CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN PEER SUPPORT

Group Facilitation

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How to Use This Resource

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Acknowledgements

If you have questions about this resource, please contact
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You as a Facilitator

Our Approach – The Humble Facilitator

As facilitators we…
- Strive to be relational in our approach
    - We stay away from creating a hierarchy, everyone brings something unique to a space
- Understand that we do not have all the answers, nor do we need to
    - Encourage further research
    - Encourage knowledge sharing among the group
    - We can say we don't know but we will see what we can find out and share later
- Acknowledge our humanity - We will make mistakes sometimes
    - We can acknowledge and share this with the group… "oops, I want to rephrase what I just said as an "I" statement"
    - When we come from a place of humility, this supports the balancing of power
    - There is always room for learning & growth as a facilitator

Our Goals as Facilitators

As a facilitator our goals are to:
- Encourage a safe space
    - Safety can feel different to different people, our goal is to come from a trauma-informed lens and encourage participants to co-create a space that supports each other's wellness needs
- Engage & promote connection, discussion, and reflection
    - When we consider why our peers are coming together their needs often fall under connection, discussion, and/or reflection.
    - The flow of the group is sometimes given top priority at the expense of these needs, it is important to remember why people come to our space.
- Inspire hope and demonstrate the possibility of recovery
- Foster exploration by sharing experience and learning ways of coping from each other

Our Awareness

As a facilitator we must be aware of the power that is inherent to our role and the dynamic that follows.

Considerations include:
- The perception of our opinions as "correct" based on our role
  - While in the facilitator role, we may be perceived as the "expert," therefore it is very important to remember that when we share from our opinions or experiences it is important to state it as such, using prompts like "I" statements:
    - In my experience…
    - A personal opinion I have is…
- Being aware of our bias
  - Everyone has bias – when we are aware of our bias we can actively challenge it and make an active choice to come from the Peer Values and the Values in Action for Peer Supporters
- How we are showing up to the space
  - To set the stage for a group it is important to ground ourselves, be aware of what we are hoping to bring the space and engage with intention

Anti-Oppressive Practice

Our group members are going to come from diverse identities, backgrounds and experiences. It is essential that we be self-aware and honour everyone in the space.

Honouring our peers from an anti-oppressive perspective might look like:
- Sharing our pronouns and using the pronouns others identify
- Participating in learning opportunities to gain further understanding of another's experience
- Being open to feedback and learning from any mistakes me make
- Acknowledging the power and privilege aspects of our identity have
- A conscious effort to use inclusive, respectful and trauma-informed language

Setting Ourselves up for Success

Staffing Considerations

Facilitator
- Attention is on the group and conversation at hand
- Grounds the group in the values
- Maintains the flow of the group

Host
- "Background" Support
- Supporting participants in navigating technology challenges
- Ready to take actions to support privacy & safety
- Any admin tasks (Attendance, etc.)
- Creating breakout rooms, admitting participants, etc.
- Backup Facilitation if support is needed (Facilitator's internet drops, etc.)
- Adding to the conversation when beneficial

Interns/Volunteers
- Role modelling ways of sharing experience that are supportive of the group
- Providing one-to-one support in breakout rooms or via chat function

Backup
- Who can you reach out to on your team for additional support, should you need it while in the group?

Not every team has these roles. In our experience we have found it incredibly helpful to have at least 2 trained supporters in a space.

If you do not have the staff capacity to have 2 supporters, we encourage you to be transparent with your group,

"I am unable to reply to chats, or provide one-to-one support in this space, if you require individual support, please reach out to…."

Curriculum Preparation Considerations

- What topics have been identified by the group for further exploration?
- What is the intention of this group?
    - Discussion?
    - Tangible coping mechanisms/tools?
    - Education?
    - Connection?
- How much time do you need to create this?
- What is the group format?
    - Discussion, content, or a mix?
    - What is the group length?
- What materials are needed for the group?
    - List of support resources available (crisis/distress lines, etc.)
    - Paint brushes, chalk, writing utensils
- How will you communicate the materials needed for group?
    - Email, website, etc.

Team Communication

It is important to have active communication with your team. To enhance cohesion, we must understand each others' roles and have clarity regarding how you will support the group. We recommend meeting before and after each session.

These are questions you can use to guide your conversations as a team. We encourage you to add any questions or conversations you feel are relevant to your team dynamic.

"Pre"brief:
- What do we want to be mindful of?
- Who is doing what?
- How can we support one another?
- How will we communicate if there is a problem?

Debrief:
- What went well?
- What can we improve?
- How is the group best engaged/supported?

How we can Promote Privacy/Safety

In support of group privacy and/or safety we can utilize and communicate the following:
- Our Group Values, that outline conduct in a group space
- Having confidentiality agreements signed by participants ahead of participation
- Discussing confidentiality as a group effort required for mutual trust and vulnerability

Additional Considerations for Virtual Spaces:
- Asking peers to ensure that they are in a private space, where the group can share without others hearing or seeing the group from their device
- Reminding the peers that the space behind them is on camera and visible to the group

Supporting Ourselves

While supporting others' challenges and concerns, we may feel impacted. It is important to know what you need for yourself and the supports that are available to you.

- We can bring comforting things into our space while we are supporting in order to ground ourselves
- We can also utilize our team debrief and supervision as place to address areas of challenge and brainstorm tools & techniques to support ourselves
- Scheduling time after a group to breath and self-care can be incredibly beneficial in allowing us to transition from one space to another
- Your agency may have an Employee Assistance Program you can reach out to

Engaging with Participants

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Proposed General Group Structure

Group Values
Housekeeping
Supporting Ourselves Conversation
Check-in
Group Content/Discussion
Check-out

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Group Values

As facilitators we strive to balance the needs of individual people with the needs/safety of the group as stated in our Values in Action; *"When I meet with others in a group, the peer support worker tells me that I can participate in a way that is comfortable for me and the group."*

Aligning our guidelines with the values creates opportunity to support an atmosphere of hope & recovery while balancing the need for safety in our sharing.

These are referred to as values or guidelines rather than rules very intentionally – when we restrict the group with rules and abruptly tell people that they are engaging or sharing "wrong" it makes our space tense and uncomfortable. We can use these values to gently guide peers to a way of sharing that is comfortable to the group.

There may be times when, for the safety of the space, we need to be more assertive but we do not need to be aggressive.

Integrity, Authenticity & Trust
- We will be respectful of each other's privacy
- Staff will only break confidentiality if someone expresses they are at risk of serious harm to themselves or others; or if a child under the age of 16 is at risk of being harmed

Notes for Facilitators:
- Be aware of applicable legislation
- Our first response to intentions of self harm is a conversation & safety planning, if safety cannot be confirmed then we will proceed to involve the necessary parties (i.e. EMS)
- If there is the need to break confidentiality we try to involve the person as much as possible

Diversity, Respect and Social Inclusion

- We will support an environment that is free from stigma, prejudice, and discrimination

Notes for Facilitators:

- Everyone has the right to feel welcome in the space as authentically themselves
- We can ask participants to share their pronouns if they are comfortable doing so (i.e., in their screen name while virtual) and use these pronouns or their name when referencing that person

Empathetic & Equal Relationships

- We will be open-minded to each other's journey and experiences
- We will share our time together equitably so that there is space for all to share

Lifelong Learning & Personal Growth

- We recognize that differences of opinion are an opportunity to hold space for each other without judgement

Notes for Facilitators:

- Welcome difference of opinion as learning opportunities
- Encouraging everyone to view all experiences as valid

Self-Determination

- Everyone is invited to speak and share as they are comfortable. Silence is OK and we have the right to 'pass' if we would prefer to just listen.

Notes for Facilitators:

- Encouraging people to use "I" statements
  - "I feel…"
  - "In my experience…"
  - "In my opinion…"
  - "I" statements acknowledge diversity in experience and leave room for others to feel differently

Health & Wellness

- In support of each other's wellness: we will share the impact of the traumatic experiences we have been through rather than the details of the experience itself

Notes for Facilitators:

- As facilitators we strive to come from a trauma-informed lens
- Speaking to headlines & impact allows us to share our experiences in a way that avoids triggering vicarious trauma

Housekeeping

The housekeeping is an opportunity to revisit key reminders, provide any agency updates and share any information ahead of the group.

In-Person reminders may include:
- Where to find what you need:
  - Washrooms
  - Refreshments
  - Emergency exits
  - Where participants are allowed to smoke at your venue
- Communicating any allergies with the facilitator
- Setting our devices to vibrate/silent, where to go if we need to take a call
- Fire safety procedure:
  - Where the group meets outside the building,
  - Reminding people not to leave before attendance is taken

Virtual reminders may include:
- Making sure you are in a space that is private
- The use of virtual settings/ virtual group conduct (i.e., muting, unmuting, etc)
- Protocol in the event of technology difficulties

Supporting Ourselves Conversation

In a wellness conversation, there is high probability that at some point we may not feel comfortable with the current topic or conversation.

- Collectively brainstorming strategies that group participants may use to comfort and/or ground themselves while in the group space can be incredibly helpful in navigating challenging conversations
- We can type this out in the chat or invite participants to write down any tools they may find useful
- If you find participants are unaware of local supports (I.e., Distress lines) this is also an opportunity to share services available to them
- We can also encourage participants to take a break when they feel they need one

Check-in

A group check-in provides the space to bring everyone together, similar to an icebreaker. While everyone shares, this gives the facilitator an opportunity to gauge the energy of the room.

When developing a check-in question, we suggest providing structure and direction to encourage shares that are safe for group spaces.

Examples:
- What is one word to describe your energy today?
- If you were a type of weather today, which would you be?

General Facilitation Tips

Sitting in Silence

- Silence provides the opportunity for people to formulate their thoughts
- While we may feel the need to fill the silence, so will others. Waiting may prompt someone else to share something they have been working up the courage to say
- If nobody has anything to share you may choose to move on and invite participants to share if anything comes up for them later

Engaging Conversation

When trying to engage the group in a discussion further prompts may be required.

Some techniques include:
- Rephrasing the question
- Asking "What's the first thing that comes to mind?"
- Role modelling sharing
  - Sharing from our experience
  - Calling on host or interns to share
- Asking guided questions that build on each other
  - Example for "What are techniques you use for conflict resolution?"
    1. Does anyone experience conflict with others in their life?
    2. Is anyone willing to share a type of conflict they have had?
    3. How did you navigate that conflict?

Re-focusing the Group

Conversations may deviate from their original intention and as facilitators we re-focus the conversation in order to meet the objective of the dialogue that was identified by the peers.

Some techniques include:
- Paraphrasing a person's point while highlighting the information relevant to the topic
  - "That makes me think of…"
  - "I really appreciated what you said when you mentioned…"
- Interjecting when one person's sharing is dominating the group
  - "I notice that other people are waiting to share"
  - "I'm mindful of the time"
  - "Thank you for sharing"

Navigating a Challenge from a Peer

There will be times when a participant disagrees with a facilitator.

Some techniques for navigating this include:
- Keeping a calm tone
- Holding others in unconditional high regard, not being judgemental
- Being aware and respectful of differences in opinion/ in our experiences
- Through the language we use (I.e., "I" statements, coming from the values)
- Validating other's experiences
- Use the Values in Action
- Thank people for their contribution
- Invite the participant to connect after group one-to-one
- Refer to the Group Values
  - "I just want to remind everyone that we <u>INSERT GUIDELINE</u> to <u>protect the safety of the space/ honour others / uphold confidentiality, etc</u>"

Grounding the Group

Knowing when to take a break or ground the group is a skillful tool when supporting a group.

Some techniques include:

- "Let's take a second to honour what was shared with a breath"
- "Thank you for sharing, I want to take a minute for everyone to take in the value of what you have shared."

Protocols for Group Privacy/Safety

In the event that group privacy and/or safety is not respected (prejudice/discrimination, refusal to engage with our group values or displaying graphic content) the following options are available. It is important to discuss your protocols with your team to ensure you are aligned with your policies and there is consistency among the team in how these situations are addressed.

- Tell the group we are taking a break and have a one-to-one conversation exploring barriers to participating in a way that is safe for the space
- Remind the participant that safety of the space is our top priority and we want them to honour this so they can continue participating
- We can recommend they take a break to ground themselves and re-enter the space when they feel ready
- As a last resort we may ask a person to leave group that day and follow up one-to-one at a later time

Ideally, one team member is engaging in this conversation while another continues facilitating the group.

Please note that there is a difference between someone working to engage with our group values and having difficulty, or asking questions as to why they are there and a <u>refusal</u> to engage in a way that is safe for the space.

Additional Protocols Available in a Virtual Space:
These protocols are based off the use of the ZOOM platform

The virtual space provides additional opportunities to engage in privacy and safety protocols. Our experience is with the Zoom platform, however other platforms may have similar features.

We can:
- Mute the person or turn off their video and message them individually
  - Note: Participants may be able to unmute themselves or turn their video back on depending on settings
- Move the person to the waiting room & chat message the waiting room
  - Please note you will be messaging the entire waiting room, if there are others there, they will see your messages.
  - They are also unable to reply to the chat
  - We suggest sending "please call or text me at xxx-xxx-xxxx/email me at blank@youragency.ca to rejoin the group"
- As a last resort a person may be "removed" from the group
  - Note: This removes them from the entire live session, unable to rejoin

As mentioned previously, in our groups the host is responsible for engaging in these protocols, however any member of the facilitation team is able to carry them out. Having the Host respond allows the Facilitator to continue the group with minimal interruption.

Cultivating a Community

Groups are an opportunity to connect with others. We strive to create connection and authentic engagement between the people we are sharing the space with. This adds additional value to our groups.

Some techniques include:
- Encouraging comradery
- Allowing space for laughter
- Engaging authentically with our peers
- Encouraging each other

As staff we may come into a group with expectations on how the group should flow. It is natural to have a desire to control situations when we feel the weight of responsibility alongside our own emotions such as fear of someone being negatively impacted by something within the group. When we feel these emotions or impulses it is important to ground ourselves and remember why we are here: to promote connection, recovery and wellness. For as long as we come from the Values, and use the Values in Action, we can take comfort in knowing we are doing our job.

It is okay to let go of control and have some flexibility in the structure of the group. With your team and participants you can discuss the core goals/intention of the space. If the intention is connection and the group spends the whole hour laughing and telling dad jokes, when we planned on introducing a conversation about our favourite movies, the flow we planned for may be changed, but the group still established connection, just in a different way – and we honoured their self-determination.

If the intention of our space is to explore a very specific wellness tool or engage in pre-determined content we can create the opportunity for some flexibility, to break from content and then re-focus the space.

Check-out

A group check-out provides the space to bring everyone together once again, honour the conversation that has occurred, and transition into the remainder of our day. Similar to our check-in, when developing a check-out question, we suggest providing structure and direction to encourage shares that are safe for group spaces.

Examples:
- Something you are taking away from the group
- Something you are grateful for
- A self-care idea you would like to implement

Feedback Loop – Quality Improvement

While implementing virtual groups and content we can utilize group feedback to evaluate and improve our services.

Plan, Do, Study, Act quality improvement cycles provide an opportunity to incorporate new ideas, receive feedback and adjust to provide programming that meets the needs of our community.

This can be done via:
- Surveys
- Polls
- Informal Feedback – emails, phone calls, comments made in/after group

We can use the knowledge we have of our community to determine which feedback approach is most accessible to them.

Other Competencies to Explore Before Facilitating Groups

This handout has explored how we can apply our Peer Supporter knowledge and skills in a group context. In order to be able to skillfully facilitate groups we strongly recommend having a background in the other concepts listed through either training, mentorship as an intern/volunteer or professional experience.

- Recovery & wellness
- Our role as Peer Supporters
- Communication in peer relationships
- Sharing from our journey
- Peer relationships
- Boundaries
- Trauma-informed care practices
- Awareness of stigma, bias, discrimination and diversity
- Advocacy
- Supporting change
- Support resiliency
- Wellness planning
- Supporting distress/crisis
- Proficient knowledge of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's *Values of Peer Support*, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's *Peer Support Values in Action*, Peer Support Canada's *Code of Conduct*, *Principles of Practice* & *Core Competencies*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's

Provincial Systems Virtual Learning Centre & Resource Hub
for Peer Supporters & Organizations

Support House's Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's full programming is offered through our Virtual Learning Centre & Resource Hub which supports the most current, best practices in Peer Support.

Through our Virtual Learning Centre, we offer trainings, consultation, our Peer Professional Development Webinar Series, and provincial communities of practice. Our Resource Hub is home to our educational toolkits, documents and videos. These offerings support the practice and implementation of Peer Support within Ontario.

Products on our Resource Hub:

- *Our Virtual World - A Toolkit for Implementing Virtual Group Services*
- *Guiding Standards of Peer Support* (from Mental Health Commission of Canada, Peer Support Canada & Centre for Innovation in Peer Support)
- *Peer Support Examining Bias Toolkit*

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