

Let's do Peer Group Facilitation



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We want to say a special thanks to all peer supporters across Scotland for your continued hard work, determination, and drive to deliver peer groups within our communities.

Your belief in peer groups is changing people's lives across Scotland and beyond.



We have created this resource as a practical guide for anyone interested in facilitating a peer group. It is co-designed to be both practical and adaptable. It will give you a direction of travel but also allow for you to divert along the way – dipping in and out of the resource - to suit your own needs.



As a collective voice from across Scotland it has been co-designed with people delivering their own peer support groups. People just like you, who are learning from their experiences and coming together to share that learning.

This resource will continue to grow and change as we share our experiences and insights. Peer facilitation requires different skills and no one holds all the answers. We continue to learn through practice. We learn from each other; we learn from reflecting and we look forward to learning from you. We hope that you stay connected with Scottish Recovery Network who would love to hear any ideas and feedback that you have.

- **Graham, Hayley, Heidi, and Jeanette and the Scottish Recovery Network team.** [Meet the contributors](#)

Hear from our contributors in this [short film](#) which explores some insights from being part of this collective process and top tips for facilitating a peer support group!



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ABERDEEN



Who is the guide for?

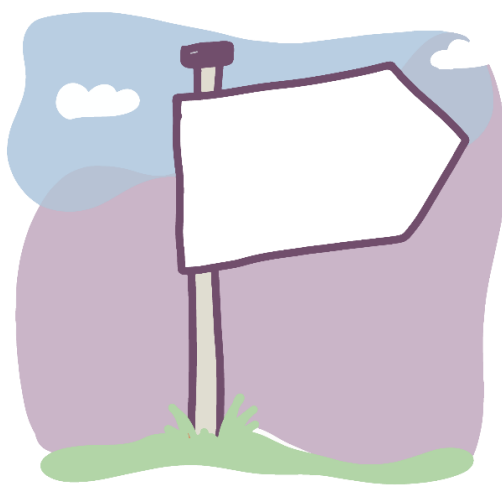
In short anyone who wants to run a peer support group!

- 🧩 Want to create a peer support group? Not sure where to start?
- 🧩 Need some top tips to help you be a peer facilitator?
- 🧩 Currently run a peer group and need support in your role?

This resource will cover the key aspects of delivering peer groups, whilst recognising, that no one group is the same. We hope that you will have the time to read, watch / listen and reflect on all parts of the resource, however, we realise that may not be possible. Please feel free to move around the guides and adapt to suit your learning style.

There are four guides in this resource:

- 1. What is my role as a peer facilitator?**
- 2. What does a healthy peer support group look like?**
- 3. Boundaries and why they are important**
- 4. Support for peer facilitators**



Let's get started!

Before we get stuck into the four guides, we have identified some insights and resources that might help you on your peer facilitation journey.

What is peer support?

As a general rule peer support involves mutual support. It happens when people with similar life experiences offer each other help as they move through challenging or difficult experiences.

What is peer facilitation?

Peer facilitation can be described as people with lived experience of mental health challenges helping to facilitate a peer led support group.

There is a small but significant difference between being a facilitator and a peer facilitator. As a peer facilitator, you are there as a peer with your own lived experience and as such not bringing a 'professional' perspective to the role. Without lived experience you are not a peer facilitator but a facilitator holding a peer space. These groups are also important but this resource has been developed with the peer element in mind.

Peer facilitation is a skill and something you build on as you learn from practice. While there is material on how to **facilitate** groups there is limited information on **peer facilitation**. Together we hope to change that! We hope this resource sparks your interest and curiosity about peer group facilitation and we look forward to hearing your ideas to make it even better!

When are you ready to be a peer facilitator?

As a peer facilitator you understand your own mental health experience and can safely share your journey to encourage others. It is important to protect yourself, not over disclose and maintain a focus towards the future. In other words, there is an argument for living vs lived experience. What we mean by this is that if you wish to take up the role as a peer facilitator it might be useful to ask yourself some check-in questions:

- 🧩 Where am I on my own personal recovery journey?
- 🧩 Am I aware of my own triggers and wellbeing?
- 🧩 Have I considered the potential personal impact of sharing my experience with a group?
- 🧩 How can I structure what I share?
- 🧩 When do I share and when is it not appropriate to share?



Remember when the facilitator makes intentional use of their own story and by inviting, recognising, respecting, and validating the experiences and strengths of peers, this contributes to the overall connectedness within the group. This subsequently results in mutuality and empowerment emerging within the group.

Ask yourself:

- 🧩 Am I ready to share my own lived experiences?
- 🧩 What am I willing to share to protect myself?
- 🧩 Is my story trauma focused and/or recovery focused?

If you feel more learning around this would be helpful, please check out the [Peer2Peer Training](#) (session 8: Using your experiences effectively – page 98).



Space for your notes



Using peer values to create your group

We believe that peer facilitation and the development of a peer support group can be enhanced by using a set of peer values (HEAR ME). These principals can be used as a framework for support, practice and reflection.



While this resource will not go into each of the peer values in depth, we will refer to them throughout in line with their connection to the peer facilitation role. You can, however, find out more in the Experts by Experience [Values Framework](#) for Peer Working.

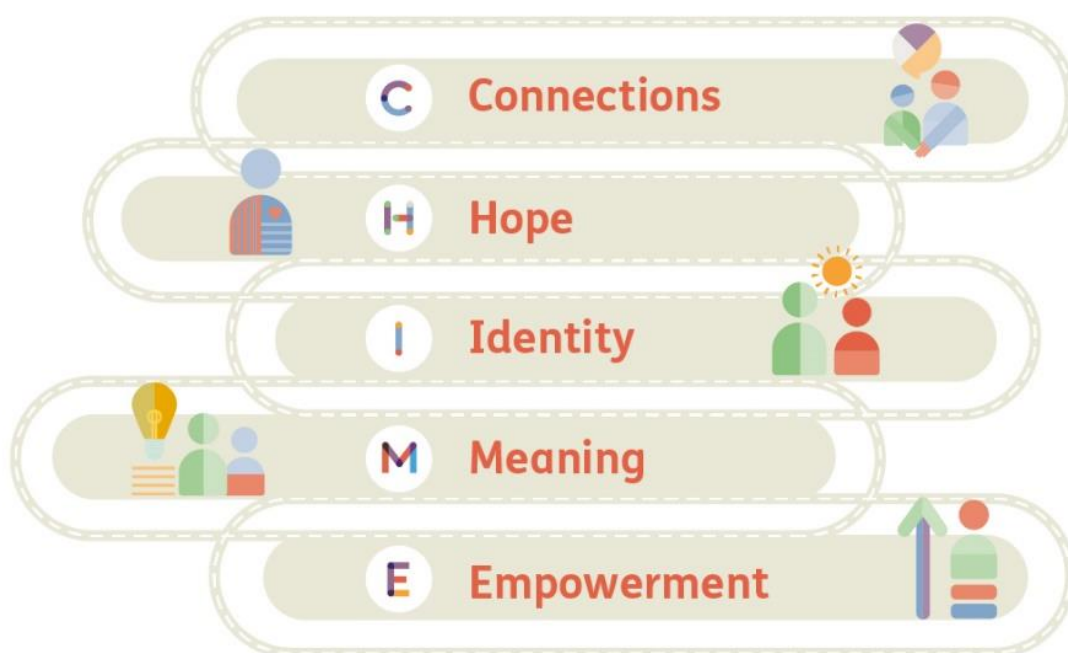


CHIME

CHIME is a framework that was created to help us track personal recovery. It was devised by [Mary Leamy](#) and her team to help us understand processes and stages that support recovery.

Peer values HEAR ME provide the how and CHIME is what you create from this. It's a great way to check that your group is achieving wellbeing for participants and yourself.

It is also a great way to start conversations about mental health and wellbeing. Check out our free [CHIME conversation cards](#), [Wellbeing teacups](#) and [Wellbeing connecting exercise](#) which might also be of use.



This is not the only tool available and we ask that as part of your learning you explore other useful recovery tools that may support you as a peer facilitator.

Peer Chat podcast

Peer support groups with Rai Waddingham

With a different guest each episode, the Peer Chat podcasts bring you insights and inspiration from people using their lived experience to support others and develop peer approaches.

Rai is an independent trainer – [Behind the Label](#), a writer and an Open Dialogue Practitioner. In this Peer Chat episode Rai shares her experiences of participating in and facilitating peer support groups.

[Watch or listen](#) (transcripts, subtitles and BSL available).

Other episodes are available in [The Peer Recovery Hub](#)

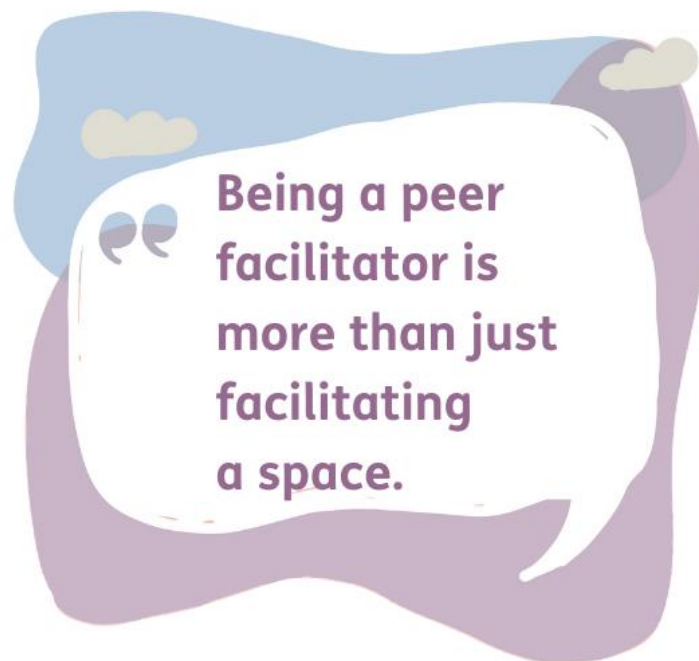


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Guide 1

What is my role as a peer facilitator?



Why is the role of a peer facilitator important?

The peer facilitator role is hugely important because it will help guide conversations and create meaningful spaces. It will enable your peer group to flourish.

The role of the peer facilitator is to host the group, to hold a safe space for people to contribute, to gently steer the group and to role model engagement and participation. This can feel overwhelming, so let's break this down into bite size chunks.

Boundaries

As a peer facilitator you must be conscious of maintaining boundaries for yourself and the group. Learning to share only enough of your 'story,' where relevant, to enable others to share can be an important role of the facilitator. We will look at this in more detail in **Guide 3**.

Turn on your 'facilitator radar'

Put into practice skills such as intentional listening, noticing body language and tone of voice. Be aware of potential triggers and over disclosure. Embody and promote the peer values of hope, experience, authenticity, responsibility, mutuality and empowerment.

Should I consider a framework to help me?

There is no right or wrong answer to this. However, if you do wish to explore a framework as part of your role, one way to do this is to consider the Five I's outlined on the next page.

The Five I's

[Diane Whitney](#) is a respected author and Appreciative Inquiry facilitator. Her Five I's are a useful framework for you to consider when developing peer facilitation skills.

1. **Inquiry** – lets people know you value them and their contribution

Facilitator role: ask positive powerful questions

2. **Illumination** – helps people understand how they can best contribute

Facilitator role: bring out the best in people and situations

3. **Inclusion** – gives people a sense of belonging and deeper purpose

Facilitator role: engage with people to support them in creating the future

4. **Inspiration** – provides people with a sense of direction

Facilitator role: awaken the creative spirit

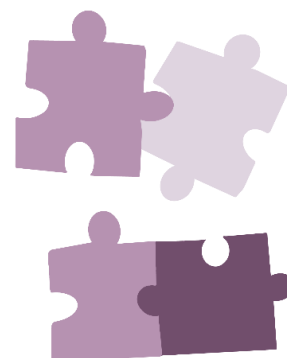
5. **Integrity** – lets people know they are expected to give their best for the greater good and in turn trust others to do the same

Facilitator role: make choices for the good of the group

Creating a personal peer facilitation toolkit

As a peer facilitator you have a responsibility to hold the space and keep it safe for everyone. It is a huge responsibility but can be extremely rewarding.

Building your own toolkit is essential to the role and will be unique to you and your peer group. You will find things that will work and things that do not – this is all part of the learning experience!



Here are some useful activities, exercises and resources to get your toolbox started but remember to add your own along the way!

- 🧩 [Practical tips](#) for before, during & after the session
- 🧩 [Session plan](#) template
- 🧩 Post session [reflection template](#)
- 🧩 Community and online resources to signpost people to

Group check in and out activities

Check in activities can help frame the session ahead without appearing overly structured. It can be a way to help everyone in the group explore what they wish to reflect on and what they may wish to contribute within the group session.

Check out activities are a great way to check in with the group again to acknowledge how people are feeling after the session. They are a great way to bring the session to a close.

- 🧩 [Check in and check out](#) activities

Powerful questions

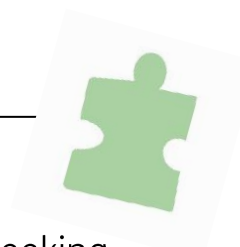
Powerful questions have several roles. They are designed around a positive assumption, open our thinking, engage our curiosity and compel us to respond. Powerful questions promote hope and inspire fresh thinking. These can be helpful when you are a peer group facilitator. It will help your group be more open and empower individuals to reflect.

🧩 Examples of [powerful questions](#)

Understanding your role can empower you to become an effective peer facilitator. It will always involve continuous learning, we don't need all the answers but can engage interest and curiosity, test out some tools and build on experience. We encourage you to give it a try!

The role of a facilitator

The facilitator has no agenda except the emergent agenda seeking to be born,
In and among and through the people gathered before her,
Her emptiness is not nothing though
It is an invitation, a reflection,
Wherever she moves radiating welcome,
Things take shape, evolve, transform, move on
She is delighted, fascinated and as impartial as the sun,
She offers comradeship on a journey into an open space
Where creativity finds its home and voice.
The greater the skill the less she does
But the more profound the life she meets because life loves above all
things to find itself, and it always comes to where it can meet,
embrace and discover greater life which it finds in the universal
centre where she stands
Under the best of circumstances, the facilitator will be totally present
and absolutely invisible, like God, like Tao, like the centre of the
Universe, everywhere, especially here. - Harrison Owen



Space for your notes



Guide 2

What does a healthy peer support group look like?



What does a healthy peer support group look like?

The value of peer support groups within the mental health sector and the wider community is becoming instrumental in supporting those that may feel alone on their journey of mental health recovery.

Whether you are an organisation or individual looking to start up a peer support group, regardless of the format of the group you wish to create, this resource has been put together to help you understand one of the all - important questions - What does a healthy peer support group look like?

Remember... the following information is designed to be adaptable and you can tailor to your needs when in the development stages of creating your own peer support group.

Different types of peer support groups

There are different types of peer support groups such as drop-in, formal time limited, informal non-time limited, online, face-to-face, groups with family or friends attending and membership led groups. These examples are not exhaustive by any means, as there are successful peer support groups that operate in their own unique way to fit their needs.

Consider the purpose of the group

Within the dynamics of peer support groups, people should inevitably find a safe space for support and reflection with others in similar situations to their own.

No two groups are exactly alike. The make-up and attitudes are influenced by the group's beliefs and environment. The main frameworks groups tend (but are not limited) to use are:

- ✚ **Accommodate diagnosis** — the focus is on acceptance of an illness and finding ways to manage / live with the illness by the sharing of lived experience amongst the group
- ✚ **Change thinking and behaviour** — the focus is on positive thinking and increasing personal agency / control
- ✚ **Empowerment and activism** - where the peer support group looks outward at empowerment and activism in the mental health community. In these groups, people come together to work for change within and out with mental health services

It is important to establish the main purpose of the group before anything else. If the group begins to steer away from the main purpose, then it is recommended that the facilitators bring the group back into focus. This can feel overwhelming for a facilitator and that is why having support within the role is important. Something we will focus on in Guide four of this resource.



Should your group be structured or unstructured?

People have been meeting in these types of groups for years. Sometimes they become formalised and supported by voluntary and statutory service providers and some are informal gatherings. There is no right or wrong in any of these as successful and healthy peer support can take many identities.

✚ **Structured peer support groups** allow for stability and a distinct form or profile. Putting out agendas before meetings allows peers to prepare themselves for the event, however, please be aware that this can have the opposite impact by discouraging attendance.

✚ **Unstructured peer support groups** allow for the facilitators to effectively go with the flow in an open forum where the agenda is created during the session by the input from peers. This approach allows for enhanced mutuality and empowerment throughout the group.

An unstructured group can however be challenging for an inexperienced facilitator to control. As a compromise it may be possible to mix up structured and unstructured peer support groups. This will create an element of diversity within the group, promote curiosity and maintain engagement.



Top tip! Splitting up the session into two segments can work. With one half structured and the other half an open forum with a comfort break in between.

Another concept to allow for structured peer support groups would be to bring in outside professional speakers discussing related topics to the group and offering a professional perspective on subjects that are raised previously within the group.

Transactional versus meaningful relationships

The interaction between both facilitators and participants within any peer support group is fundamental to the health and success of the group. Considering both relationships between facilitators and peers and the relationship participants have amongst themselves, there is an expectation from all parties for reciprocation. What we mean by this is that everybody gets as much as they can from the experience or relationship in return for their given input.

Strong people skills between facilitators and participants are paramount. Two-way communication and the understanding that just listening, can at times, outweigh the importance of talking. Building meaningful and positive relationships in the group. This lays the essential foundations for group communication and potential longevity of a healthy and supportive environment that can benefit all.



Avoid complicated language

Peer facilitators should consider unnecessary barriers to communication. Avoiding complicated language or even the use of clinical terminology can help to develop common ground between the facilitators and peers. Using recovery-focused language and challenging the use of medical and diagnostic language in the peer support group where possible.



Simple use of language in communications can result in the natural development of meaningful relationships where respectfully sharing ideas, learning and experiences can be understood by everyone and enhance their experience of a healthy peer support group.

- Hayley

Creating focus within the group

The responsibility for facilitators of peer support groups involves knowing yourself and being in the driving seat of your own recovery. Having the ability to connect with others with similar experiences and sharing the tips as well as learning from each other.

Facilitators and peers alike should have the opportunity to share and obtain knowledge around their challenges. By creating a common ground or focus within a group, peer support groups can create a sense

of security and normality in a sometimes unwelcoming and poorly informed world. Peer support groups that remain focused become a stigma-free zone that allows people to speak openly within a safe and non-judgemental environment.

Why is connection within the group important?

Peer groups, will inevitably, offer social support as mutual trust develops. This tends to happen organically through having shared our similar lived experience and similar desire around recovery. Facilitators and group members can become positive and credible role models for peers which drives connectedness.

Starting a peer support group session with a connecting exercise encourages people to share a little of themselves, acts as an energiser and sets the tone for the session. Kick off peer support group sessions with short introductions from the facilitators and each of the participants. This is a subtle group ice breaker that encourages participation and allows those that may have been absent to reconnect with the group. Here are [activities](#) you might want to try.



Share your own top connecting activities on Twitter using #PeerFacilitators

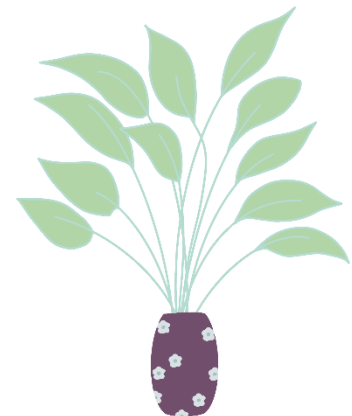
A great equaliser is to focus on wellbeing as it is something we all have. This means asking people to share something they do regularly to stay well or something they are looking forward to this week. It is through sharing our experiences that we connect with each other and create a focus from within the group. Scottish Recovery Network have a range of [free resources](#) that can help with this.

To actively promote connectedness within a peer support group you could also consider the following:

- 🧩 Greet people as they arrive – a warm friendly welcome breaks down so many barriers of natural anxieties
- 🧩 If your group is in person have a welcome team who make themselves available for chat and pointing out facilities as people arrive – it can be daunting walking into a room and sitting on your own
- 🧩 Encourage people to come as themselves rather than the roles they inhabit – it is surprising just how much this helps people relate to each other as equals. Ask people to remove lanyards and workplace I.D.
- 🧩 When meeting face-to-face think about how you use name badges – first name only, whether pre-printed or people design their own?

Choosing venues and platforms

How we create a great peer support group environment makes a difference. Providing a warm welcoming space sets the tone and healthy longevity of the group. To do this we need to think about the location, physical space and the social or participative environment.



In person

Think about the venue you choose. Is it accessible, does it have natural daylight, does it meet your IT needs? Other things to consider include:

- 🧩 Cost of hiring the venue
- 🧩 Size of room / area you are using
- 🧩 Quality / comfort of seating and arrangements

- 🧱 Comfort during the winter and summer seasons e.g. heating or air conditioning
- 🧱 Privacy for members of the group during sessions
- 🧱 Catering facilities for refreshments and associated costs



Top tip! Refreshments – a folklore of Scottish tradition is that most things can be resolved over a nice cuppa! Consider catering as this can act as a natural comfort break that also allows people to connect.

- 🧱 Toilet facilities
- 🧱 Safe access and entrance / exit and navigation space in the room for those with disabilities
- 🧱 Parking facilities / accessibility e.g. is the venue near public transport?
- 🧱 Busyness / noise of venue - acoustics, strong smells, light quality

Online groups

When selecting any digital platform, it is important to remember that online tools can be new to people and are regularly introducing new features. Encourage a light-hearted spirit of ‘we are exploring our way together’ and ‘we may not always get it right, but we are prepared to try and learn from it.’ Model the model!

Be aware that there are disparities of access to and experience of using technology. Not everyone has access to a computer or Smartphone and Wi-Fi access comes at a cost. Others may lack the experience or confidence to use the technology. Meet people where they are at and work together so that people feel as supported as possible.

To inspire digital confidence

- 🧩 Meet with new members beforehand to discuss digital needs
- 🧩 Provide information and a 'How to ...' guide
- 🧩 Have one-to-one sessions to familiarise members with using the technology
- 🧩 Have group members 'buddy up' or mentor new members
- 🧩 Provide different ways for people to join e.g. video or phone

Digital support for facilitators

- 🧩 Ensure facilitators have the equipment and information they need to safely facilitate online peer support groups
- 🧩 Encourage facilitators to try out digital tools together and get used to the different features

We would suggest a minimum of two facilitators at any one time. These need not be equally experienced or skilled individuals. One can be more comfortable with technology or presenting. The important thing is to complement one another. This allows for one person to concentrate on facilitating whilst the other focuses on the technical support. This can include managing break out rooms and the chat box. It also means someone is available to take over if a facilitator's Wi-Fi drops or their technology fails. Where possible provide access to training for facilitating groups online.

Running groups remotely requires a different skill set and additional support may be needed. Check out Scottish Recovery [Empowering Connections](#) guide for more top tips for taking peer support online.

Recruiting group members

Attendance is one of the most crucial factors of a healthy peer support group. It may be that you already have a group of people in mind for the group. If this is the case think about how you speak to them about joining, think about tone and language. Getting a group of like-minded people together to open up their vulnerabilities can be challenging.

There can be fears related to both societal and self-stigma. The following points could help in recruiting potential participants:

- ✿ Advertise / promote e.g. on local mental health and community websites and in newsletters
- ✿ Where appropriate put information on mental health social media networks, groups and forums
- ✿ Create or posters and leaflets to put in local amenities such as libraries, medical practices, grocery stores or community centres
- ✿ Word of mouth is often most powerful. Be ready to give your members resources they can share with friends to spread the word

Posters and leaflets should contain just enough information to make people curious and want to find out more. Have details of where people can get more information Take care not to share personal information or details that can go out of date too soon.



Top tip! Contact your local [Third Sector Interface](#) who can offer promotional support and sometimes access funding for you. They can also help you, in time, to constitute as a community group.

Creating a healthy environment is essential for the longevity of your peer group. It can seem overwhelming at times to get it right. Hopefully, the points and practical tips in this section can help you get started.

Space for your notes



Guide 3

Boundaries and why they are important



Boundaries

When we create peer groups it is important to keep the space safe and inclusive. As a peer facilitator you will help create and refer to the boundaries (guidelines, rules and limits) everyone within the group can agree with. Sometimes this is recorded in the form of a group agreement (more on this later!)



Who sets the boundaries of the group?

The boundaries within your peer support group might be determined by different things e.g. the law, organisation policies and procedures (if you are part of a wider organisation), your role in the group, both your and others personal values, comforts and discomforts.

Why communication is key

Your understanding of what is and is not ok in each situation will have been learnt from your relationships, your upbringing, your community, your experiences, your culture and countless other sources. Another person is very unlikely to have had the exact same experiences and understandings as you. When it comes to boundaries, communication is key.

- 🧩 Different people often do not have the same understanding of what is and is not ok
- 🧩 People do not necessarily know the purpose of a peer support group and may be expecting therapy, advice or crisis intervention instead

If people do not know what the boundaries of your peer support group are, they are likely to cross them. People attending the group need to know:

- 🧩 What they can expect from the group
- 🧩 What is expected of them
- 🧩 What they can expect from the facilitators
- 🧩 What the group (incl. facilitators) can expect from each other

A number of boundaries can be communicated prior to the group with the information they receive beforehand (see Guide 2). The main tool for communicating the boundaries of the peer support group when meetings are taking place is the group agreement.

The main tool for communication of boundaries after sessions is debriefing, team meetings and supervision (to check in with facilitators) and feedback (to check in with group members).

- 🧩 [Boundaries](#) – questions for peer facilitators to consider

Peer values and boundaries

It might be useful to consider how you will make sure that peer values are present in your group and in the way the group is facilitated.



It can also be useful to consider / discuss how you see the boundaries of your peer support group in relation to the trauma informed principles. Spaces and services that are trauma informed are those that do their best to enable:

- 🧩 Safety
- 🧩 Trust
- 🧩 Choice
- 🧩 Collaboration
- 🧩 Empowerment
- 🧩 Inclusion

You might want to explore different external resources for more information on what it means to be trauma Informed, e.g. the National [Trauma Training](#) Programme from NHS Education Scotland.

Setting firm and flexible boundaries

Some boundaries are firm, others are flexible. A firm boundary is one in which the line between ok and not ok is always the same. For example,

Confidentiality – not sharing personal information, stories or who attends a peer support space outside of the group and facilitator team (and potentially a person who is in a supervisory or support role for the facilitators role).

Confidentiality is not a boundary that can be negotiated by group members. It enables people to feel and be safe, so that people can build trust and therefore share and connect. Confidentiality should be respected unless there is reason to believe there is risk of serious harm to a person. In which case relevant information only would be shared with relevant services, such as emergency services.

Many boundaries are flexible and the line between ok and not ok may move depending on the situation. For example, comfort around hugging varies between individuals, and it obviously has to be ok for both people.

Sharing stories and experiences

The obvious flexible boundary in peer work is what to share and what not to share about yourself. Things to think about include:

- 🧩 What do you consider before sharing your own experiences?
- 🧩 What are you happy to share about yourself in group?

Think about your recovery story, what helps you, what you struggle with, your personal life, your history, your opinions on politics or faith, etc. You might find it useful to explore ‘Using your experiences effectively’ – page 98 from the [Peer2Peer Training](#)

Common / potential challenges

Common challenges that can arise when facilitating any group, especially one relating to mental health are:

- 🧩 People discussing potentially triggering topics without being mindful of others in the room
- 🧩 People with strong opinions. For example on medication or benefits
- 🧩 People's relationships outside of the group
- 🧩 People speaking for a long time or being repetitive in what they say
- 🧩 People not speaking at all
- 🧩 Group members showing a lack of respect towards other group members (intentionally or unintentionally)

Part of your role as a peer facilitator is to remind people of what has been agreed between them and the reasons you are all there (see purpose of the group – Guide 1). Your most helpful tool when managing challenges is your group agreement (see next page).



Top tip! Work with your peer co-facilitator if you have one. Debrief. Bounce ideas off each other. Support each other in sessions and afterwards.

When managing challenging conversations remember to:

- 🧩 Be clear and timely in responding / reminding people of their responsibilities
- 🧩 Be consistent
- 🧩 Assume good intent wherever possible
- 🧩 Respond proportionately

Be ready to gently stop someone if the group agreement is not being adhered to. This may mean interrupting “I just need to stop you

there as I'm mindful of (time/our agreement etc)... perhaps we can come back to this once we have heard from xx" And then thanking them.

What if risk comes up like a discussion around Suicide?

Somebody may share that they are thinking about or contemplating suicide, or you may suspect somebody is. If your group is part of a wider organisation, please follow your organisation's guidance on how to respond and when to act. Make sure you have details of local crisis services available at your group and have a clear plan of when you would involve emergency services. Further information and training can be found at:

- <https://www.chooselife.net> (SuicideTalk, SafeTalk and ASIST)
- [Public Health Scotland](#) – Suicide Prevention
- <https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com>

Group agreements

A group agreement should be created by the group who are using it. It is used to create a safe space and to let people know what is expected of them, especially people who are new. It is also a useful way to mark the beginning of the session.

Top tips for creating a [group agreement](#)

Creating boundaries within a peer group not only helps create healthy peer support groups, but it also protects those attending the group and those facilitating the group. There is no right or wrong way to creating these boundaries however as we have seen a helpful way is to establish a group agreement from which the peer facilitator can draw upon when situations arise. We hope that this section will help you and your peer group form lasting and healthy relationships, creating clear and concise boundaries which in turn create safe spaces.

Space for your notes



Guide 4

Support for peer facilitators



Support for peer facilitators

As a peer facilitator it is vital that you feel supported in the role. Without this your peer support group and your own wellbeing can become compromised. We hope the tips and tools in this section help you to reflect and support yourself along the way. Remember we are all human and to be human means to be imperfect. The same applies to the peer facilitator role.

Experience has shown us...

Considering your own self-care, support and development is essential to creating healthy spaces of wellbeing for fellow peers. It enables consistency whilst also preventing power dynamics where facilitators can end up in challenging positions. This can include being wrongly seen as experts or as service providers rather than fellow peers.

Being a peer facilitator can seem attractive as a solo enterprise, it is understandable to want to get on with things and push forward to make change happen under your own steam. It can also be a challenge to put ourselves first as we are thinking of others and we want to enable access to peer support. However, peer is most powerful when connected mutually.



Top tip! The most successful peer facilitators have taken time to plan support for their role. Many are part of a group, team, or partnership where ideas and resources can be shared.

Structures of support are likely to follow the level of formality you need for the groups you want facilitate. If the group is quite formal then it follows you will want a formal structure of support for yourself and co-facilitators. If more informal then the same would follow.

Everyone will need a day off occasionally or have an emergency where they need another person to support them or the group. Collaborating with someone else or being part of a collective also enables ease in

other areas of group planning and delivery. From booking rooms to advertising and even sharing refreshment costs. It does not mean you need to share everything. You might get one kind of support from your role with local people and other aspects with a larger collective.



Top tip: If you are just starting out without an organisation or group, you could look and see if someone is doing similar nearby or even nationally with which you can link.

Learning with others

Taking a peer support values approach to group facilitation involves a constant learning and reflection process. This need not be complicated or formal if you do not want it to be. Peer support is about learning through connecting with others of shared experiences. This should also be applied to the experience of being a peer facilitator.

Look at the ways you enjoy learning and see if you can find ways to incorporate this with your role. There might be a meet-up for other group facilitators locally or nationally, in-person or online. You might like to connect with people through email or forums in your own time. Another aspect to consider is if you want to be part of a small or a larger group to share and learn alongside other peer facilitators? Learning is not a one-way process, and you will have great experiences to share as well as learn from. You will know if you are gaining the right learning experience if it feels rewarding and re-energising when you connect.

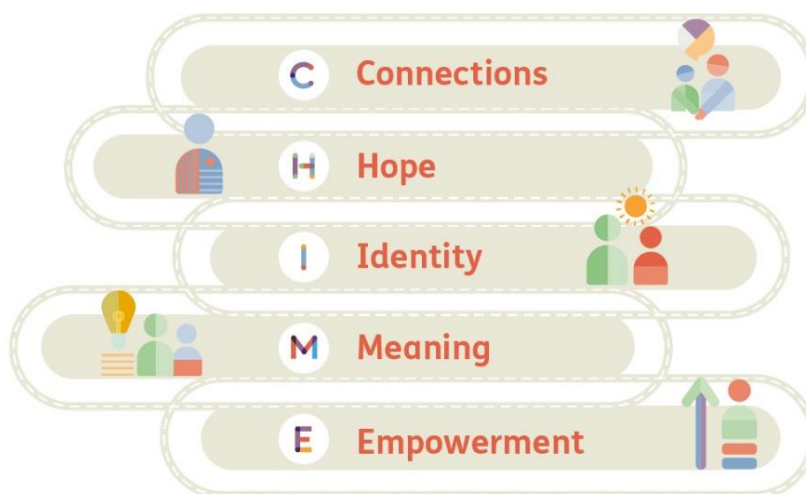
Debriefs after delivery

Having a process where you debrief after delivery is a powerful wellness tool as well as an opportunity for learning, both personally and for the group. If you want to debrief directly with another person e.g. your co-facilitator or supervisor, using a pre-prepared set of questions can be

extremely helpful in capturing learning as well as processing your own feelings after delivery.

🧩 This post session [reflection template](#) might be useful

You could also frame the pre-prepared questions around the peer values (HEAR ME) and / or the CHIME framework we spoke about earlier in this resource. This could be as simple as having both to hand, reading these over and asking ‘What went well? / What could be better?’ for each theme. You might want to record your answers / reflections in some way as part of your approach to keeping records for learning and for handing over or sharing with for example, a fellow facilitator, a mentor, or a funder.



Access to quality training

Any peer facilitator will tell you; a lot of their learning came from experience in groups and from their fellow peer facilitators. They will also likely point to training programmes such as [Peer2Peer](#) in giving them the foundations and framework of delivering using lived experience. Depending on your connection to an organisation or group, there may be other training you will need to undertake as a minimum to deliver peer support groups with them.



Top tip! If you are setting this process up you may wish to consider what basic skills you will need for the groups you will be leading?

This is not just in peer approaches but in other aspects such as venue induction and hygiene. Awareness training on diversity or conditions you wish to support such as working with neurodiversity. Or for safety and support courses such as Scottish Mental Health First Aid or physical first aid. These will unlikely be one off courses but something you will want to reflect on as part of ongoing personal development. Ensure you have time and the financial resources to support this. Another aspect to consider will be the quality of this training, no courses will be identical and taking time to research and compare is worth it. Consider reaching out to support organisations such as:

- 🧩 Your [local third sector interface](#)
- 🧩 Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations [SCVO](#)
- 🧩 Your local [Health & Social Care Partnership](#) (HSCP) - including their Drug & Alcohol Partnership
- 🧩 [Business Gateway](#) to learn about recommended courses which are often funded

Other organisations can provide bespoke training, to find these try searching online or speak to their industry body for recommendations.

Creating a network of mutual support

Mutual support may not be from the same group as those you learn with or train alongside. Look at your wider contacts that already provide support and consider what, if anything, you want their support for?

Many peer facilitators recommend five supporters for their own wellbeing. These five people might support various aspects around the interests we have or the activities with which we are involved. Those who offer mutual support don't need to be fellow facilitators, but they

will have something in common with an aspect of peer support group delivery. Relationships are everything and you will need to consider not only what you need from a mutual support but also how you will maintain this relationship. Think about how often you meet or when you might reach out to people. Remember to check in with them before assuming they will be able to support you.



Top tip! Note down the various aspects you need to consider for the group you are leading. This can then be used to consider who can best support you.

It will also show quickly if you are relying too much on any one individual or have gaps where you need more support / contacts.

Personal development and progression

Not everyone wants to or needs to be part of a large organisation or project to deliver peer support in groups. It is possible to find a mentor out with the existing formal structure that can exist in paid peer roles. This might be someone from your mutual support network or even someone in a separate role you engage with privately like a professional coach. When considering who you think will work well in this role think about how often and by what method you will engage in mentoring support. It is also useful to think about what your goals are for progressing and development. Once again remember to consider the resources you will need in terms of time, resources and finance.

Peer facilitator support - a case study

A key reason for setting up Moray Wellbeing Hub was for peer facilitators to co-create a structure of support that enabled them to have sustained wellbeing. As a facilitator working on my own, I had struggled to find others who could offer things like regular debriefs or share delivery with once in a while. It was damaging my health to not be able to take days off, or to have off days when running a group was the last thing on my mind.

For us it was a local approach, we lived nearby one another and wanted to focus on support face to face. We started meeting monthly. This provided mutual support as fellow peers as well as space to share learning and resources. From there we started to consider quality of what we felt we wanted to offer people who came to our spaces. That was when we came up with our own processes, reflection sheets and later our own training for trainers' courses. This included [Peer2Peer](#) as well as mentoring where we accompanied each other to sessions we delivered and gave positive feedback on how we were doing.

From those early days in late 2010's the same approaches are used, they just became more formal as the ask from our funders required more formal things. We could have stayed small and informal as a group, but for us as facilitators we wanted to provide support for others in our position that was more dependable, as well as offer things like expenses and pay for those interested.

We are always developing and reflecting on our approaches as individual facilitators as well as an organisation. There is no perfect, but in using the Peer Values and CHIME to provide support we feel confident we are doing the best we can for ourselves and others.

- Heidi

What support do I need?



Types of learning I will use in my practice?

And finally...

As fellow peer facilitators we thought we would create a summary of our top tips to support you in the role:

- 🧱 Strong self-care and support for facilitators equals better peer support group experiences for participants
- 🧱 No facilitator is an island! Don't be tempted to go it alone, connect to others in ways that best suit you and your role
- 🧱 Tools such as the Peer Values Framework and CHIME can provide excellent foundations for building reflective practice like debriefing
- 🧱 Think resources. Nothing is ever free and your time, and the time of those that support you, is valuable. Look at support that exists out there from funded organisations who provide support, as well as exploring costs for support options that are more bespoke
- 🧱 Consider progression and learning as core to the facilitator role and part of peer support best practice



These and more top tips can be found in this [short film](#) from our resource contributors.

Whatever you decide to do to help support your role as a peer facilitator please know that you are not alone. In Scotland there are lots of peer leaders that want to help and if you take that first step and reach out they will be happy to support you in your role.

Get in touch

At Scottish Recovery Network we are always happy to have a chat about your ideas and answer any questions. We would love to hear you feedback and ideas for this resource which will change and grow over time.

We have examples and resources that you may find useful in [The Peer Recovery Hub](#). We can also connect you with other people facilitating peer support groups similar to yourself.

Please do get in touch.

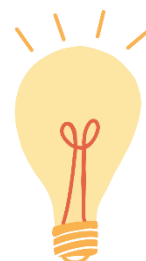
☎ 0300 323 9956
☎ [ContactScotland-BLS](#)

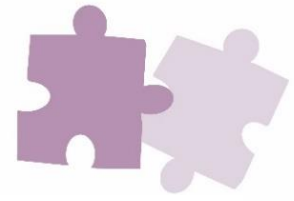
✉ info@scottishrecovery.net
🌐 www.scottishrecovery.net

You can also join the conversation social media using **#PeerFacilitators**



If you need this resource in a different format please get in touch.





Resources - quick clicks

- 🧩 [Practical tips](#) for before, during & after the session
- 🧩 [Session plan](#) template
- 🧩 Post session [reflection template](#)
- 🧩 Examples of [powerful questions](#)
- 🧩 [Boundaries](#) – questions for peer facilitators to consider
- 🧩 Top tips for creating a [group agreement](#)
- 🧩 This post session [reflection template](#) might be useful
- 🧩 [CHIME Conversation Cards](#)
- 🧩 [Wellbeing teacups](#)
- 🧩 [Wellbeing connecting exercise](#)
- 🧩 [Peer2Peer](#) Training Manual
- 🧩 [Empowering Connections](#) guide

Media

- 🧩 Let's do Peer Group Facilitation – insights film
- 🧩 Let's do Peer Group Facilitation – top tips film
- 🧩 Peer chat podcast [Watch or listen](#)

Frameworks

- 🧩 Experts by Experience [Values Framework](#) for Peer Working
- 🧩 CHIME framework for recovery [Mary Leamy](#)
- 🧩 Diane Whitney, Positive Change - [The Five I's](#)

External support

- 🧩 [Local Third Sector Interfaces](#) (TSIs)
- 🧩 Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations [SCVO](#)
- 🧩 Local [Health & Social Care Partnership](#) (HSCPs)
- 🧩 National NHS Education Scotland [Trauma Training](#) Programme
- 🧩 <https://www.chooselife.net> (SuicideTalk, SafeTalk and ASIST)
- 🧩 [Public Health Scotland](#) – Suicide prevention
- 🧩 <https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com>
- 🧩 [Business Gateway](#) to learn about recommended courses which are often funded