



Group Work – Peer Support Plus[©]

Safe, Kind and Supportive

The priority of Peer Support Plus³ is to establish and maintain a safe, kind and supportive environment² where every Peer³ engaged in learning to better manage their mental health, and every Peer Support Plus Volunteer³, can Flourish³.

When you first engage as a Peer with Peer Support Plus, you will attend a two-hour *Introduction to Group Work*¹ Workshop³ where you can experience what it feels like to be a Peer attending one of our Groups³, and learn more about the process we use to maintain a safe, kind and supportive environment.

A key part of the process is that we all aspire to *Guidelines for Behaviour*¹. Any Group member may propose additional Guidelines³ which must be agreed and periodically reviewed by the Group (with regard to, for examples: disabilities; room lighting; mobile telephone silence; eating and drinking during sessions; etc).

We aim to ensure that every session of every Support Group³, Workshop³ or Course³ we offer is co-facilitated by two appropriately trained Facilitators³.

Before joining a Support Group³, its Facilitators will meet, Zoom³ with, or call you, to gain some insight into the progress of your 'personal journey'. This is not an interview. It is designed to help you decide if joining a Support Group would be the right move for you at this time. An *Initial conversation with Support Group Facilitators*¹ usually takes between 30 and 45 minutes.

Facilitators Role

Facilitators are primarily responsible for process – guiding Peers through each Group session and maintaining a safe, kind and supportive environment where Difficult Feelings³ may be shared.

Peers should treat Facilitators and other Peers, as equals. Facilitators are also Peers who are actively learning to self-manage and maintain their own mental health.

All Peers share in facilitation to the extent that everyone is responsible for ensuring their own Behaviour³ aspires to *Guidelines for Behaviour*¹; and, at an appropriate time in the Group session, Giving Voice³ to their thoughts and feelings about improving the conduct and safety of the Group.

Timekeeping is an important element in Facilitation. It ensures there is an equal opportunity in every Round³ for each Peer to share. If the group is large there will be less time for each Peer to share, so those who choose to share may need to be concise and more may Pass³ if they feel they can't add significant value.

How Peer Support Plus helps me learn to self-manage my mental health

- I accept responsibility for my own behaviour.
- I am expert in my own distress.
- I can learn from my own and others Lived Experience³.
- I can take control over, and responsibility for, my own Wellbeing³.
- Only I can do it – but I don't have to do it alone.

Confidentiality

What is said in The Room³ stays in The Room – except when we need to follow our *Safeguarding Policy*¹ which describes our duty to disclose any concerns surrounding child safety or adults at Risk³.

This means that if we have concerns for your safety, or the safety of others may be at Risk, we reserve the right to pass these concerns and any related data to other third parties – for example, a mental health crisis team or, if necessary, the police.

Typical weekly Support Group session structure

- Welcome (and housekeeping, notices, Group administration).
- Round of Good News³ (giving preferred names if member unfamiliar).
- 'Who would like to Take Time³' today?
- 2x Taking Time / Checking-In³ (each with a Round of Sharing³ if wanted).
- Comfort / refreshment break.
- 'Would anyone else like to Take Time today'?
- 2x Taking Time / Checking-In (each with a Round of Sharing if wanted).
- Summary of any housekeeping actions arising, for examples: confirm next meeting date, time and venue; the Group may agree to guarantee an opportunity for a Peer to Take Time or Check-in at the next meeting; Facilitator may promise to distribute a technique handout referred to; Facilitator may promise to seek news of an absent Peer; etc.
- Round of 'Something I am taking away' from this session.

Rounds

How they work and why we use them i.e., to guarantee everyone a chance to speak and be heard (or Pass). When sharing it is vital that Peers:

- feel safe
- maintain Trust³
- feel able to Risk disclosing difficult feelings
- maintain personal boundaries and don't share more than you are comfortable to talk about
- are kind to ourselves and others
- make no Judgements³
- do not interrupt (except when a timely question is essential to ensure clarity)
- do not have side conversations

Taking Time

The part of the session where a Peer can choose to voice something to the group. It is important that Peers can trust each other and Risk voicing difficult feelings and experiences, always remembering to maintain safe personal boundaries.

It might be: something that has been on their mind recently; something that has been suppressed for a long time; something they would like to hear different perspectives on; perhaps an update about something previously shared; or something they might want to celebrate; etc.

If sharing is wanted by the Peer who has Taken Time, a Facilitator will reflect what has been shared then negotiate and agree with the Peer, a question around the feelings they expressed. The Facilitator then invites everyone to share, in a Round, their Lived Experience when similar feelings were evoked – describing what helped them, and what did not.

When the Round is complete, the Facilitator will offer the Peer who has Taken Time an opportunity to reflect verbally on the sharing. The Peer may choose to say something, or Pass if they wish to.

Risk of triggering difficult feelings

It is not possible to predict what feelings and experiences a Peer will share. Some of these will trigger difficult feelings in others. It is often possible to sit with a Difficult Feeling. It can help to know that it is OK to leave and OK to come back.

Silence isn't bad

When the Facilitator offers opportunities to Take Time, or when a Peer is Taking Time, or someone is sharing in a Round, it isn't unusual for there to be silence in the room which can sometimes last a few minutes. For some people, silence can feel uncomfortable and a little odd, evoking an urge to 'fill the gap', but silence is positive and gives space for Peers to gather their thoughts or just sit with Difficult Feelings.

Keeping in touch

If you are unable to attend a session or intend to leave a Group please let us know immediately you know. Read our *Peer Engagement Policy*¹.

Open-Ended³ relationship

Providing you continue to be eligible as defined in our charitable Objects³, (see our *Constitution*¹) your *Peer Relationship*¹ with Peer Support Plus will be Open-Ended. By Open-Ended we mean that you can continue your *Peer Relationship*¹ with us until you feel ready to self-manage your mental health and move on. Read our *Peer Engagement Policy*¹.

Why we don't encourage social contact outside the Support Group

Peer Support Groups work because Peers are able to share difficult feelings and lived experiences with people who are not part of the Peer's life or social circle.

We always name-check before a prospective member joins a weekly Support Group in case an existing Group member has, or has had, a personal, social or business relationship with them at some time.

When we meet another Group member unexpectedly in public, we do not usually greet one another openly because others present may not be aware that we are both learning to self-manage our mental health.

Having said that, Group members have attended each other's performances, fundraisers, funerals, etc. and sometimes enjoy a celebratory or seasonal gathering together. Some may work together in other Peer Support or Wellbeing settings.

How our Groups are funded

Group Work is £ FREE to Peers. Voluntary Donations³ and responsible fundraising activities are always welcome. We also seek small grants when available. Learn more on our website peersupportplus.org.

To learn more about the charity Peer Support Plus C.I.O. please read our Objects in *Constitution*¹. Anyone who supports our Objects can become a Member³. Membership of the Charity is £ 0 a year. Learn more by reading our *Membership Policy*¹.

Contact us

If you would like to learn more about becoming a Peer at Peer Support Plus, please let us know how we can make contact with, or meet you for an informal chat.

Contact us <http://www.peersupportplus.org/contact/>

Email enquire@peersupportplus.org

Telephone 07434 614 829

When you call us you may be asked to leave a voicemail message. If that happens, please mention a telephone number we can call to speak with you. We promise to try and call you before the end of the next working day.

Or write to⁴ Peer Support Plus

c/o 2 Woodlands Park Grove, Leeds LS28 8LY [our registered address]

Notes ¹ available on our website peersupportplus.org

² To learn more about how we do this, please read our *Guidelines for Behaviour*¹, *Safeguarding Policy*¹, *Health and Safety Policy*¹, *Privacy Policy*¹ and *Peer Engagement Policy*¹ Documents

³ See *The words we use*¹

⁴ We don't have a walk-in office you can visit to meet one of us in person, but you can write to us at our legally registered address for official correspondence.

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