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/* ----- The CSS rules offered here are just an example, you may use them as a base.
Shape your 'expand/collapse' cont so that it meets the style of your site. ----- */ #cont {
width:100%; margin:0 auto; padding-bottom:20px; overflow:hidden } .demo {
/*margin:0; padding:1.5em 1.5em 0.75em; border:1px solid #ccc; position:relative*/ }
.collapse p {padding:0 10px 1em} .top{font-size:.9em; text-align:right} #switch, .switch
{margin-bottom:5px; text-align:right} /* --- Headings --- */ .expand{padding-bottom:.75em}
/* --- Links --- */ a:link, a:visited { border:1px dotted #ccc; border-width:0 0 1px;
text-decoration:none; } a:hover, a:active, a:focus { border-style:solid; /*
background-color:#f0f0f0;*/ outline:0 none } /*a:active, a:focus { color:red; *// .expand a {
display:block; padding:8px 8px } .expand a:link, .expand a:visited { border-width:1px;
background-image:url(images/img/arrow-down.gif); background-repeat:no-repeat;
background-position:98% 50%; } .expand a:hover, .expand a:active, .expand a:focus {
text-decoration:underline } .expand a.open:link, .expand a.open:visited { border-style:solid;
background:#eee url(images/img/arrow-up.gif) no-repeat 98% 50%; } Do
es it cost anything to become a member & participate in caregivers support group
activity? Is contribution or subscription compulsory or voluntary?
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It is good that one is clear about the role of funds. There is no compulsion to donate or pay subscription. But then a group requires a place to meet, a place to operate from, some stationery, make phone calls, give ads or announcements in the newspapers, to spend on local conveyance etc. All these are required to be paid for. So voluntary collection of subscription helps support group to function more effectively. Experience of most shubhankars is, this payment of voluntary donations or contributions is cost effective. That is, benefits both tangible and intangible outweigh cost incurred in participating at these support group meetings. So, generally contributions from members and donations from well-wishers are spontaneous. There is no compulsion. There is in fact a spirit of cooperation!

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**Who can become members of shubhankars' support group? Do you have any eligibility criteria for this?**

Any member of the affected family and volunteers are welcome to join this support group. Those with compassion for the persons coping with the challenge and a genuine desire to serve them generally continue with the support group.

Actually a shubhankar need not necessarily be a family member though mostly it is so. Head of the family, the earning member, mostly happens to be the guardian or shubhankar of an affected person. But it could be literally anyone, say, a compassionate neighbour, a friend or a dedicated volunteer, not necessarily related to the patient at all. In other words, one enrolls as a

member of a support group based purely of his own choice.

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### **What exactly happens at the shubhankars' support group meetings? Is there any planned agenda or structure designed for these meetings?**

Shubhankars meet once a fortnight, that is, on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of every month. The time is 4.30 pm to 6.30 pm. Second Saturdays mostly it is sharing of one's experience by the members. If there are any first-timers, self-introduction by them is followed by a brief narration of their situation at home. A lot of informal exchange of ideas, suggestions, one's own experiments and experiences by shubhankars, articles or books read, one's hobbies, topics like marriage, medication, self-employment etc. form the content of discussions.

#### **One or two experienced facilitators ensure the following,**

Everyone present gets a chance to speak.

No controversial or irrelevant topic is discussed e.g. religion, god men, astrology, politics etc.

No one in the group takes up any advisory or critic's role.

Unity and team spirit are encouraged and nurtured.

Mostly on the 4th Saturdays talks of experts or professionals are arranged. The topics are very wide-ranging e.g. communication skills, problem-solving techniques, self-care for shubhankars, relaxation methods, diet, medication and its side-effects, marriage prospects, investment and tax planning, trusteeship or guardianship arrangement, meditation and light physical exercises, vocational skills and self-employment opportunities, etc.

Thus, you will find a holistic approach to shubhankars' needs. This ensures their regular participation in the support group activities. I hope you are now better able to decide on joining a support group in your area.

Topics for discussion in shubhankars' group.

1. Things to be done while dealing with shubharthi.
2. Things to avoid while dealing with shubharthi.
3. Promoting compliance of medication: learning from experience.
4. Taking care of siblings of shubharthi.
5. Sharing of individual experiences of success, followed by discussion.
6. Inviting people with/working for other disabilities to share their experiences.
7. Promoting socialization of shubharthi & other family members.
8. Sharing of difficult situations involving shubharthi and others' comments on them.
9. Ways of encouraging shubharthi for self-help & greater self-reliance.
10. Marriage and shubharthi the pros, cons & probable solution
11. Shubhankars' need of self-care, both physical and emotional health.
12. Effective communication - avoiding contradictory verbal & non-verbal behaviour.
13. Ways of showing support to shubharthis.
14. Sharing responsibilities in the household work.
15. How Recovery method & tools help shubharthis.
16. Shubhankars' old age & financial self-reliance of shubharthi.
17. Role of shubharthi in household chores
18. Role of exercises, yoga, relaxation and pursuit of hobbies

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### **In what specific ways shubhankars have been benefited?**

Each shubhankar finds that at least some of his needs are met by the group activity. Some of the important are listed below :

- In a non-judgmental atmosphere he gains more factual information and is able to shed a lot of misconceptions about mental disorders. This leads to a journey of hope from earlier position of hopelessness and frustration. He starts encouraging his ward also to join support group meant for shubharthis.

- By now the process of breaking away from isolation and back to socialization begins. There is an attitudinal change, attitudinal healing of the family members. This results in developing fellowship, a desire and an ability to improve relationship with persons around.

- Willingly undergoing training meant for shubhankars he is able to overcome stigma, a sense of shame and blame. He realizes he has acquired communication and problem-solving skills. Coping techniques also give him the confidence to handle ups and downs so very characteristic of mental disorders. Reading literature available from the library and participating

in experts' talks and workshops change his entire outlook on life. In a way, one benefit leads to the other and that is why a shubhankar looks forward to the fortnightly meetings.

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**Why is it only recently that we find so much being talked about of shubhankar support groups? Is it because mental disorders are on the rise? I am curious to know whether this is simply another wave that will be short-lived?**

Statistics all over the world indicate that the percentage of population affected by mental disorders is not different now. That is, there is no rise in incidence. Why we get an impression that it is on the increase could be for a different reason. Because of improvement in literacy and tremendous progress in the means of communication, there is greater awareness about mental disorders and so many misconceptions are removed. This has resulted in more families coming out openly to seek medical help and support group assistance. When those who benefited share their positive experience, others also get motivated to take similar steps. Organizations like SAA try to fulfil the increased demand for support groups in more places. That perhaps gives an impression as if the incidence of mental disorders has increased. You will thus agree, there is no temporary surge or popularity wave of support groups but a continual demand. There is a lot that needs to be done by shubhankars themselves.

That is why we consider what SAA has been doing is a movement in restoration of hope and health in mental care. Of course, there is need for a lot more to be done. We also find many other similar organizations are doing a wonderful job for this very cause. So it is the cumulative and continuing effort that deserves the description as movement.

All shubhankar's are an important part of this universal movement!

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**What topics or issues are not encouraged to discuss in a support group? And what are the reasons for doing this? Does this not amount to imposing restrictions on the support group activity?**

It takes a lot of planning and effort to make the support group activity beneficial to its members. So, if after their having taken the trouble of coming for the meeting, spending time, money and

energy, they find they are not benefited; they will be demotivated and may stop participating in the group. Therefore, we have to bear in mind that nothing that is done or discussed creates controversy and confusion. In matters like politics, religion, occult practices, unproven therapies etc. each person has his own likes and dislikes. So debating on them will be a waste of time.

Observing such self-imposed restrictions or discipline is also part of self-help and every member of the group respects it in the overall interest of the group. So, let us call such a practice as a sign of maturity rather than a curb on one's freedom!

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