PEER SUPPORT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Culture Collective
Co-Chomann Cultair

INTRODUCTION

This resource aims to help you establish your peer support group, giving you a framework to think through the details of how your group will exist.

It is designed for you to use during the initial planning of your group as a checklist of things to think about in order to get started and to keep running well. It encourages you to:

- Agree how the group will operate
- Discuss principles and boundaries that will define your group
- Create a plan for addressing issues that may arise

You may also find that this is a helpful resource to come back to as your group operates.

It's important to remember that ideas included here are just guidelines to get you thinking - it is a framework of areas to think about, with some suggestions of things you might consider for each area. It does not give you any answers though - the decisions you make about each of these areas are yours to make as a group.

CONTENTS

PRACTICAL

How will you communicate?

For example, you could use an email thread or create a WhatsApp group or a combination of both - what works best for most group members?

How will meetings be organised?

Will you use Doodle or a more informal approach?
Will someone take responsibilty for organising meetings (see ROLES)?

How often will you meet?

Weekly/fortnightly/monthly/quarterly/ad hoc - what would be useful and manageable?

When will you meet and how long will meetings last?

Think about how long people can manage as well as how long is productive/useful. Will you have breaks etc.?

How will you meet?

If online - what platform will you use? Are you able to meet in person? Would a mixture of the two be possible?

How long will your relationship as a group last?

For example, you may decide that you want to meet for a set period of time i.e. a year; you could decide to review things after an agreed amount of time; or you could keep things completely open-ended. What are the pros and cons of these options? What do members feel would be most sustainable/most helpful?

CONTENT

What will the focus of your group be?
For example, support with professional issues, critical feedback on work, or skills sharing. There's no need to choose just one - you could try a combination.
It's also worth remembering that there's a lot of cross-over between these areas so you might naturally dip into multiple.

Is anything 'off-limits'?
Keeping in mind that, even with a focus, things can drift, is there anything that the group, or any members of the group feel strongly that you should try to avoid? For example, personal issues.

STRUCTURE

Action Learning Set/Listening Circle

If some or all of you have done some training in these frameworks, you may want to try using them to structure your meetings. You should have resources from training that you can refer to.

Come up with your own structure

Even if you're not keen on using an existing modality it's a good idea to come up with a plan of how you'd like to structure your meetings so that everyone knows what to expect, and to make sure everyone is getting what they need out of the group. See the next page for a couple of examples of what this could look like...

2 HOUR MEETING (e.g. 7-9)

7 - 7.30: Sharing updates
7.30-8: Reflecting on one person's work
8-8.10: Break
8.10-8.40: Reflecting on another person's work
8.40-8.50: Checking out
8.50-9: Planning next session

2.5 HOUR MEETING (e.g. 10-12.30)

10-10.30: Sharing food and catching up
10.30-11.15: Sharing/reflection for one person
11.15-11.30: Break
11.30-12.15: One person leads skill-share
12.15-12.30: Checking out/planning next session

Some things to note:
- both examples include checking in/checking out and planning time
- both include a break!
- you don't need to stick to one focus - you could try a mixture of elements

ROLES

Facilitator

Having a facilitator at meetings helps ensure they run according to plan. The facilitator can be responsible for holding the space, reminding everyone about confidentiality, keeping time and fielding reflections/questions/feedback.

As you are taking part in a peer support group it's a good idea for people to take turns facilitating. Ideally, everyone would take a turn but if some people really don't feel comfortable doing it, it's fine to share the responsibility amongst a few of you- just avoid having one person doing it all the time because this would prevent them from being able to take part in the group and receive support from it.

When planning how your group will work think about what the facilitator will be responsible for, and how they will be assigned - will you plan a rota at the beginning or decide meeting by meeting for example?

ROLES

Organiser

It can also be helpful to have someone responsible for organising meetings - finding suitable dates/times, setting up Zoom meetings etc. When setting up your group think about how this role will work: You could also take turns, as with the facilitator role, or one person might take on this role permanently. If taking turns, this could be included as part of the facilitator role, or you could decide to have a different person take on each role.

Sharer(s)

When planning your group, agree how you will decide who will share at each meeting - will you decide in advance or on the day?

Responders/Participants

Everyone else taking part in the group - responsible for non-judgementally listening and reflecting on what the sharer brings to the group.

SAFEGUARDING

Creating a safe space together

Spend some time during the planning session of your group thinking about what a safe space means for each of you, and for you as a group - discuss people's needs and how to meet them. It's also a good idea to discuss what to do if someone feels triggered or unsafe during a meeting - have a plan in place for this. See the resource 'Please Don't Tell Me "I'm In A Safe Place"' for more thoughts on this.

Confidentiality

You might think that it's a given that what you share in a peer support group should remain confidential, but it's best to be clear about what this means. For example, you might decide part of the facilitator role could be to remind people about confidentiality at the start of each meeting. You should also think about boundaries around confidentiality - when would it be appropriate to break it, and how would you go about breaking it if there was a need? Would there be a group discussion about this, for example?

SAFEGUARDING

Signposting

It can also be a good idea to have a discussion about the limits of what you can deal with as a group, and a plan for what to do if things go beyond those limits. You may wish to think about what you as a group would do if you felt a member needed support beyond what the group could offer. How would you address this with the member? Could you create a list of resources that members in this position could be directed towards?

ISSUES

Avoiding issues

Think about how potential issues/tension/disagreements can be avoided by being identified and dealt with early on - you could agree to create time at every meeting for issues to be brought up, during the check-in time, for example. It can also be helpful to decide on some group values together, and to write these down.   Considerations around creating a safe space mentioned in the previous section are important here too.

Resolving issues

This may never be something that you have to worry about, but it's a good idea to have a plan in place for what you would do if issues were to arise between group members. Will someone mediate discussions? Will this take place during your usual meeting or at a separate time? How will you decide on resolution? Have a look at the 'Resolving Conflict in our Groups' resource for more detailed reflection on this.

AGREEMENTS

Now you've been introduced to the key considerations around establishing your group, the invitation is to spend your first meeting thinking through these, and any other areas you feel are important, and making agreements about your group's approach to each of them.

You may wish to use the headings on the following pages as a template for this, or you may work with another format that works better for you.

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RESOURCES

Please Don't Tell Me "I'm In A Safe Place" – Jamie Marich

Resolving Conflict in our Groups – Seeds for Change

Reflective Practise – Skills You Need

Doodle