

Here are some examples of advocacy programs a survivor group can support:

- **Sharing survivor stories.** This can have a powerful impact on the public and encourage people to learn CPR and place AEDs in their neighborhoods.
- **Media campaigns.** Encouraging local news outlets to print and broadcast stories on cardiac arrest awareness can bring attention to the issue at little cost; social media efforts are another way to reach out to other survivors and the general public.
- **Fundraisers.** Fundraisers can be held to purchase AEDs or CPR training equipment for schools or community centers.
- **Training.** Survivor support groups can provide CPR and AED training to the public and encourage bystanders to recognize and respond to cardiac arrests and other emergencies.

Surviving sudden cardiac arrest is an impactful event—one that permeates all aspects of the survivor's life, and that of their loved ones. Creating a nurturing environment for SCA survivors through a support group is a challenging initiative, but one that has long-lasting rewards. The tools available at [LifeAfterSCA.org](https://LifeAfterSCA.org) can be instrumental in guiding you through this gratifying experience.

## Life After SCA

Presented by the HeartRescue Project

[LifeAfterSCA.org](https://LifeAfterSCA.org) provides resources to help survivors of sudden cardiac arrest and their families. **Because every SCA survivor who gets a second chance at life also deserves a second shot at living.**

# Life After SCA

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## Tips for forming a sudden cardiac arrest survivor support group

As survival from sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) increases across the United States, we are faced with the good problem of having more survivors. In the past, these survivors and their families have not traditionally had many resources to help them return to productive lives. Establishing a local support group in your community can be a very valuable resource for survivors and their families, and incredibly rewarding for the individuals who support them. The resources at [LifeAfterSCA.org](https://LifeAfterSCA.org) can guide you in creating a successful SCA survivor support group.

A survivor support group can provide an outlet to share stories and frustrations, a resource for finding answers to medical questions, and simply awareness that a victim of cardiac arrest is not alone, and that others have experienced similar fears and anxieties. Research has shown the importance of social support in recovery from all sorts of illnesses and injuries, and a survivor group is one way to increase that support.

Support groups do not all look the same. Some exist simply as a way for survivors to talk to other survivors, share stories, and encourage each other in their recoveries. Others take on advocacy roles, educating the public or engaging local legislators. What support groups all have in common is providing a forum for survivors to meet and help each other as peers.

## What makes a good support group?

Successful support groups differ based on the needs of the individuals in the group, but they share the same basic components, including:

- The provision of current and reliable information
- The ability to respond in a timely manner to individuals and their questions
- Regularly scheduled meetings and/or correspondence, such as newsletters
- Access to appropriate professional support and expertise
- Strong leadership and a clear confidentiality policy

## Starting a support group

Establishing a new support group is a rewarding experience, although it can be time consuming and requires dedication. Often help can be enlisted from a local hospital or other healthcare facility, religious organization or advocacy group. Researching and reaching out to existing support groups can be helpful as it may provide information about a group structure that works well, or can help identify educational materials that have already been developed. Utilizing the resources at LifeAfterSCA.org can also provide useful tools for the process. While a support group does not need a large, formal organization, starting one without a basic plan and structure can often prevent the group from being successful. However, the initial mission and plan for the group should be flexible enough to adjust to the members' goals for the group.

There are many ways a survivor support group can reach out to survivors who may be interested in joining the group. The most successful groups are likely to be using healthcare networks, such as local hospitals, cardiac rehab facilities and cardiology practices. Provide these organizations with information about the support group so they can refer patients, and invite representatives of the healthcare community to attend group meetings or speak to the group. The relationship with the healthcare community will not only help more survivors find the support group, but also provide resources for the group to turn to when looking for professional advice and support. In addition, hospitals, fire departments, and EMS agencies can often provide some logistical support, such as a location for a meeting, as well as educational resources.



Traditional and social media are also ways to let survivors know about the group. Keep in mind that not all individuals who survive sudden cardiac arrest wish to celebrate or discuss the event. Many do, but be careful not to make assumptions about what individuals want or need.

## What a survivor support group is not

Although the goal is to provide emotional support to survivors of SCA, a survivor group cannot replace the services provided by professional counselors, psychologists and medical providers. What the group can do is be a resource for members who may desire to speak to a mental health professional; some SCA survivor groups have compiled lists of counselors and psychologists who will work with survivors and their families.

## SCA survivor groups and advocacy

Survivor groups can provide a focal point for members to inform the public about sudden cardiac arrest. There are a number of advocacy activities that can help to improve survival from SCA within a community.