blood cancer or condition and support groups are not for everyone.

Not everyone finds talking in a group easy and this thought may be intimidating. You are invited to participate as much or as little as you like and are definitely not expected to talk if you don't want to. Just listening to others may be beneficial for you.

Within a group people will have varying coping strategies which may not always align. However hearing how others cope may offer some new learning, however small. People within the groups

are also encouraged to talk about what they find helpful as opposed to telling others what they should or shouldn't be doing.

There will also be people present at very different stages of diagnosis and/or treatment. Some people may have experienced a relatively trouble-free diagnosis/treatment while others may have, or may be very unwell. Whilst this can be difficult, it can also provide hope for those not doing too well, and a feeling of gratitude for those who are.

What are education groups?

At education groups, a guest speaker is invited to present to the group. The information may be medical in nature, for example information on clinical trials, treatment updates or interpreting blood results. Or the presentation may focus more on providing information to support you to live well following diagnosis and treatment, for example fatigue management, eating well or advance care planning.

What are the benefits of attending education groups?

Everyone copes differently with a cancer diagnosis and treatment, and for some people good information and education can provide a sense of control and reduce any feelings of helplessness.

During these groups information and strategies to assist coping are presented in an easy-to-understand format in a relaxed and friendly environment, where questions are encouraged.

Join the mailing list for groups in your area

LBC runs regular education and support groups across the country.

QUESTIONS & NOTES



Important information available online

For more information and to download other fact sheets, see our website www.leukaemia.org.nz