

LITS Bulletin

Louisiana Integrated Treatment Services (LITS) Technical Assistance Bulletin (TAB)
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TAB No. 7

It is the goal of LITS, according to Guiding Principle #9, to involve consumers and their families throughout LITS implementation, specifically by supporting advocacy and self-help group development. This TAB will introduce and explain the importance of self-help groups for people with co-occurring disorders, and what you can do to support clients and their families.

Self-Help Programs for Co-Occurring Disorders

What are “self-help programs”?

Self-help programs are comprised of a group(s) of individuals who share a common “problem” behavior. Usually following an adaptation to the 12-step model, they learn to accept their problem, share their experiences, strengths, and hopes. The only requirement for membership is a desire to abstain from the problem behavior, and for many this leads to “recovery”, which represents a road to a better life. As a free fellowship of everyday people helping everyday people, there is no “professional” involvement - self-help programs should not be confused with treatment or counseling services, but rather a recovery support compliment to formal treatment. There are many programs for the wide array of problems and challenges faced by people everyday – for the purpose of this TAB, we will focus on self-help programs for people with co-occurring disorders.

How does self-help for co-occurring disorders work?

Self-help programs provide a social network based on a commonly shared experience, within a meaningful structure that is self-generated (rather than imposed by outside entities). Members learn from each other how to cope successfully with their struggles based on experiences and lessons learned by others. With time, members shift from being a help-recipient to an actual helper to others. Self-help programs that focus on co-occurring disorders are particularly helpful to people with multiple recovery needs requiring a multi-focus program, rather than programs that focus on a single disorder, or ignore or provide misguided advice about the other disorder.

Which self-help programs focus on recovery for co-occurring disorders?

At this time, we are aware of 2 worldwide programs with established networks: Double Trouble in Recovery (DTR) and Dual-Recovery Anonymous (DRA). Few parts of Louisiana have DRA or DTR groups operating, however growth is possible with support from agency professionals who can understand and appreciate the self-help concepts.

Why should I support 12-step programs for COD?

As a treatment professional, you know it is important to encourage your clients to build a healthier life of recovery – this means they develop their support network and learn to deal

with stress – and to help them transition into the post-treatment phase of recovery. You will find, as research shows, that 12-step support programs not only have a positive influence in this area, they also serve as a wonderful compliment to treatment and play a significant role in the success of your clients' recovery. Participation in 12-step groups, during and after formal treatment, is associated with reduced substance use and reduced mental health symptoms, as well as increased health-promoting behaviors (such as medication adherence, seeking health-care, and engaging in self-care activities).

Beyond these evidence-based reasons, it is also important to remember that the availability and incorporation of 12-step programs for COD actually enhances treatment programs, in terms of DDCAT measures, which sets the state's standards for "Co-Occurring Disorders Capable / Enhanced" (CODC/E). Twelve-step programs intertwined with traditional treatment programming can actually raise a treatment program's level of co-occurring capability.

What can I do to support 12-step programs for COD

While 12-step programs are typically grassroots, self-supported efforts, there is no contraindication for treatment program staff providing support and technical assistance to those groups. For instance, you may be able to identify clients and consumers who would like to start a group, but they don't know how and where to do it. This is where treatment professionals can assist. Resources, including start-up guides, are available online from DTR (www.doubletroubleinrecovery.org) and DRA (www.draonline.org). Also, treatment professionals can assist in locating meeting space, posting meeting notices, and encouraging participation. In some cases, a treatment professional may even assist with facilitating the group meetings until a more appropriate replacement is identified.

Many people receiving treatment and continuing their recovery can benefit from the additional support and enrichment that 12-step groups for COD can offer. It is the position of LITS that these groups can sprout up from the fertile ground of the treatment programs, and grow into the communities. However, it is essential that program administrators and treatment professionals become the catalyst for this process, by investing an initial amount of time and effort towards the group's development and sustainability.

Is there any specialized technical assistance available?

For DTR, in particular, there is a facilitator-training program offered by the founder of DTR, Howard Vogel. The training can be tailored to an individual group's needs and time constraints, with a possibility of ongoing consultation. The only prerequisite is that a treatment program must identify potential DTR facilitators and work with its local Steering Committee to negotiate and secure a LITS Technical Assistance Request. For more information on pursuing this option, please consult with the Facilitator of your Local Steering Committee.